

Follow your bliss:¹ Developing the Wisdom and Courage to Listen to the Body-Mind Connection

by Ton van Huffelen and

Mirjam van Huffelen

*If you follow your bliss,
you put yourself on a kind of track
that has been there all the while,
waiting for you,
and the life that you ought to be living
is the one you are living.*

—Joseph Campbell

He is an acupuncturist specialising in Toyohari. She is a coach specialising in Body & Mind Language and Somatic Experiencing®. Both professional therapists, Ton and Mirjam van Huffelen are also partners in real life. Besides many interests, they sometimes share a client. In this case report, you can read about differences and similarities in their approach to the body-mind connection.

Treshold (Ton)

In 2002, in my first month as an acupuncturist, I was confronted with an outspoken case of the body-mind connection. A female client came to my clinic; she had slept badly, was very tired and rather anxious. She had agoraphobia. I was rather anxious too because I had just finished the school of TCM and didn't have the slightest idea how to treat her. In my notes on extra meridian treatment, I happened to find something about agoraphobia. I decided to treat her with the Chong Mai SP-4 right side and PC-6 left side with retained needles.

A week later she came back: her agoraphobia had largely dissipated; her sleep, tiredness and anxiety were much better and she had returned to work. I was completely stupefied. I had no idea what I had done. It was my first example of a strong body-mind connection and the power of acupuncture.

Dive (Ton)

In 2015, the time had finally come for me to dive into the body-mind connection. Together with some Dutch Toyohari colleagues, I followed a course on Shen acupuncture with Yaïr Maimon, an inspiring teacher from Israel.² He was trained

in Five Element Acupuncture.³ I knew from his lectures that Yaïr Maimon thoroughly studied the works of Claude Larre and Elisabeth Rochat-de la Vallee,⁴ and knew the work of Giovanni Maciocca⁵ quite well. During the course, I started rereading *Nourishing Destiny: The Inner Tradition of Chinese Medicine* (1998), as well as *Five Spirits: Alchemical Acupuncture for Psychological and Spiritual Healing* (2007) by Lorie Eve Dechar. The study of Chinese philosophical and medical aspects of the body-mind connection gave me a broader view on clients and their processes.

Language (Mirjam)

For more than 20 years I was a dance teacher. To teach students techniques and a dancing vocabulary was, of course, part of the game. However, what was most inspiring to me was to facilitate their ability to really listen to the music, to track the resonance in their bodies, and to give their unique interpretation and expression of the music. I was fascinated by the relationship between people's thoughts about themselves, the world around them, and the way they moved. It struck me that another thought would evoke another way of moving. It struck me more that another movement influenced their way of living.

After I stopped teaching dance classes in 2012, I continued coaching people on professional and personal issues. As I love language from the body as well as the mind, I specialised as a Body & Mind Language coach and trainer.⁶ I noticed the combination of spoken words and signals in the body offered a wonderful opportunity for transformation. However, that was not always the case. Some people weren't capable of sensing their bodies or became overwhelmed by its reactions.

Expression (Mirjam)

One day while I was facilitating a young man in coping with stress and thinking he was doing better and better, he suddenly experienced an oncoming panic attack. Fortunately, I knew intuitively how to get him grounded again. At that moment, I decided I needed more understanding and tools. I wanted to be able to work with people who needed more; people who had lost a healthy cooperation between body and mind due to, for instance, trauma. Next year, I'll complete a three-year course in Somatic Experiencing®.⁷

Now, in my practice as a coach, I facilitate people in listening to the messages of their bodies and minds, to track the connections and disconnections, and to express what was lost inside.

As a coach, I help clients to find their regulating capacity by tracking the signals of the nervous system, guiding their attention to these signals, and exploring their message. As long as the client is not completely able to regulate himself, my nervous system functions as a backup for both of us.

Ton treated Derek for some time and we agreed to combine his treatment with my coaching. I entered the room. Derek was already there. We shook hands and sat down. Derek was a silent man, young, although I didn't have a clue about his age. He was wearing a cap. He did not look me in the eyes and slumped down slightly, one leg crossing the other. His shoulders looked tense. Now and then I saw his jaws clenching. I felt my belly contracting and my back tightening. I renewed the contact of my feet with the ground and of my back with the chair. I felt my diaphragm releasing and noticed Derek sighed. Then I asked him to orientate himself in the room. He looked around and I saw his legs sinking into the chair. His shoulders broadened a bit. When I asked what he preferred to look at in the room, he pointed out a small figure of Joshu,⁸ the well-known Japanese monk, and the wooden soap dispenser.

