

Live Well, Live Long

These are notes that I took from *Live Well Live Long: Teachings from the Chinese Nourishment of Life Tradition* by Peter Deadman (Journal of Chinese Medicine, 2016).

Research shows that following a healthy lifestyle confers surprisingly large benefits to health. Healthy behaviours have a far more beneficial effect than any medical treatment or preventative procedure ...

‘One must be on guard against the tendency for specialists to tout the one thing they’re good at.’

GE Hong 283–343

Countless Chinese philosophers, scientists and doctors, practitioners of the arts of health cultivation ... observed, experimented, discussed and shared their findings on what it is to be human. They truly exemplify the words of the 5th century BCE *Great Learning* that, ‘the extension of knowledge lies in the investigation of things.’

A project carried out in the UK in 2013 found that when general medical practitioners, GPs, were allowed to ‘prescribe’ effective insulation and more efficient heating in the houses of elderly patients, GP and outpatient visits decreased by a third ...

The idea that weather and climate can injure the body is found in every traditional culture. In English, we catch colds, while the Chinese prefer ‘being attacked by wind’ (in combination with cold or heat to describe the same illness).... One 2004 study compared arthritis sufferers’ pain reports with weather data, found a correlation between increased barometric pressure and severity of knee pain ...

Accustoming ourselves to cold – for example by regular sea, river or lake water swimming throughout the year – also appears to strengthen resistance to cold and firm up what Chinese Medicine calls the ‘defensive *qi*’ – a kind of energetic barrier that flows below the skin surface ...

The World Health Organisation warns that ‘occupants of damp or mouldy buildings are at increased risk of experiencing health problems, such as respiratory infections, allergic rhinitis and asthma’ ...

‘Extremes of joy, anger, anxiety, fear or grief - if these five become part of the spirit, life is harmed.’

Annals of Lu Buwei (3rd century BCE)

‘The Gray Ox Daoist says if you’re constantly active with something from morning to night and don’t plan proper rest periods, and get nervous and tense, just make sure you are aware of your extreme point and get a good rest, then begin your activity anew.’

Nourishing Inner and Extending Life (7th/8th Centuries CE)

Assertiveness occupies the healthy middle ground between behaving passively (repressing our feelings and allowing someone else to transgress against us without us responding) and behaving aggressively (unrestrainedly given rein and transgressing someone else). Assertiveness makes straight statements about how we feel, early on in the process, as soon as we are aware that something upsets us. Examples would be, ‘I feel hurt when you say that’, ‘I don’t like it when you do this’, ‘I am not willing to accept this’.

‘Apprehension and anxiety, worries and concerns, injure the spirit.’

Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Internal Medicine (2nd century BCE)

“‘Supposing a tree fell down Pooh, when we were underneath it?’”

“‘Supposing it didn’t’” said Pooh, after careful thought. Piglet was comforted by this.’

Winnie-the Pooh AA Milne 1928

‘The ability to be in the present moment is a major component of mental wellness.’

Abraham Maslow, 1908–70

‘Relaxed and unwound, yet acutely sensitive, in solitude you delight in your own person.’

Original Tao (4th century BCE)

‘The practice of patience enables us to keep our composure. In doing that, it enables us to exercise discernment, even when in the heat of difficult situations. It gives us inner space. And within that space we gain a degree of control, which allows us to respond to situations in an appropriate and compassionate manner, rather than being driven by our anger and irritation.’

HH the Dalai Lama

... A research team from the University of California has been looking at the brains of regular meditators for several years. In their first 2009 study, regions of the brain associated with emotional regulation were larger in meditators than in non-meditators ...Meditation has been shown to relax and open blood vessels and contribute to low levels of blood pressure in regular meditators. Patients with Irritable Bowel Syndrome who meditated twice a day, for 15 minutes each time, experienced a significant improvement in symptoms compared to a waiting list control group. Among those who continued to meditate for a whole year, symptoms improved even further...

‘Know thyself’ is a maxim carved into the ancient Greek temple of Apollo in Delphi. Yet this simple advice is harder to achieve than it might seem, for what is closest to us is usually the most difficult to see...

