FREE SAMPLE · ONE EXCERPT FROM EACH VOLUME

Stems and Branches Acupuncture

Six things from the six volumes that you can use with your next patient.

Michal Richter, MD

Clinical Acupuncture

What this file is

Six passages from the six volumes of the series, one from each. They are printed exactly as they appear in the books, not summarised and not re-written. Where a passage uses a term explained earlier in its volume, a one-line note in grey sits above it.

Each passage ends with something you can say to a patient or check in the clinic. The page numbers are the original ones, so you can see where each passage sits inside its volume.

Inside

1 VOLUME 1 · THE ENERGY CLOUD
Mr Szymon and the pug: why the recommendation matters as much as the needle

2 VOLUME 2 · THE GREAT MOVEMENTS
Metal: two minutes of evaluation in the evening

3 VOLUME 3 · THE TEN HEAVENLY STEMS
Ren: the dandruff method

4 VOLUME 4 · THE TWELVE EARTHLY BRANCHES
You and Xu: listening to the end, and loyalty towards oneself

5 VOLUME 5 · THE SIX DIVISIONS
The six atmospheres: how to name each one to the patient

6 VOLUME 6 · THE WHOLE CHART
After the needles come out: thirty seconds that show you whether the treatment worked

Educational material for acupuncturists and acupuncture students. It is not medical advice and does not replace a medical examination. You are welcome to pass this file on to anyone who needles.

VOLUME 1 · THE ENERGY CLOUD

Mr Szymon and the pug

Why the recommendation matters as much as the needle

What you take from it. A real patient, one recommendation that matched the needle, and four rules for giving recommendations.

FROM VOLUME 1, PAGES 32 TO 35

> *Just before this passage the book explains that each person is born with one energy strong and another weak. We over-use the strong one, and the life challenge is to learn the weak one.*

What can we, acupuncturists, do about it? Two things.

The first is obvious. We analyse at which level the disturbance happened and we work at that level. We needle a point, we change the vibration, we say to the body: look, this vibration. And the body, which until now was flexing the strong energy, says: oh. And we have balance — equal contact with energies that balance each other.

The second is just as important and often underrated: recommendations. If I had to point to the single most valuable thing in the whole course this series came out of, it would be the recommendations. Not the points. The recommendations.

Mr Szymon and the pug

Let me tell it through an example.

I had a patient, Mr Szymon, who needed wood. I will not go into details — he needed wood, he got wood, I tonified it for him with acupuncture.

If I had left him at that, it would have gone like this: a few days later he was out walking his dog. A pug. You know what a walk with a pug looks like — it is not a walk, it is shuffling on the spot. And suddenly he felt he wanted to run. A man who for fifteen years has been walking to the same place at the same pace would think: ah, interesting, maybe I will buy myself some running shoes, one day. And he would let it go.

But he had heard a recommendation in the clinic. I told him that I was tonifying wood. That his body has a tendency to pathological wood — an odd name, but it means that he does a lot, has a lot of goals, lives fast. I watched him sitting there nodding. And I said: the solution is to start moving physically. Not because Richter said so. But because it may turn out that in the near future you will feel like moving more.

And that is what happened. Mr Szymon dropped the lead on his walk and ran. The pug stayed where it was, because it was a pug. Mr Szymon came back and said: this is great. He has been running regularly ever since.

He only had to hear one more thing: that the point is not to run more and more, faster and faster. Just to move. A walk, nordic walking, swimming, a bike. And to find the pleasure in the running — not in getting to the finish.

A recommendation is a verbal description of an energy

Here is the heart of it. With the needle we introduce an energy relationship. And with the recommendation we inform the patient about it. A recommendation is nothing other than a verbal description of the energy we are trying to remind the patient's body of.

That is why I do not give the patient every recommendation I could give. I give only the ones connected with what I am currently doing with the needle. I tonified wood — I talk about wood. I tonified earth — I talk about earth. One and the same thing, through two channels.