Rhythm (Mirjam)

Orientating in the here-and-now is a great way to make the nervous system feel safe. The safer a client can feel, the more he will be able to open up to curiosity, creativity, love, and goodness.

In a coaching session, both the client and I attend the unfolding process. By doing this, we allow the client to re-find his self-healing and self-regulating capacities. During the session, I intervene to help establish a rhythm between contraction and expansion in the body and to find the triggers that block this interaction. I bring into consciousness what has been unconscious for the client. And, if necessary, contain for the client what he is not able to contain yet.

As soon as we both were sitting well enough, in contact with ourselves, each other and the room, I asked Derek what it was that needed his attention. He told me he felt stuck, and not in touch with life. I asked for a specific situation that came to mind. He brought up a situation with a beloved. While he was describing the situation, I saw his jaws clenching again. When I told him that his story triggered a feeling of loneliness in my stomach, he looked me in the eyes, and it felt as if he was looking for something. 'Do you notice something is going on in your jaws?' I asked him. He had not noticed the clenching himself. When we paid some more attention to his jaws, by just noticing

them and seeing what was happening, I saw a movement in his neck.

He reported a tight feeling in his throat. When I asked him if there was an image with this feeling, he visualised a bottle with a small neck. Looking at this image increased the tightness in his throat. 'What would make this image easier to look at?' I asked him. In the visualisation, he added a dispenser, like the soap dispenser in the room. Now, Derek was able to allow some of the emotions in his chest to flow. Bit by bit, drop by drop. Exactly the amount he could handle. He could give room to his sadness without being flooded by it.

Compass (Mirjam)

When a client gets used to the emotions and sensations of his body and knows how to regulate these, he can start to differentiate between triggers and perception and by this, discover the map of himself and the world.

During some sessions and in the time between the sessions, Derek practised acknowledging, accepting and regulating his emotions. The next session he enters without his cap. I can see his face, softer and more vivid than the moment we met. His jaws have stopped clenching. Still, there is sadness; a big ball in his chest. He can be with it, give attention to it. I ask him to find the relatively most pleasant and comfortable spot in his body. He reports his belly is soft and relaxed. I invite him to spend some time giving attention to the belly. This gives room to warmth and tingling feelings that, over time, spread more and more. The warmth meets the ball of sadness in his chest, and the ball softens. Derek discovers feelings of love spreading out. 'Do you realise this love is happening inside you? That this is yours?' I ask. I see a big smile on his face. And when he stands up, it looks as if he is bigger and taller than when he entered the room.

By discovering the relationship between triggers from the outside, the way you perceive these physically, emotionally, and mentally and the behaviour that is evoked, the client gets a compass. The more he listens to this compass, the sharper it will get, and the more it will guide him in his decisions in life.

Derek's family puts pressure on him to make a certain decision. He is confused. I invite him to give a name to the different possibilities. I ask him to put each possibility in the room one by one and to adopt a posture that expresses this possibility. The first spot makes him feel excited and powerful. I can see him standing grounded and solid as a tree. When he steps into the second spot, it is as

if I can see all the energy flowing away. His face, shoulders, back and legs seem to lower. He says he feels heavy and angry. His compass has spoken.

Axis (Ton)

It took me quite some time to digest, but over the past year I have used a metaphor to help my clients understand the Chinese philosophical concepts of shen, destiny, five element acupuncture and emotions. Everybody's life is a humming top. Being on the merry-go-round of life with its emotions, we tend to forget who we truly are. We keep running around and doing things, neglecting signals of unwell-being on a physical, psychological, and spiritual level. Nevertheless, the axis of the humming top is our essence, the way we are. This is the place of true healing.

If we have the guts to enter the axis in the realm where there is no movement, we can learn to not-do and just be. This can be difficult, painful, and frightening because there is no distraction anymore. But if our actions don't express who we are, the top stops humming, loses its radius and its balance, and starts to totter. If, however, our deeds are in line with our being, the top is in perfect balance and starts humming.