It has long been recognized in the Chinese internal cultivation tradition that when we are fully absorbed in mediation or *qigong* practice we may produce more saliva. This is considered a sign of correct practice and the saliva produced is thought to be richer than normal. It is even given poetic names such as Golden Fluid, Golden Elixir, Jade Dew and Divine Juice. This saliva should be consciously swallowed down to our core centre (the *dantien* = field of elixir)

in the lower belly. Interestingly, saliva contains digestive enzyme, antibacterial agents, and a powerful painkiller (six times stronger than morphine) called opiorphin, which is also thought to have anti-depressant effects.

As Dean Ornish points out in his book *Love and Survival*, ‘those who feel lonely, depressed or isolated are three to five times more likely to suffer premature death or disease. I don’t know of anything else across medicine that has such a broad and powerful impact.’ ...in a study of US students. Those who felt lonely had a weaker immune response to the flu virus, the feeling of loneliness was unrelated to the number of people in the students’ social network. It is real intimacy rather than mere presence of others that is so important to our mental health.

‘Those who know that enough is enough will always have enough.’

Daodejing (6th century BCE)

Cultivation of the mind and emotions is generally considered to be an important branch of the nourishment of life traditions. We are seeing that both indulgence in extreme emotions, and emotional repression, can negatively impact on health, that when our emotions are chaotic it is hard to cherish and look after ourselves, and that cultivating the mind and emotions can support health and happiness.

...without emotional cultivation, especially of positive feelings such as friendliness, intimacy, compassion and generosity, the search for health can become a form of narcissism. (The search for health) can also be perverted for dark political purposes. It is salutary to remember that the Nazi party in Germany espoused nature walking, environmentalism, tree planting, vegetarianism, homeopathy, organic agriculture, and healthy exercise in the open air...

‘Experts at curing diseases are inferior to specialists who warn against diseases. Experts in the use of medicines are inferior to those who recommend proper diet.’

Zhi Chen (11th century)

When I co-founded a natural food shop in the 1970s, orthodox scientific opinion ridiculed the idea that diet and cancer could be related.

Today it is thought that around 10% of UK cancer cases are caused by poor diet, and that a third of US cancer deaths are linked to a combination of diet and lack of physical activity...In my thirty years as a practitioner of Chinese medicine, I found that patients asked my advice on diet – specifically what to eat – probably more often than any other question. In trying to answer them, I gradually came to realise that the ‘how’ of eating rather than the ‘what’ of eating is usually the most important question to start with...

‘The body should always be exercised; food should always be minimal. Yet even in exercise, do not go to extremes; in minimizing food, do not go to emaciation.’

Ge Hong (4th century)

Hundreds of millions of people are on, or are considering, a weight loss diet at any one time. Yet despite a multi-billion dollar weight loss industry, the evidence shows that by and large, dieting simply doesn’t work. A 2007 analysis of 37 long term studies concluded that, ‘there is little support for the notion that diet leads to lasting weight loss or health benefits...’

A 2011 Oxford University Study found that of the nearly one third of a million people studied, those who ate at least eight portions (80 grams each) of fruit and vegetables a day had a 22% reduced risk of coronary heart disease compared to those who ate less than three portions a day...

If there is one food that can unequivocally be condemned as harmful to health and a major contributor to the rise in chronic disease, it is added sugar. Its consumption in the USA (in the form of cane sugar, corn syrup and maple syrup) rose from 6.3lbs per person in 1822 to 107lbs per person in 1999...One sweetened drink a day raised the risk of diabetes by 18% over a decade, and notably raised it by 13% even in people who were thin or of normal body weight...

A 2014 Newcastle University review of 343 peer-reviewed studies concluded that organically grown crops contain substantially higher levels of anti-oxidants, and lower levels of pesticides and toxic metal residues, than conventionally grown foods...

The five tastes are sour, bitter, sweet, acrid and salty. Like many aspects of Chinese medical thinking, these are integrated into Five Phase theory and each is therefore linked to one of the five principle organs (lung, spleen, heart, kidney and liver).

