



Adventures in Healing: Tong Ren for Sam

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Katherine Heeg, LCSW

I received a referral from a neurologist for a paralyzed man suffering from depression. His mother was aggressive in her attempts to reach me, leaving multiple voicemail messages. Because her son was on a ventilator and could not travel without an ambulance, I agreed to see him at her home. Sam was a 30-year-old college graduate, who had been employed doing Information Technology work. A coworker invited him to come to the mountain climbing center one day after work. Sam never had much interest in sports, but mountain climbing was different. He enjoyed the mental challenge, and soon he was designing courses for others on the climbing wall.

Sam began traveling for mountain climbing excursions. One weekend, he experienced every climber's worst nightmare—equipment failure. Sam suffered a shattered pelvis, and broken hip and femur. His spleen was removed, and he had a spinal cord injury at C-2 (second cervical vertebrae) from a broken neck. His spinal cord was not severed, just injured. He couldn't breathe without a ventilator. However, his diaphragm was stable enough for a diaphragm pacer, a battery operated device implanted under the skin that provides the phrenic nerve with electrical stimulation, allowing Sam to breathe for a couple of hours per day off the ventilator.

It was more than a year after his accident when I met

Sam. I was amazed to learn that in all his months of hospitalization, he never spoke to a mental health professional, even after such a dramatic life changing injury. His life had gone from living the American dream to being trapped in a body he could not use. These circumstances can cause even the most resilient among us to become depressed. I was not sure what my role would be, but my initial intention was to be a friendly visitor and evaluate how I could best be of service.

In spite of his physical limitations, Sam had a sharp mind and with no cognitive impairment or disordered thinking. He spent most of his time on the computer, beating able-bodied people around the globe playing video games! His laptop rested on a bedside tray table. An arm-like extension from the computer featured a plastic straw that he could blow into to tap/click, which he could move with his lips for direction. I thought this was great therapy for him because he could momentarily forget about being immobile and feel competent at something.

Sam did not talk much, nor did he want to discuss or analyze his feelings, which made traditional psychotherapy a less viable option. Before I met Sam, I remember thinking about this unusual referral and wondering to myself "How on earth am I going to help? I am no expert on spinal cord injury." Little did



I know, taking this referral would cause me to open my mind to a different way of working and measuring progress as “micro-improvements.”

Sam’s mother Nancy was relentless in her desire to help her son. Almost overnight, she learned to become his nurse, complete with suction tubes, coughalator, bladder bags, and more. One of the front rooms in the house had been turned into a quasi-hospital room, including a lifting device attached to the ceiling, wall mounted TV, and a handicap-equipped shower in an adjoining bathroom. At the end of my visit, Nancy and I were talking when she pleaded, “If

he had was that he could barely, BARELY move his fingers. Now he could do a full scissor-like motion with them?? From someone banging on a doll with a magnetic hammer? That blew my mind. If it was not for the fact that I saw it with my own eyes, I wouldn’t have believed it.

I began looking at Tom Tam’s website (www.tom-tam.com). Tong Ren works like this: one person taps on a rubber doll marked with acupuncture points, while the other person sits with palms up to receive the energy. I noticed that Spaulding Hospital in Boston allowed Tom to hold his healing classes at their

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you can think of anything, ANYTHING AT ALL that might help Sam, PLEASE!! Let me know!”

Feeling moved by her compassion and love for her suffering son, I began thinking. I recalled an email video (youtube.com/watch?v=2Eqm0xRJ2Mk#t=14) of a Chinese man banging a doll with a hammer, a process called Tong Ren. Many people were testifying that this cured their cancer, even a former governor claimed to have been healed from a life-threatening illness.

Back then, I had zero knowledge of Chinese Medicine. I knew acupuncture was gaining in popularity and credibility, but that is about it. I forwarded the video to Nancy. Soon Sam received two phone sessions of this crazy doll banging treatment from Anubha, a Tong Ren practitioner. On my next visit, I noticed with curiosity and total disbelief that Sam’s mobility had improved! Prior to this, Sam could only slightly wiggle two fingers on his left hand. After two phone sessions, he could do a major wiggle, about 80% more than before!

This got my attention. Here was a guy who was lying in bed for over a year, and the most mobility

facility. His treatments are being researched. Tom seemed clever, and since my curiosity was activated, I thought about going to a Tong Ren class to investigate. I called my friend Michelle, who recently had two surgeries and said “I want to go to this class, but it is strange. Would you like to come?” She was willing, so we went to our first Tong Ren class.

Tom Tam was an acupuncturist from Boston. One day he was leading a Tai Chi class when a woman was overcome with crippling sciatic pain. Tom did not have any clean acupuncture needles to treat her, so as a joke, he took a blank piece of paper, drew a figure of a human body, and put his dirty acupuncture needles on the paper where he would have applied them on her. To their amazement, her pain went away within a minute!