I think this metaphor's connection with Chinese philosophy is easy to make. The act of creating Man (conception) is the yang descending from heaven to mix with the yin from earth forming the very first cell. In that first cell is a spark of the big shen from heaven, becoming a little bit denser as everyone's unique shen. As long as we live, there will always be a whisper in our ear from heaven, reminding each of us: "you are you and nobody else." We are here to become who we are.

After nine months, life becomes very different. Birth means we come out into the world, we start experiencing the world and our consciousness develops. And with consciousness, a sense of distinction develops, possible differences in life and a sense of opportunity. Wholeness is lost, being makes place for wanting or not wanting, for can or cannot, for have or have not. Or, in other words, if our shen isn't in line with the aspects of the big shen from heaven we were given at birth, we lose our destiny, we forget who we are and what we have to do in life, and we will get ill. Now, this is Chinese medicine.

Track (Ton)

His mind was as hypotonic as his muscles. He had incredibly sensitive, green eyes. Just from his appearance, you could sense great melancholy. He complained of tiredness and depressive feelings.

Derek told me he had great difficulty coping with changes. Somewhere he had lost track.

He came in as a client on July 20th, 2017. He was a 28-year-old freelance graphic designer. His legs were tingling, heavy, and he had cold feet and clammy hands. His belly was bloated, overall cold and clammy, especially in the lung zone. He felt he had a stone in his stomach, an open navel and small lower abdomen. He had a history of vitamin B-12 deficiency and in 2012 he had had Pfeiffer disease. His pulse qualities were a bit deep, normal speed, and a bit weak. The primary pulse pattern was lung sho. I treated him with a silver needle #2 LU-9 left, and SP-3 left. Since all yang pulse positions were weak, I did five times okyu on SJ-4 right side as well five times okyu on ST-36 left and right side.

After he turned on his belly, I palpated his back. His naso/neck and upper back region was very weak, his muno region/lower back region was very stiff, with two pits on BL-27 left and right side (back shu point of the small intestine left and right side). In the region of BL-18, the muscle was as tight as a rope, especially on the right side. I treated BL-18 left and right side, BL-23 left and right side as well as DU-4 with kyotishin/moxa on the needle.

I took much time to sit still with Derek, giving space to be silent, to think, to feel, to reflect, and to mirror. This is a very easy way of allowing the presence of shen in the treatment room. The story of the humming top gave Derek insight into the fact that he was in a process and that the process has dark sides as well. It made him well aware that his personalised problems were, in fact, nothing else than a non-personalised movement of healing. This gave him the courage to just be with his feelings and emotions. He developed an awareness that he had a choice of doing and not doing. He had the choice of letting go of his emotions of grief. He heard the whisper from Heaven and got back on track again.

His body is much stronger. His tummy is warm; his skin has lustre. After the treatment, we sit and have tea. His eyes are vivid. We are both silent for a while. Then Derek glances at me and says with a crooked grin: "It's funny you know, your wife and you, you talk differently, but you tell the same."

Connection (Ton & Mirjam)

When we realise that body and mind are actually one and that they act together as well as in connection with the bigger picture, we can try to match our heartbeat with the beat of the universe, to match our nature with Nature.⁹ Learning how to do this is possible from many points of view. We do

it as acupuncturist and coach specialised in Body & Mind Language and Somatic Experiencing®. As an acupuncturist, I do it by exploring other styles and by applying the holistic vision of shen, nature, and destiny to a person's shen, nature and destiny as well as through the realignment of the humming top and the axis. As a coach, I do it by helping a person to continue his trip and by that, re-establish his universal journey. Our techniques and ways to communicate might be different, but the effect on the body-mind connection is the same. For us these are fruitful ways; working on our own as well as working together.

Derek was ready to make a new step. He went to Italy for a new perspective, fresh insights and work. After a few weeks, he sent an email:

I have learned to be more aware of my feelings and emotions. Emotions need room to flow, but sometimes you can take a pause and go back to them later. Mirjam has helped me a lot to regulate what is happening in my body. What I feel makes sense, I can be more effective and energetic in life.

The combination with Japanese acupuncture by Tonsan was a great and friendly experience. Ton made my body feel relaxed by stinging needles and warmed my cold energy by burning moxa. Then Mirjam took me by the hand to help me make my emotions flow.