‘The reason flowing water does not become putrid and the pivots of a door are not eaten by insects is because they move. The physical body and its *qi* are like this too. If the body does not move, then the essential *qi* does not flow. If this does not flow, then the *qi* clogs up.’ *Annals of Lu Buwei* (3rd century BCE)

Morris and his team sat on London double decker buses watching bus conductors running up and down all day long and compared their health status to the bus drivers who spent their days sitting behind the wheel. This meticulous study found that drivers suffered higher rates of heart disease than their more active colleagues. The paper reported similar results with the postal service – those who delivered mail by foot or by bicycle suffered less coronary heart disease than those who had desk jobs...

‘The body should always be exercised...yet even in exercise do not go to extremes’

Ge Hong (283–343)

A study of male endurance athletes (over 100 proven marathons or equivalent, average age 57) found that half of them showed signs of heart scarring (fibrosis) compared to none in either the two control groups (younger endurance athletes, and healthy men who were not endurance athletes)...

‘The way of nurturing life is to constantly strive for minor exertion but never become greatly fatigued and force what you cannot endure.’

Sun Simiao (7th century)

‘As a general rule, humans have 360 joints, nine apertures, five repositories, and six storehouses. It is desirable that the skin be taut, the blood vessels open to free circulation, the sinews and bones hard, the mind and well harmonious and the *qi* active. If all of this is achieved, illness will find no place to lodge, and evil no means to grow.... Its malevolence grows because *qi* is blocked. When water is blocked, it becomes stagnant; when a tree is blocked, it becomes infested with wood-boring insects; when a plant is blocked, it withers.’
Annals of Lu Buwei (3rd century BCE)

Good physical alignment and posture are also considered to have a healing effect in themselves. If depression, misery or anxiety cause our posture to droop, our chest to collapse, our body to become knotted, tight or weak, then adopting a strong, confident, open and relaxed stance can help counter these negative forces. If we’re easily distracted, swayed by every passing emotion, become flustered and emotionally chaotic, then the practice of quieting the heart and mind, sinking the weight, rooting to the ground, and creating a solid foundation can slowly start to change these patterns. With regular practice, we can start to build the priceless qualities of stability and resilience...

The ‘Yang part’ is the sympathetic branch – responsible for our ‘fight or flight’ response. The ‘Yin part’ is the parasympathetic branch responsible for our ‘rest and digest’ relaxation response... What is known as ‘high vagal tone’ describes a flexible autonomic nervous system of this kind, since the stimulation of parasympathetic activity is significantly controlled by the vagus nerve. This ‘wandering nerve’ runs from the brain to the heart and most of the major organs, carrying messages in both directions. It is stimulated by slow, deep abdominal breathing – a key feature of internal practice – which lowers heart rate, blood pressure and other stress responses...

The quieter, more internal practices that make up the Chinese healing exercise tradition take a different approach to achieving free flow. Some – especially in martial training – may well be

vigorous, but this is always placed in the combination of softness with strength, relaxation with effort, and on mental stillness and presence in the midst of bodywork...

If we want to maintain a functioning body through to old age, we have to keep it mobile. There appears to be a relationship between a flexible body and flexible blood vessels. A study which tested participants ability to reach forward and touch their toes when sitting with their back to a wall, found that for middle aged and older people, the more flexible they were, the more elastic their blood vessels were, and the lower their systolic blood pressure...

‘Just let a balanced and aligned breathing fill your chest, and it will swirl and blend within your mind. This confers longevity.’
Original Tao (4th century BCE)

‘When the breath or energy of the individual is congested or stagnant, the muscles and the bones are contracted and don’t flex well.’
Annals of Lu Buwei (3rd century BCE)

As far as Yin Yang is concerned . . . rooting, contracting, and sinking the weight into the earth are all Yin, while rising towards the sky, lengthening and uncoiling are Yang. When the body contracts and expands, coils and uncoils rhythmically, harmony with the washing in and out of the breath, it is aligned with these basic, binary forces of the universe...