And one more thing I have been observing for years. If the patient is really working on something, three words about that element are enough. They say: yes, yes, yes. They nod. Because they feel it — it is just that nobody had named it before. And naming it brings enormous peace.

FOR THE PRACTITIONER

A few rules for recommendations that I have worked out over the years and that I stick to:

- You only talk about what you did with the needle. One energy, one message. A patient who gets five recommendations does none of them.
- You forewarn, you do not order. “It may turn out that you will feel like…” works better than “you are to go running”. The body will do its thing after the treatment anyway — your role is to make sure the patient recognises it instead of getting frightened.
- You do not leave them alone with it. The new vibrations will feel strange to them. If they do not know where they came from, they will put them down to chance or take them for a problem.
- You name, you do not lecture. Three words about an element, in a person who is working on it, do more than a lecture. Save the lecture for the course.

VOLUME 2 · THE GREAT MOVEMENTS

Metal

Two minutes of evaluation in the evening

What you take from it. A ready recommendation for a patient working on metal, with the exact words to say.

FROM VOLUME 2, PAGES 60 TO 62

> *Metal is one of the five elements. In this series it is the element of boundaries, of judging what is good or bad for me right now, and of letting go.*

The most frequent recommendation I give to patients working on metal is evaluation.

First I tell them that evaluation is an inseparable part of life. Something is good or bad for you at a given moment. You cannot project it onto others — and there is the trap. We may consider something good, and at this moment it may be bad. You have your favourite dish, let it be shakshuka. You eat it every Sunday, you have the time, you prepare it, you love it. But one Sunday you feel: somehow I don't fancy it. "But I'll make it anyway, because it's my favourite dish." And you eat it, because it is your favourite dish. And at that moment it was bad for you.

So I encourage this: two or three minutes in the late afternoon or in the evening — metal, afternoon, autumn — to evaluate the events of the day. Good, bad. With the caveat that something that has always been good did not have to be good that day. The person you do not like may have been nice to you that day. The friend you adore may have been bad for you that day. If the evening is impossible — better in the morning than

not at all. Patients like doing it and they see the effects of this simple recommendation.

The second thing, which connects with it: you do not have to articulate it. I am meeting my boss and at that moment I may think — excuse me — "oh, the old cow". I am calling things by their name. I am naming what has already happened inside me. I do not have to tell her. If I do say it, I am performing an activity — that is my yang, my energy. I can spend it if I hope to change something in the situation, if the relationship matters to me. But the point is not to be shouting everything into people's faces all the time.

Here is the trap of assertiveness. When somebody is learning to be assertive, they think it all has to be articulated straight away. I think not. Things should be called by their name in front of yourself: allow yourself to call your favourite dish disgusting at a given moment, or the neighbour you dislike thoroughly charming. I have it in my head, I do not have to say it. You would not believe what strength that gives people. It is a weight off their mind that they do not have to tell somebody to their face that they like them or do not — they simply think it to themselves. We lift the imperative of articulating thoughts and emotions. What I encourage is honesty with yourself.

What I say to the patient when we are working on metal

Evaluating is fine. Your body needs to evaluate — and it has a right to. In the evening, two minutes: what was good for you today and what was bad. For you, today — not in general.

And the most important thing: you do not have to tell anybody. It is enough to name it in front of yourself.

Understanding somebody does not mean you have to excuse them. You can understand and still say: no, thank you.

VOLUME 3 · THE TEN HEAVENLY STEMS

Ren

The dandruff method

What you take from it. A short conversation for the over-responsible patient, and three sentences to give them.

FROM VOLUME 3, PAGES 61 TO 62

> *Ren and Ding are two of the Ten Heavenly Stems. Ren is called bladder in wood, Ding heart in wood. A person born in a year ending in 7 has a strong Ding, and Ren is the stem they learn.*

Who gets this one. People with a strong Ding — a year with a seven. Heart in wood strong, bladder in wood to be learned.