My air balloon has warm air to fly now, and my basket is braided properly for good grounding. I'm ready for the adventure!

Teachers, writers and colleagues mentioned here inspired us, as, of course, Derek did. We hope by sharing our knowledge, experience and enthusiasm, we may inspire others.

There's something inside you

that knows when you're in the centre,

that knows when you're on the beam

or off the beam.

And if you get off the beam to earn money,

you've lost your life.

And if you stay in the centre and don't get any money,

you still have your bliss.

– Joseph Campbell

Notes

- 1 In the 1980s there was a seminal series of five interviews on the US national broadcast with Joseph Campbell by journalist Bill Moyers. Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) was a professor in Literature who worked in comparative mythology and comparative religion. They discussed how myths hold the key to understanding human experience. They may vary superficially from culture to culture, but at their deepest level they all reveal the path to self-fulfillment, social integration and ultimately, transcendence. The philosophy of Joseph Campbell has been summarized by his own often-repeated phrase: "Follow your bliss."

The DVD *Joseph Campbell, The Power of Myth* is still available and many fragments of the interviews are available on YouTube (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Campbell).

- 2 Yair Maimon is an internationally renowned figure in the field of Integrative and Chinese Medicine with over 30 years of clinical, academic, and research experience in the United States, Europe, and Israel. A graduate of schools in England, the Netherlands, the US, and China, Dr Maimon practices and has been trained in different methods of Chinese medicine such as five element acupuncture, TCM, stems and branches, Japanese acupuncture, Chinese herbal medicine, and studies of ancient texts (see: www.yairmaimon.com).
- 3 For an introduction, see: Angela Hicks, John Hicks and Peter Mole, *Five Element Constitutional Acupuncture* (first edition 2004).
- 4 Like Claude Larre and Elisabeth Rochat-de la Vallee, *Rooted in Spirit, The Heart of Chinese Medicine* (1995) or *The Seven Emotions: Psychology and Health in Ancient China* (1996).
- 5 Giovanni Maciocca, *The Psyche in Chinese Medicine: Treatment of Emotional and Mental Disharmonies with Acupuncture* (2009).
- 6 In the Netherlands, a professional dancer named Jos Dolstra discovered, during her own personal crisis, that healing needs more than words and talking alone. She searched for a new movement for herself and found the correspondence between mind, language and behavior. Through her own profession, she was also convinced of the connection between spoken and body language. Jos Dolstra developed her own model, *Body and Mind Language*, and wrote a book with the title: *Body & Mind Language: de relatie tussen lichaamshouding en levenshouding* (*Body and Mind Language: the Relation between Body Posture and Attitude to Life* (only available in Dutch)). She is now

director and main teacher of the Body & Mind Language Instituut (see: www.bmli.nl, Dutch only).

- 7 The Somatic Experiencing® method is a body-oriented approach to the healing of trauma and other stress disorders. It is Dr Peter A Levine's life work (1942), resulting from his multidisciplinary study of stress physiology, psychology, ethology, biology, neuroscience, indigenous healing practices, and medical biophysics, together with over 45 years of successful clinical application. The SE approach releases traumatic shock, which is key to transforming PTSD and the wounds of emotional and early developmental attachment trauma. His best-known book is: *Waking the Tiger. Healing Trauma* (1997) (see: www.traumahealing.org).
- 8 Jōshū Jūshin (778–897), Chán Buddhist master.
- 9 Quote Joseph Campbell. Wise words from the interviews with Bill Moyers: *The Power of Myths*. See the first note.

Ton van Huffelen (1965) studied History in Groningen, The Netherlands. He thoroughly practised taji and qigong. In 2002 Ton became an acupuncturist and since 2003 he has specialised in Toyohari. Ton is supporting clients refinding and recovering their balance. Besides treatment, he invites clients to start doing home treatment with moxa, food, meditation and qigong. Ton is convinced of the value of self-responsibility and commitment of clients in their healing process.

Mirjam van Huffelen (1967) studied Dutch Language and Literature in Groningen, The Netherlands. She thoroughly practised dance and gave dance lessons for many years. Besides being a governmental consultant and advisor, she has been a coach since 2012. Mirjam hopes to contribute to a tolerant world that gives room to everyone's unique expression.