Sometimes, when I was treating patients, I would suggest that they might try Tai Chi or yoga for chronic back pain, or make some dietary changes to help a longstanding disorder. It wasn’t unusual for them to report back a week or two later complaining that nothing had yet changed. So I would tell them that story of the American tourist who visited the Tower of London (built in 1078). He came across an old gardener, slowly pulling a heavy roller over a bowling green. It was one of the most beautiful pieces of grass he had ever seen – perfectly flat, every blade the same cropped length, verdant in the afternoon sun. ‘Wow’, the tourist said. ‘You must tell me how you get a piece of grass to

look like that.’ ‘It’s very easy sir,’ the gardener replied. ‘You water it regularly and roll it every day for nine hundred years’ ...

Sleep – along with regulating the mind and emotions, eating well, and taking care of the body with exercise – is one of the four vital legs of the ‘chair’ of health maintenance. And like a chair, if this one leg is broken, our health becomes unstable – even if we take good care of the other three. There is a marked relationship between poor sleep and obesity in both adults and children...Adults who regularly sleep less than six hours are more than seven times more likely to have a higher body mass index (BMI) by their twenties...

The Chinese medicine perspective on the relationship between lots of sleep and increased hunger is a simple one. Sleep and food are the two principle nourishers of yin in the body. If sleep cannot meet this need, then the onus shifts onto food to do so...

‘The secret of health preservation is first of all sleep. It can regenerate the essence, improve health, invigorate the Spleen and Stomach and strengthen bone and muscles...It is an ever successful panacea that cures all diseases.’
Collected Works of an Old Man with a Bamboo Hat Lu Yu (17th century)

Opinions vary on whether right or left side sleeping is best. Although the latter is advised through pregnancy as it minimizes reflex from the stomach...

Kissing was considered a valuable way to absorb a partner’s essences. From the Chinese medicine perspective, the Heart is the seat of the emotions, and resonates with the tongue in the system of Bodily Correspondences. This explains why kissing is such an intimate exchange – even more so than intercourse.... The Ming Dynasty text, *The wondrous discourse of Su Nu*, is directed at householders. Chapter Five, ‘The Supreme Human Relationship’, states clearly, ‘between man and wife, closeness and intimacy, mutual respect and love are the constants of human relationships’, and

‘when kindness and love are in accord, then there is respect.’

A 2007 review of the available evidence published in the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* concluded that if a mother is stressed during pregnancy, her child is much more likely to experience emotional or cognitive problems such as anxiety, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and delayed language development...

In traditional Chinese thinking, the middle way – that balanced and harmonious realm between extremes – is (as always) advocated. Excessive work or exercise during pregnancy is potentially as harmful as excessive rest. A French study of over 2000 women found that those whose work involved long periods of standing, carrying heavy loads, and working on assembly lines, were more likely to have premature labours and lower birth weight babies...

Similar findings appear in research into high-level physical training. Women who continued endurance training at or near pre-pregnancy levels throughout pregnancy delivered early and had lower birth weight babies. However, those who continued exercising at 50% or more of their normal routine, had shorter labours with less operative interventions, less acute foetal stress, than those who stopped exercising within the first trimester, though their babies were lighter...

In the end, we can all only do our best in life and will inevitable fail in a variety of ways. Mothers (and fathers) know this and have been reassured over the years by the words of Donald Winnicott, the psychoanalyst and paediatrician, who taught of the ‘good enough mother’ and ‘the ordinary devoted mother...an example of the way in which the foundations of health are laid down by the ordinary mother in her ordering loving care of her own baby’ ...

The quantity of added sugars that children (and adults) now regularly consume is staggering. In 2005, sugar consumption (in the form of cane sugar, high fructose corn syrup and maple

syrup) was running at 100lbs a year, or 22 teaspoons a day. This level of consumption is hardly surprising given the (up to) 13 teaspoons of sugar in a typical soft drink or the 7 teaspoons in a single serving of commercial yoghurt (typical of the hidden sugars, often in the form of high fructose corn syrup in processed food)...

Sugar is recognised as both addictive and damaging to children's ability to enjoy the less intense taste of simple foods such as vegetables. The reckless and cynical addition of sugar to virtually every manufactured and processed food risks harming children's lifetime dietary preferences and health, since high sugar consumption is strongly associated with diseases such as obesity, diabetes, heart diseases and cancer...