What it looks like. People with a weak Ren usually have an overgrown sense of responsibility. In the pictogram of Ren there is a person with a pole and bundles across their shoulders — that is a person in overload. They do not have proper responsibility. And proper responsibility, let me remind you, is not guilt and not duty. It is: I took part in something, so either I repeat it or I change it — the part I have influence over. We, on the other hand, often take responsibility — there is comfort in knowing everyone does it — for how other people feel, which we have no influence over. But we try to have. And we are overloaded. Very often these people feel lonely. They feel that everything rests on their shoulders. They find it hard to delegate, to share the duties; in a group they would gladly take everything on themselves.

What I say. Then I say — and this again is something I came up with — that you have to apply the dandruff method. All patients look at me the

same way at that point. I explain: there are things you take responsibility for and have no influence over. Please just notice them. And brush them off. Like dandruff off your shoulders.

We have to learn helplessness. If I stopped at that sentence, the patient would not understand. So, further: if we live in a cult of activity and of achieving goals, then when I feel helpless I have the sense that I did not manage — someone else would have, or ought to have. But sometimes we are helpless for various reasons: some of them we know, some we do not, we do not have the competence, the skill, the ability. We are simply helpless. We are by nature fallible — in the sense that we cannot get on top of everything. The feeling of helplessness is negative in our civilisation, but the feeling that I have no influence over something is absolutely natural. We needle, we talk about it — and it happens that after some time the person is glad to be helpless. Seriously. "I am helpless, wonderful, I am not dealing with this."

What I say to the patient when we are working on Ren

Your body takes more on itself than belongs to it. Including things you have no influence over at all.

The dandruff method: when you notice that you are worrying about something you have no influence over — please just notice it and brush it off your shoulder. Nothing more.

One thing this week, please hand over to somebody else. Even if they do it worse.

VOLUME 4 · THE TWELVE EARTHLY BRANCHES

You and Xu

Listening to the end, and loyalty towards oneself

What you take from it. Two complete branch conversations from the clinic, each with the words to say.

FROM VOLUME 4, PAGES 73 TO 76

> *Each birth branch finds its life challenge in the branch opposite it on the organ clock. Large intestine (Mao, the hare) learns kidney (You, the owl). Stomach (Chen, the dragon) learns pericardium (Xu, the dog).*

You — kidney — listen to the end

Who gets this one. People with a strong large intestine — the branch Mao, the hare — who lack the owl.

What it looks like. Ping-pong. They do not take things in: they look — they do not see, they listen — they do not hear, they are active the whole time, they react.

What I say. Look, your body — this is not a trait of your character — has a way of not listening. You are talking with somebody and you do not hear them at all. Your body is reacting the whole time. And beyond the needle we recommend: force yourself to listen to other people to the end. Hold back from the impulsive, automatic reacting, interrupting, comparing to your own experiences. Simply noticing that the body reacts, and when it reacts, is already half the battle.

I give my own example here — although in my case it does not come from a birth tendency, more from my jing: sticking-out ears. Fifteen years ago, when I was learning face reading — I was given a book by Lillian Bridges, there were few books back then — I read that people with sticking-out ears do not listen to others. God, it is true. I do not listen. At the beginning it cost me a really great deal of effort to absorb and to notice how my body was already reacting: what I would say, what I could say. A nightmare. But it can be worked on. I think I have done quite well with it. Probably. The people I talk to can be the judges of that.

What I say to the patient when we are working on You

Your body engages superbly. It does less well with taking things in — it reacts before it has heard to the end.

One conversation a day in which you do not interrupt and do not relate what you hear to yourself. Just listen. Notice the moment when the body wants to jump in — and do not jump in.

Xu — pericardium — loyalty towards oneself

Who gets this one. People with a strong stomach — the branch Chen, the dragon — who lack the dog.