For years, every Saturday, Tom would spend the entire day in Boston’s Chinatown, going door to door asking, “What’s your complaining?” Then he would treat them with acupuncture. His unique theory is called the Tom Tam Healing System. Tom thinks that illness is caused by blockages, which could be from our circulatory, nervous, lymph systems or chi



(bioelectricity). A few things can remove a blockage: acupuncture, Tong Ren, Chi Gong-traditional Chinese energy healing and Tui Na massage which physically removes blockages with manual manipulation.

After the discovery in the Tai Chi class, Tom began studying the principles of synchronicity and brain wave entrainment. In the mid-1600s it was discovered that if two pendulum clocks are on the wall next to each other, they synchronize. Tom had the idea to use acupuncture training dolls by tapping the energy points with a small metal hammer. There are magnets in the ankle of the doll and the hammer tip. His idea was to create a Tong Ren healing class because there is strength in numbers and the collective intention of the group is stronger than one person alone. If ten people, or 30, all tap for one person, the healing energy will be stronger. Having studied and practiced group psychotherapy I recognized there were some parallels of thought. Even self-help addiction groups like Alcoholics Anonymous believe in the fellowship of the group because the group is more powerful than the individual. So in Tong Ren class, attendees bring their dolls and hammers and take turns tapping for one another. I call it “Getting your Chi on.”

At the Tong Ren Center of New York, Anubha led the class participants in physical exercise which I found refreshing and later learned was Tai Chi. Then she took turns asking what we wanted tapping for. A woman in front of me said she had trouble with her left ankle. I did nothing, just observed, but I noticed a pulsing in my left ankle as Anubha was tapping. I thought that was really strange, but was pretty sure I had not imagined it.

Then it was Michelle’s turn. Michelle mentioned her two recent surgeries, and only about a minute or two later, she was shrieking in pain, bent over clutching her abdomen. Anubha quickly figured out that Michelle was feeling intense burning on the incision sites and was highly sensitive to the energy. Anubha’s remedy was to tap the energy down to the doll’s feet to ground Michelle. Michelle said the class helped her feel better and experience less pain afterward and we

returned the following week. At that point, humor and skepticism, I bought a doll, hammer and some books with just to see if it would work.

Not long after that, I developed a terrible headache and by the time I arrived at home, my head was throbbing. I immediately handed the doll and hammer to my significant other and said “Hit me in the head, right here!” Playing along, he grabbed the doll and began banging on head with the hammer saying “Pain, pain, go away!” This was the worst headache ever. Within two minutes, it felt like someone released a pressure valve in my head. Within ten minutes, the pain was reduced by 80%! Thinking that this was faster than Tylenol or Motrin—I quickly became a believer. I should add that my significant other had absolutely no Tong Ren training, instruction or faith in the process.

Yet, the logical side of my brain was still wondering “How the heck can banging a doll with a hammer do that?” Tom’s theory is that we all have the ability to heal as long as energy flows without resistance. There are several theories about why Tong Ren works. One theory is that through synchronicity and brain wave entrainment, the sick person’s organs will entrain with the energy of the healthy people—which leads to healing.

Some think the healing energy, or universal chi, comes from what Carl Jung referred to as the collective unconscious mind. Tong Ren practitioners then act as conduits to guide the healing chi energy of the collective unconscious past the blockages in the patient, so the chi nurtures the body back to its healthy state (Tong Ren Healing, Oriental Cultural Institute Healing Research Foundation). Chi is our life-force energy, the stuff that makes us alive.

In Western culture, chi is probably best understood by university researchers working on non-local effects in sub-atomic physics. These studies validate the concept that chi is the fundamental magneto-electric field in the universe. In our bodies, chi is equivalent to bioelectricity, which is essential for maintaining healthy nerve impulses that are re-



quired for nourishing cells so they can self-repair (Tong Ren Healing, OCI Healing Research Foundation).

Still curious, I Googled “thought energy” and came across the works of William Tiller, a retired Stanford professor and former Dean of the Materials Science and Engineering Department. He wrote about an experiment that concluded that meridians were real, the roads or pathways on which bioelectricity runs. In a recorded lecture, Dr. Tiller talked about the zero-point gravity energy level universe and how it could intersect with our own plane of existence. He had the physics formulas to prove all of this. His work is called Psychoenergetic Science, a Second Copernican Scale Revolution.

People of faith have believed for centuries in the power of prayer. My brain conceptualized Tong Ren as “prayer with an added electromagnetic kick.” I do not know much about the electromagnetism of the human body. Nor do I know how the ignition in my car works, yet I still turn it on and drive it. Bill Tiller seemed to have the whole universe figured out, so for my own intellectual understanding, as long as someone had figured out the mechanisms of why Tong Ren might work and could explain it with hard science, this was good enough for me.

Initially, I helped Sam work through some of the sadness and anger he was experiencing. All of his physical energy was going towards keeping his broken body alive. It was exhausting, and he slept in two- to-three hour increments throughout the day and night. We decided, with Sam’s input, to seriously learn more about Tong Ren and its benefits. Sam encouraged his mother to adopt a trial-and-error approach to his

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treatment, but Nancy was fearful, wanting to make sure she did not do anything to harm Sam. Sometimes Sam experienced more muscle spasms after Tong Ren.