Sufficient activity is vital for the development of healthy young muscles, sinews and bones. In a five year Swedish study, children aged 7 to 9 who exercised for 40 minutes a day at school, were found to develop denser bones and suffered fewer fractures than children who exercised for only an hour a week...

It seems as though young men and women are increasingly suffering from a narcissism that is more preoccupied with what they look like in the mirror and selfies, than how they feel on the inside. A healthy body is surely one that works well and feels good, while a curious attentive looking out at the world must be more rewarding than an obsession with being looked at.

Hiking in forests, hills or mountains; gazing on folded valleys, green meadows, winding rivers and snow-capped peaks; strolling through city parks as spring time trees unfurl with new life; kicking through piles of autumn leaves; digging our hands into rich earth to plant seeds and bulbs; watching the sea in all its mood and colours – in all these we allow the forms, smells, and sounds of nature to fill our senses...

'Hardiness' is a description of personality style introduced by clinical psychologist Suzanne

Kobasa in 1971. It encompasses qualities such as resilience, self-control, patience, self-confidence (including the belief that we can change circumstances by our own efforts), the appreciation of challenge as opportunity (and thus a reduced fear of change) and curiosity and interest in the outside world. These qualities – which are similar to the 'warrior spirit' cultivated in the martial arts – help us to deal with the inevitable difficulty and stresses of life...

As for the great cycle of the year, *The Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic* – the 'bible' of Chinese medicine – advises attuning our lives to the flow of the four seasons. As befits a 2000 year old text, this yearly pattern follows that of the farmer who sows in spring, sees their crops flourish in summer, reaps in autumn and stores in winter. Summer, for example, is characterised by opulence and blossoming. 'The *qi* of heaven and earth interact and the myriad beings bloom and bear fruit. Go to rest late at night and rise early. Never get enough of the sun.' Winter, by contrast, is characterised by 'securing and storing. The water is frozen and the earth breaks open... Go to bed early and rise late. You must wait for the sun to shine. Let the mind enter a state as if hidden...

It has been suggested that the art of water management underlies the practice of acupuncture, one of whose core ideas is to needle locations distant from the site of the disease to free up the dammed flow of *qi* and blood. It is certainly true that the 'acupuncture physiology' of the body is depicted in terms of complex network of water systems and channels...

Qigong models its practice on the softness of clouds, the stability of a mountain, rootedness of a tree. It might imitate the flying of the crane or the goose, or draw inspiration from the slow rolling of waves in the sea. There are even practices connecting the 'essence' to the essence of trees, the sun, moon and distant stars. In *Tai Chi*, inspiration is drawn from the soft power of water and the flexibility of living plants...

‘To cast off worry there is nothing better than music.’

Original Tao (4th century BCE)

A 2003 reported that of a range of physical (swimming, cycling, dancing) and mental (reading, playing board games or a musical instruments) activities, dancing was associated with the greatest reduction in the risk of developing dementia...

‘To know how to grow old is the master work of wisdom and one of the most difficult chapters in the great art of living.’

Henri Frederick Amiel, philosopher
(1821–81)

A UK study of over 5,000 men aged 42 to 63 for example, found that those who followed four basic health behaviours (no smoking, consuming moderate levels of alcohol, being physically active, and eating fruits and vegetables daily), had over three times as great a chance of successful aging over the 16 years of the study. Successful ageing was defined as maintaining good cognitive, physical, respiratory and cardiovascular functioning, with the absence of disability, mental health problems and chronic disease...

Knowledge of how to maintain health, strengthening independence in our later years is therefore of vital importance – for ourselves, our families and the societies we live in...In the Chinese tradition, this phase of life – as long as it reasonably healthy – has been welcomed as a time that delivers more leisure, more comfort, greater wisdom and increased status and power within the family...

Chinese medicine has traditionally described the aging process as decline and exhaustion of life giving essence. Essence is stored in the Kidneys, which govern not only the urinary function but also fertility, libido, the bones, brain, teeth, head, hair and ears. As essence diminishes from mid-life onwards, so fertility and libido decline, the bone and mental faculties weaken, the teeth and hair fall out and our hearing fades...