What it looks like. Loyal to everybody — religions, philosophies, the family, mother, father, a colleague — and sacrificing themselves for others.

What I say. That it has come about in your life that your body began to be loyal to everybody else — and not to itself. Very often at this moment a tear appears. If I had to point to which of the twelve branches has a recommendation that brings tears — it is this one. Why? Because they feel it inside, but usually they are hearing it from a stranger for the first time.

And tears are a safety valve: they let go. Not in everyone, but you know what I mean.

And we say that loyalty towards oneself is very difficult, because nobody teaches us that. And that it is not about assertiveness — nothing has to be articulated, only noticed. Please feel the comfort and the discomfort in a given moment. You do not have to do anything, say anything — only be honest with yourself. A man I disliked for twenty years — today I feel good with him. A man with whom I thought for twenty years that I felt fantastic — today I feel bad. We remove mistaken convictions. We notice them. One should let go of, avoid, what is not good for you.

What I say to the patient when we are working on Xu

Your body acts without hesitation — for others. It does less well with the question of whether this is good for you.

With every person and every matter this week, one quiet question: comfort or discomfort — for me, now? Say nothing. Change nothing. Just answer yourself honestly.

VOLUME 5 · THE SIX DIVISIONS

The six atmospheres

How to name each one to the patient

What you take from it. A few sentences for each of the six atmospheres, and the kind of rest that suits each one.

FROM VOLUME 5, PAGES 48 TO 50

> *The six divisions (tai yang, shao yang, yang ming, tai yin, jue yin, shao yin) are the six layers known from TCM. In this series they are read as the background atmosphere a person lives in, worked out from the year and half-year of birth. It is the level you work on last, and rarely.*

At this level the recommendations look different from the previous ones. There is no “twenty seconds a day”. There is a conversation about the atmosphere — and that conversation is itself the recommendation, because a person who has seen that his resentment, his fear or his need for structure is not him but the air he has been breathing takes it further on his own. Below is what I start from. The rest depends on the person.

Tai yang

Everyone around you sees strength in you. You do not see it — you see resentment. That resentment is not you. It is the atmosphere you have lived in. For one week, please just notice who you resent and what for — without doing anything about it. Only notice that it is the same resentment, in different clothes.

Shao yang

Your intuition is very loud. You do not listen to it — and that is what exhausts you, not people. Please do not cut yourself off from people in order to rest; you rest in people. Instead, once a day, listen to your first impression and see what happens.

Yang ming

You take in the world more strongly than other people do. That is not a fault, it is sensitivity of the senses. Recovery, for you, is quiet — no people, no screens, no sound. Half an hour a day in that kind of quiet can do more than a week's holiday in the noise.

Tai yin

You are looking for stability outside — in books, in teachers, and in me too. It works, but not for long. For a month, please do not start any new book, course or method. What you have inside is enough. One on one you know that. In a group you forget it.

Jue yin

You have to finish things — and that is your strength, and that is what overloads you. Once a week, please leave something unfinished on purpose. And once a week ask someone for help with something you can do yourself. It will be unpleasant. That means this is the thing.

Shao yin

You radiate — people are drawn to you and your time leaks away through people. Rest, for you, has to have an hour in the calendar, otherwise it will not happen. Please put it in just the way you put in your appointments. Structure is not a limitation. It is your sense of safety.

FOR THE PRACTITIONER

Notice that in none of those boxes is there a “strengthen the division” or “work on the division”. The recommendation at this level is naming the atmosphere — plus one practical consequence for recovery. [...] Do not combine a recommendation from the division with recommendations from the branches and the stems in the same conversation. One recommendation per visit — at this level that rule holds even more strongly, because here one sentence can do more than a whole box did at the previous levels.

VOLUME 6 · THE WHOLE CHART

After the needles come out

Thirty seconds that show you whether the treatment worked

What you take from it. The breath, saliva and tongue check you can do before you take the pulse, and how often to treat.

