

The Attitude of Radiant Health

Excerpted from The Ancient Wisdom of the Chinese Tonic Herbs
by Ron Teeguarden

One of the great secrets of a long, satisfying, and happy life, according to Eastern wisdom, is to focus on health instead of disease. This is the psychological basis of the art of radiant health. Develop the *attitude* of radiant health, and radiant health can be attained surprisingly easily. Once we have trained ourselves to focus on the attainment and maintenance of radiant health, and have acquired the tools for accomplishing our goal, the functions of the mind, body, and spirit can flourish. Once we have achieved a state of radiant health, the bodily functions cannot easily fall into disharmony, disease cannot readily arise, and, from the perspective of our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health, we are beyond most dangers.

Radiant health is attainable by most people who have not already severely damaged themselves through abuse and wrong living. It is also attainable by many who *have* severely damaged themselves but have the will to regain true health. In life, it is sometimes necessary to hit a low point before we discover the motivation to work at attaining radiant health. Complete success takes determination, knowledge, discipline, and skill.

But we cannot do it by ourselves. We need help. Nature can provide that help. One of the ultimate sources of help from nature lies in the nutritional resources. The tonic herbs, being one of the richest sources of bionutrients, are used to promote overall well-being, to enhance the body's energy, and to regulate bodily and psychic functioning, resulting in radiant health.

Health Beyond Danger

Radiant health, the highest level of health a person can attain, is defined as "health beyond danger." In other words, the person is so internally strong and adaptive as to be able to adapt to virtually all normal stresses, as well as many extreme stresses, and is thus capable of overcoming most serious dangers. My teacher, Sung Jin Park, emphasized that *protection* is one of the primary characteristics of health, and the higher the level of protection the better. When one's protection has reached the stage of "health beyond danger," then one has achieved radiant health.

There are many Chinese tonic herbs that strengthen the body's resistance. Thousands of active components in the various herbs influence the human immune system. In particular, the tonics are rich in substances that "modulate," or regulate, the immune system. Regular consumption of a major immune-modulating herb, or a collection of herbs with modulating capacity, gradually builds up a person's resistance. I have seen hundreds of people who were

immune deficient and thus prone to chronic colds and other infections. After taking the tonics for several months, their immune systems showed tremendous improvement. After taking the herbs for a year or so, they became highly resistant to common colds and flu's. People find it amazing. It's this kind of response to the herbs that makes me think that the tonics are really foods that the body *requires*. It seems that without the herbs, the immune system is underfed. With the herbs in the diet, the immune system flourishes.

The combination of factors found in the tonic herbs makes them an indispensable nutritional requirement. They replenish Primal Essence, they provide the energy to adapt to the stresses in our environment, and they protect us. They can even strengthen our willpower. Radiant health is much more easily attainable if we are truly nourished, and these great tonic herbs provide a form of nourishment found only rarely in nature.

Attaining Longevity

In Asia, longevity is universally regarded as one of life's primary goals. People do many things to assure their longevity. They work at an even pace, they eat three meals a day at very regular times, they exercise in a way that is believed to promote longevity, and so on. One of the measurements most often cited in determining the advanced state of a country is the average longevity of its citizens. The average life expectancy of a Japanese woman, for example, is eighty-six years. This is an astounding and wonderful achievement.

It would do all of us well to start thinking about longevity as a virtue rather than an inevitable catastrophe. It is possible to live long and to live well. If youthfulness is so important (which it is to me), then we should attempt to maintain our youthful condition into old age. By watching our health and promoting our well-being on a steady basis, we can reach old age without undue suffering. This does not in any way have to mitigate the excitement of life. On the contrary, with energy, protection, and intelligence, our lives will ultimately turn out to be richer and more exciting. And then the latter years of our lives can be truly great if we are not suffering from various ailments. While we are still young, it is wise to seek radiant health so that we can live a long, healthy, exciting, and happy life.

Wisdom is something that can grow as we grow older, so we should seek to learn the underlying truths of life as we proceed through life. We in the West would do well to respect the wisdom of older souls who have seen and done more than we have and who have the wisdom to understand what has happened.

My wife, who is Chinese, was very surprised when she first came to America to find out that there is not a single real, universally recognized symbol for longevity in our culture. Our Western culture seems to downplay the beauty of achieving

great longevity. Youth seems to be king here. Yet we all eventually come to realize that life is finite and that growing old in a state of radiant health is far superior to living fast, hard, and foolishly while we are young and then suffering intolerable illnesses when we reach middle age and beyond.