Nancy got a Tong Ren book in Chinese which she read several times. I assisted in deciphering Nancy’s questions and emailing them to Anubha, relaying the answers and helping Nancy understand them (there was a bit of a language barrier). Meanwhile, Sam kept himself occupied through mood fluctuations. We stumbled along the Tong Ren learning curve, tapping for Sam. Four months after meeting him, he could open and close his left hand, but he still could not hold onto any objects. Sam complained that his hands were stiff, and I pointed out it was good that he could feel them. Nancy reported that Sam could flex one foot slightly, wiggle some toes, and he was starting to overcome his own skepticism of Tong Ren. Nancy made a weighted bean bag so he could get used to holding something weighted and practice grasping with his left hand.

Until this point Sam’s father, Don, had thought everything related to Tong Ren was ludicrous. However, one day Nancy reported Don got up in the morning and said to her “Wow, I slept so well last night. I feel so good.” Minor troubles were no longer bothersome. “I don’t know what happened to make me feel so good,” said Don. “I’ll tell you what happened” said Nancy, “I TAPPED you last night!” Don replied, “Do it again tonight!” Nancy was a natural at Tong Ren. She knew much about acupuncture because her father had been an acupuncturist and Chi Gong healer.

Things were never easy, yet little by little, things were improving. Sam could flex his foot forward and Nancy saw that the big toe wanted to wiggle. Also while lying on his back, he could move his forearm a tiny bit, from the elbow (as if pulling his hand towards his body). Sam regained feeling his own appetite and began saying, “I’m full.” He could feel tingling while receiving Tong Ren. He couldn’t feel his torso yet, or his knees. He began to rotate his wrist a little bit from side to side. He also reported sleeping longer.



We began to notice that a pattern of pain and stiffness usually preceded new mobility, and speculated that this was part of the healing process. Nancy excitedly showed me that when they stretched Sam's feet, he could pull his own toes backwards. She was encouraged by all the small improvements and believed he was healing very slowly.

One improvement that blew my mind was the laser. According to the Tong Ren practitioners, you could take a device that points a red beam of light and shine it on any point on the Tong Ren doll which then was supposed to bring energy to that point in the body. The power of intention plus red beam of light equals relief? That concept was a little too bizarre for me initially. However, seeing became believing. Nancy put the laser on the diaphragm points and within one week, Sam went from breathing three minutes off the ventilator to breathing four-to-five minutes off the ventilator.

Nothing else in his routine had been changed. I recalled reading that physicists discovered that underneath it all, we are reduced to vibrating strands of light. So perhaps there was a connection between pointing a beam of light on a doll and vibrating the right strands of light to bring healing? Nancy even noticed that when Sam was on the ventilator, if the laser was pointing to T-6 for diaphragm on the doll, the ventilator showed that Sam was breathing more on his own and less from the machine! Other measurable changes from Tong Ren tapping included Sam's pulse oxygen level would improve and his heart rate would decrease as he entered the relaxed, healing state.

After taking a Tong Ren Anatomy class with Joe Lucier, we began consulting with Joe. He explained the goal of Tong Ren is to access the nerves and let them heal themselves. Nancy was grateful to have someone knowledgeable to turn to about Tong Ren healing, and Joe became part of our tapping treatment team. Nancy translated Joe's Tong Ren Anatomy book into Chinese. Sam was now able to pick his forearm up and lift it slightly into the air, which indicated his strength was improving. Sam also reported that he could feel his knee, and felt warmth in his legs and tingling in the

back of his neck (the spinal cord injury area). Joe provided direction regarding which points to tap for specific problems, especially for symptoms not listed in the book.

And so it went. Micro-improvements and tapping continued. Almost five years have passed since I first met Sam. Our hope is that all the micro-improvements will continue to accumulate. He is showing improved sensitivity in new areas, the latest are his abdomen and knee. He can use a computer mouse. He can sleep four hours without turning, his energy is increasing, and he can sit up after exercise with no headache. Certainly his mood and depression have improved. Early on, one of his doctors dismissed his mobility as a reflex. This was disappointing to Sam, so he stopped showing his improvements to that person. I joked, "When you can walk into his office and hit him in the head, then maybe he will acknowledge your improvements!" Sometimes we are blind to what is right in front of us because our mind cannot comprehend what is possible.

What is a family supposed to do when told, "I am sorry, there is nothing more we can do for you"? Should the family give up? Will the patient give up? Will the community give up? Or should they try something new, because they have nothing else to lose?

William Harvey was disgraced as a physician for believing that blood was pumped by the heart and traveled through arteries. A modern example is psychiatrist Daniel Amen, who pioneered the idea of examining brain scans before diagnosis and treatment. The outrageous can become routine with time and understanding. My hope in sharing this story is that you consider the possibilities. If you find yourself sitting at a loved one's bedside, feeling helpless, order a Tong Ren starter kit and start tapping. You never know. Also, if you are fortunate enough to be able-bodied, you can even tap for yourself. €



Author Katherine Heeg can be found at www.AchieveYourFullPotential.net.