FROM VOLUME 6, PAGES 9 TO 12

> *The vertical axis is the author's image for a person close to their own balanced pattern, closer to themselves.*

Every acupuncture treatment — and the classics write about this — should produce a movement of clear yin upwards and of yang downwards. Just as in nature: the energy of the sun, yang, comes down and is held by the soil; the fluids go up. An acupuncture treatment is the systematic evening out of yang and yin — that is all. At the level of the great movements, the stems, the branches and the divisions, but always the same thing.

And now something worth being able to see, because the pulse is one thing and the patient on the couch is another. How do you know the person is closer to the vertical axis — apart from the fact that the pulse has evened out?

Yang has appeared in the lower burner. I call it the jing breath — I put a couple of things together myself, so I am allowed to. It is not that the air goes down into the pelvis. The body becomes supple, it starts to work in

the rhythm of the breath; sometimes you can see the thighs moving, even when someone is sitting. They do not have to be lying down.

Yin has gone up. The blood supply improves — the complexion changes, a glint appears in the eye. Very often you can hear the patient swallow: there is simply more saliva. Patients say they can see more sharply, or that they are noticing details. And that is the rule in most patients, not the exception. Everyone who has been on the live courses has seen the patient's tongue — shape, colour, coating, the distribution of the coating — change within a few seconds. That is what happens.

Acupuncture does not cure

Let me say the sentence I say on every course. Acupuncture does not cure. Acupuncture releases potential. It helps a person come back to the vertical axis, so that they are closer to themselves — closer to the true self, closer to the potential — so that they start living in accordance with themselves. Because that is when health appears. By the WHO definition, health is physical, mental and social well-being. Mental — the level of the stems. Social — the level of the branches. Interesting, isn't it?

Every treatment works like a piece of information. We give it at a given moment, the patient evens out, and the body says: oh, this is how it should be. And by repeating it — it does not have to be often — we remind it of that state. At the beginning once every two weeks, then once every three. From my own observation, for the therapy to be effective, at the very least once every six weeks. I try to see patients once every three weeks and that works. And the treatment takes three minutes. If the tongue can change within a few seconds, then the energy changes immediately — so what is the point of leaving the needles in any longer? I have noticed that some patients feel the change straight away, in the chair. Some feel it after twenty minutes — they say it happens somewhere around the slip road onto the motorway. Others only the next day. But usually they do feel it.

FOR THE PRACTITIONER

Three things to check after you take the needles out, before you look at the pulse: the breath (has the body started to move with the rhythm of the breath — the belly, the thighs), the saliva (has the patient swallowed) and the tongue (has anything changed compared with before the treatment). That is thirty seconds, and it teaches you more than many hours of theory, because it shows you live what “yin up, yang down” actually is. Then the pulse — and it is the pulse that decides whether the treatment was the one the body needed.

THE COMPLETE SERIES

Six volumes, one level at a time

Volume 1 · The Energy Cloud
How the system looks at a person, and why the recommendation follows the needle.

Volume 2 · The Great Movements
The five elements from the year of birth, the life challenge, and what you tell the patient for each element.

Volume 3 · The Ten Heavenly Stems
Each stem inside its element: who gets it, what it looks like, what you say.

Volume 4 · The Twelve Earthly Branches
The twelve branches, each with a recommendation for the day of the treatment.

Volume 5 · The Six Divisions
The atmosphere a patient lives in, and how to name it in one conversation.

Volume 6 · The Whole Chart
Four levels on one sheet and five real charts read line by line.

526 pages in PDF and EPUB, a cheat sheet for each volume and one for the whole series, and the first year of Meridian Advice, the app that gives you the advice for the meridian you treated.

Get the complete series

smartacu.io/p/stems-and-branches-acupuncture-the-practical-side

© 2026 Michal Richter. Excerpts from Stems and Branches Acupuncture, Volumes 1 to 6.