In China and other Eastern societies, there are many symbols of longevity. You find them everywhere in China, Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia, and they are used in a multitude of settings. Interestingly, an herb now commonly used in Chinese tonic herbalism is the most widely used symbol of longevity—the Reishi mushroom. This mushroom is used in all Asian societies as a symbol of health, happiness, wisdom, and long life. It is a common symbol in the art of China and Korea.

The Reishi is in fact a true longevity herb. Though historically it has been a rare herb, it has in recent years become much more commonly available, thanks to modern horticultural technology. Hundreds of scientific studies have confirmed that Reishi can be used to build physical resistance to disease and to treat a wide range of ailments. Reishi has many benefits, including protection of the cardiovascular system and prevention and treatment of liver diseases and even certain forms of cancer. No wonder it became a symbol of longevity.

We are fortunate today to have herbs like the Reishi mushroom accessible to us. There are many other similarly beneficial herbs that were once rare but are now easily obtainable. It is unfortunate that most people in the West do not even know that these herbs exist. When consumed over a period of time, these herbs can profoundly enhance the performance of our bodies and minds and can help us attain both radiant health and longevity. When used properly, they are completely safe and have no side effects at all. They are far less expensive than modern medical procedures used to cure illnesses and can be obtained at a local herb shop or health food store or by mail order.

Human Potential Potentiators

The Chinese call these tonic herbs “mild” because they are so safe and because they are not “druglike.” They are not bolts of lightning, nor are they mind-altering in the same sense as we have come to think of drugs. But they are extremely powerful. When taken regularly for a period of time, we change. A whole host of functions tends to improve, we feel better and stronger, and we become more capable: more capable at work, more capable at home, more capable at play, more capable in bed, more capable in our art, more capable in every aspect of our lives. Our minds become clearer. We get more work done, and at a higher level. We look better and become more attractive. The Chinese tonic herbs are so right for the age we live in. They are natural, they are effective, they are legal, and they are readily available. They can help us achieve what we want out of life. If we want energy, they can provide it. If we want willpower, they can help. If we need to relax, they can help us to calm down and loosen up. If we require

endurance, they are truly effective. If we seek wisdom, they are a godsend. And if we want it all, why not? The Chinese tonic herbs are truly that good. Three thousand years of experience has proved that the Chinese tonic herbs are the virtual fountain of life.

The tonic herbs were considered by Taoist and Chan (Zen) Buddhist masters, who contributed heavily to the development of the art of tonic herbalism and to the art of radiant health, to be “spiritual growth herbs.” The tonic herbs have been used for thousands of years by wise men and women and spiritual seekers to aid in their spiritual development. The herbs are not psychoactive substances like drugs. They are beyond that. Because they have profound regulatory functions that help the body-mind maintain its equilibrium even under extremely stressful circumstances, they are enormously useful in supporting our ability to overcome intense challenges and to learn from our experiences and thus to attain wisdom that might elude those less fortunate. The spiritual path is arduous and fraught with traps. And one of the biggest problems is that you may not even know when you are caught in a trap. The illusory nature of traps is legendary. Many spiritual seekers have used the superior herbs to clarify their awareness and put things in perspective. Ginseng, Reishi, and other similar herbs have played an enormous role in the spiritual world of Asia.

Adaptability: The Measure of Your Life

The psychic power bestowed upon us by taking these herbs need not be the exclusive possession of the spiritually minded. The adaptive energy provided by the tonic herbs helps those who are not specifically on a “spiritual path” in a similar way. For one thing, the tonics help people handle stress much more easily. Success in the modern world can often be measured by how well we can handle stress. Those who handle stress well generally move up in the world much more quickly, taking on greater challenges, heavier workloads, and more confrontation, and in general getting more done. Successfully overcoming obstacles is the truest way to grow in experience, knowledge, and wisdom—all very good things. It could easily be said that the motto of our age is: “He or she who can handle more stress most successfully wins!”

Resilience is a significant aspect of radiant health. It results from adaptability, and thus the concept of adaptability is central to the concept of radiant health.

The ability to adapt to the stresses of life is fundamental to life itself. Adaptability is the root of evolution and the secret to biological success. The more adaptable one is, the more flexibility and resiliency one will be capable of showing in one's life. Adaptability is inherent in all living creatures, and human beings are inherently one of the most adaptable creatures on earth. They have been able to adapt to virtually every climate. There are humans living in the most inhospitable climates: the hottest, driest desert; the hottest, dampest jungle; the coldest, most barren tundra. But humans are now creating a new, often artificial world that is in

many ways a new challenge to their adaptive nature. Not only is the well-being of every individual now at stake, but the very survival of *Homo sapiens* and the majority of other species is at risk because of extreme changes in the ecosystem resulting from aggressive technological “advancement.”