The nourishment of life tradition offers remedies...to delay consumption of essence, it advocated a regular lifestyle with sufficient rest and sleep, appropriate diet, good breathing habits, and the cultivation of calm and nourishing, rather than exhausting, states of mind...And to counter stagnation, it advocates movement of both body and mind with the aim of maximising mental and physical flexibility and thus free flow of vital energy and blood...

‘As for the back, it is the palace of that which is in the chest. When the back is curved and the shoulders drop, the palace will soon be destroyed. As for the lower back, it is the palace of the Kidneys. When a person is unable to turn..., his Kidneys will soon be worn out.’

Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Internal Medicine
(2nd century BC)

‘The body needs a certain amount of movement. This movement serves to properly balance right and left and to re-distribute and assimilate the various grain energies; it also causes the blood to circulate smoothly and prevent the arising of diseases.’

Hua Tuo (3rd century)

A healthy appetite is a key symptom of overall health, while a poor appetite and the consequence lack of proper nutrition, will eat away at bodily strength and hasten decline. Involuntary loss of weight in late life is a clear predictor of increased mortality. As two Chinese sayings put it, ‘with Stomach *qi* there is life, without Stomach *qi* there is death’, and (in defining three basic signs of health), ‘able to eat, able to sleep, able to defecate’...

It is easy to gain weight, especially from early middle age onwards. Middle age spread is a common experience for many of us. If it is significant, this weight gain may have negative consequences, increasing the risk of developing dementia and overall disability later in life...

‘One cannot allow one’s mind to fall into disuse and must not let it turn into a piece of withered wood or dead ashes.’

Cao Tingdong (1699–1785)

‘Iron rusts from disease; stagnant water loses its purity and in cold weather becomes frozen; even so does inaction sap the vigour of the mind.’

Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519)

Further light is shed on emotional changes in ageing by a study which found that adolescents tend to maintain or even increase negative emotions and to dampen down positive ones, while elders tend to maintain positive states and dampen down negative ones... The growing evidence that the physical brain is plastic rather than concrete is confirmed by research showing that cognitive exertion at any age can increase the rate at which new neurons appear in many different brain structures...

‘It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.’

Charles Darwin (1809–82)

Time itself does not magically generate knowledge and wisdom. We have all met older people who are narrow minded, stubborn, and chronically miserable. There has to have been a commitment to lifelong observation and learning. That necessitates flexibility and adaptability – a continual readiness to let go of fondly held ideas in the light of new knowledge and understanding. This requirement for maintaining mental flexibility exactly parallels how we need to cultivate the body through our older years. Both body and mind can so easily stagnate, becoming solidified and fixed, unless we are continually willing to take on new challenges...

As we near our end, so many of us – the unique, brave, funny, fascinating, creative, rebellious, obstreperous, steadfast, loved and loving people that we are – are likely to be diminished and depersonalised by the medicalisation of death – subject to increasingly futile interventions as decisions about our fate are made above our heads... For many, this last stage of life becomes a battle between the bruising effects of medical

intervention and the increasingly slim hope that it will grant any meaningful extra time...

The observation that greater diversity results in increased ability, resistance and resilience, is now widely accepted in ecological science... The early Chinese philosophers, especially the Taoists, believed in observing, learning from, and going with the grain – with the flow – of nature. Lacking the religious beliefs and dogma that so often hinder the development of knowledge, they were free in the attempts to see things as they truly are. Only by patiently observing and seeing the whole picture can action and intervention be successful...

‘If people exercise their bodies, the hundred ills cannot arise.’

Sun Simiao (7th century)

Sun Simiao, one of China’s greatest ever doctors and popularly known as the god (or Buddha) of medicine, devoted one scroll of his *Essential Prescriptions for Every Emergency Worth a Thousand in Gold* to nurturing life, with advice on self-massage, exercise, cultivating *qi* and circulating breath. Regarding physical activity he repeated the age-old advice of balance, moderation and learning from nature.

With great gratitude to Peter Deadman
Norman Blair
May 2020