It is not quite clear whether or not people are under more or less stress than they were in the past. Poverty, seasonal weather changes (without heating, insulation, or air conditioners), the hard work of acquiring food, war, pestilence, and so forth have always been stressful. Many of the stresses that our forefathers had to bear have been lessened by modern invention. What would we do without electricity, the modern toilet, the automobile, the telephone, the modern printing press, refrigeration, heating oil, grocery stores? On the other hand, life is so full of trivial pursuits and is so fast-paced that new stresses have arisen and we are being forced to adapt in new ways. Will we be able to adapt to the widening holes in the stratosphere? Will we be able to adapt to the carcinogens in our water, food, and air? Will we be able to adapt to artificial food? Will we be able to adapt to the constant bombardment of various forms of radiation?

A healthy person adapts easily to a wide range of “normal” stress factors, such as changes in the weather. But if for some reason we lose some of our ability to adapt, we can easily become imbalanced, and this often results in illness. And it is important to remember that an overreaction is just as dangerous as an underreaction. To be considered optimally adaptive, one must adapt precisely according to the degree of change.

If for some reason we lose the ability to adjust appropriately, sooner or later we fall prey to the forces of nature. In a desperate attempt to regain homeostasis, our bodies rely on backup methods of regaining balance. If these, too, are insufficient, severe symptoms arise, followed by death.

As the great endocrinologist Hans Selye has pointed out in his classic biomedical text, *Stress*: “Adaptability is probably the most distinctive characteristic of life. In maintaining the independence and individuality of natural units, none of the great forces on inanimate matter are as successful as that alertness and adaptability to change which we designate as life-and the loss of which is death. Indeed there is perhaps even a certain parallelism between the degree of aliveness and the extent of adaptability in every animal-and man.”

Selye postulated that there is some sort of intrinsic energy with which a person is born. He presented compelling evidence that it can be used slowly or quickly, but when it is all gone, we die.

Adaptability is the very measure by which an Oriental master would judge the true health of an individual. The more adaptive an individual and the more vigor with which one can meet the challenges of life, the greater that person's degree of health. The Taoist sages of China have taught that each of us is born with an

intrinsic energy that determines our fundamental, constitutional strength. It is called Primal Essence, or *Jing*. *Jing* is said to determine our potential life expectancy as well as the vitality of our life while we are living it.

Oriental sages say that it is easy to abuse and thus dissipate this *Jing* with which we are born. As we lose this fundamental energy, we stiffen and lose our ability to change. We cannot adapt easily or appropriately, on either the microscopic or the macroscopic level. Therefore, we easily become imbalanced, toxic, and stagnant, dangerously susceptible to attack by microbial invaders. Selye has supported this principle of an original, apparently limited energy by demonstrating scientifically that stress of any sort can be adjusted to for a while, but that finally the stress-response mechanism exhausts itself and death ensues prematurely.

Long ago, Chinese sages knew this. They investigated the natural world, and over many centuries they discovered and developed means of enhancing this Primal Essence by working with the natural laws rather than against them. The oldest philosophical teaching of China, Daoism, is a philosophy of flowing with nature's changes, constantly harmonizing, always maintaining balance so as to avoid the stress of extremes. Nature itself presents enough difficulties. Why add more stress by bringing it upon ourselves? By knowing when you have gone far enough and by knowing when you have had enough, you will lead a less stressed, less draining life. Additionally, by living close to nature and by changing gracefully with the changes in the environment, you can avoid calamity and slow down aging.

Aside from simply avoiding stress, the ancient masters found it possible to *replenish* our reserves of *Jing*. It is obviously impossible to avoid stress entirely. Anything that taxes our system drains us of some of our *Jing*. Thus, to promote our health, we must nurture our *Jing*-that is, our primal energy. Techniques were established to do exactly this, and have been passed along from one generation to the next for three millennia. These health arts for replacing spent *Jing*-or beyond that, building reserves-are the greatest health secrets of the East.

Chinese tonic herbalism is a primary means in the Orient for replenishing and enhancing energy and for preserving harmonious balance in the human body. It is the primary tool for attaining radiant health.

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