

East- Asia

Travels and Adventures through the Amazing World of Medicinal Plants

Japan



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I arrived in Japan, for the first time, after being attracted to Karate and Japanese arts, since I was twelve years old. To be in Japan, felt so extremely foreign to me, yet curiously at the same time, it stirred deep within me, a strange familiarity of an old friend, met for the first time yet dear to my heart. Looking back over the years, to the brash and naive young man who arrived to study at the Oki Yoga Dojo, I am so thankful for my studies, the remarkable characters I met, and my fate shaped by a unique Japan experience. I arrived remarkably interested in tough 'yang' style martial arts. I left changed forever, my life course reset for the 'yin' study and practice of Oriental healing arts. It has now been 25 years since I had last been in Japan, when I returned just few months ago, at the invitation to teach at a seminar on Herbal Medicine. I had left a student and returned a teacher. I had come full circle.

Japan is fascinating and so unique, the ancient and traditional are held alongside the ultramodern. The modern present of science and technology, culture and fashion contrasted with Japan's ancient past, somehow finds "balance." The ancient peace and tranquility of a Zen temple garden, next door to a modern sanitized shopping mall. The serene beauty of a woman in traditional kimono contrasts against the modern brand name suits of the business samurais, cramming the trains to work each morning. A land

where Shinto priests still bless new office buildings with traditional ceremonies. The inspiring beauty of its shrines and gardens are reminders of an isolated island empire while the modern robotics at the Nissan factory show's Japan is a bustling high-tech leadership, in today's interconnected world of commerce. Japan's heart begins to unfold between these opposing poles. The high culture of a traditional tea ceremony or in the ancient art of flower arranging in balance against high rise-buildings of its metropolis's, the triple layered trains, one above the other, ferrying millions into central Tokyo each morning. Admiring the accomplishments of the past through the Great Buddha of Kamakura and the splendid architecture of 400-year-old Himeji Castle, the exquisite design of a Zen temple. Yet also admiring the accomplishments, of the Japanese regeneration and modern economic success. Somewhere between the elegant formality of Japanese manners and the candid, exchanges that take place over a few drinks, between the super-modern Shinkansen trains and the unexpected rural traditional festivals. Somewhere between and the modern and the ancient lies the heart of the Japanese culture. A fascinating unique culture un-like anywhere I had ever been to in my life. I experienced a 'push and pull' of its polarities yet always in fascination and love.

Japan is slightly larger than the United Kingdom and one twenty-fifth that of the United States. Japan has a population of 127 million, making Japan the world's eighth most populous nation. It also has one of the world's highest population densities; there are 338.4 residents for every square kilometer of land. Compared to the U.S where it's 28! Three-quarters of Japan is mountainous, and two-thirds is forested. 70% of the people live on 20% of the land. That kind of intensity has developed its highly developed sense of formality some say to civilly deal with social interaction during such population densities.

Japan is detached and separated from the Asian mainland by 160km (100 miles) it has been physically isolated for at least Five thousand years by the Sea of Japan (Yet, once before the seas came, it is believed that it was connected by grasslands). Japan's History has been strongly influenced by the rest of Asia. It is often speculated that as a result of this geographical separation, that the Japanese have a strong sense of cohesion and cultural identity.

Approximately 70% of the country is covered by hills and mountains. The island nation is still subjected to natural disasters such as earthquakes, tidal waves, and volcanic eruptions, more than most. Lowlands and plains are small and scattered, mostly lying along the coast, which is exceptionally long in relation to the land area. The deeply indented bays with good natural harbors tend to be alongside mountainous terrain. Though lying completely in a temperate zone, Japan stretches 2500 km from North to South. The climate, with four seasons, ranges from very cold winter, in Hokkaido, to subtropical Okinawa region. Typically, winters are mild, and summers are very hot, except for the North and South extremes of the nation. Rain falls throughout the year and is intermittent with sunshine; in June and early July is the main rainy season. The



plant life also varies in southern Japan there are many broad-leaved evergreens, such as chinquapins and evergreen oaks. Yet as you move north, beeches and non-evergreen oaks become common. Forests in Hokkaido in the northern part of the country often consist of conifers.

Because there are four distinct seasons in Japan, different types of flowers bloom during the year. Plum blossoms appear in early spring, and the Japanese obsession with the ethereal, the cherry blossoms in mid-spring. Japan holds on to its unique connection to nature, perhaps more than any other country I have been to, treasuring even their small connections to nature, from a small bamboo screen, to the small area viewing garden, even despite a scarcity of space. Japan is a land of opposites. The frenetic daily world is delicately balanced against the timeless traditional. A luscious and diverse land Japan has 7,087 species of higher-order plants.

Japanese Herbal Medicine *Kampo*

“Kampo is a unique, ancient system of herbal medicine that has been reborn in modern Japan. Kampo is the synthesis of Eastern and Western healing traditions, equally understandable in terms of anatomy, chemistry, and physiology as it is in terms of vital energy, energy channels and symbolic organ systems. Kampo is a person-orientated system that prescribes herbs and herbal combinations to address specific symptoms and symptom patterns”

--Robert Rister, 'Japanese Herbal Medicine, the Healing Art of Kampo'

The word *kampo* is the Japanese pronunciation for the combination of the Chinese characters *Kan* (han) meaning "from China" and *po* (*ho*) meaning the "way". Thus, *kampo* is the Japanese version of traditional Chinese medicine. In addition to herbal treatments, Kampo practitioners these days may also administer acupuncture, moxibustion, and manipulative therapy.

Japanese medicine, like all-early medicines around the world, once relied on prayers, incantations, herbs, and shamanistic practices. Although purification practices, seem to be especially unique to early Japanese Medicine. Early on, physical uncleanliness was seen as tempting the wrath evil spirits, and divine retribution (and from our public health perspective of today, avoided epidemics and much suffering and). Personal and communal purification became an important prevention and treatment. It's easy to see from these roots, where the importance of bathing arose for Japanese culture. Early contact with Japan and China is still shrouded in myth, one such tale is told in the Chinese tradition about the first Chinese Emperor (221-210 B.C.) who is said to have sent envoys on a search throughout the Eastern Seas, to search for the herb of immortality; it is said that they returned from Japan with Reishi mushroom (*ganoderma lucidum*).

As the Empress Suiko (AD 593–628.) took the throne in A.D. 593, Japanese armies were sent to invade Korea. Reports came back from this war of Chinese medicine's successes there, so impressed was the empress, that she sent two envoys to China to study Traditional Chinese Medicine. This would begin a three hundred year old tradition of sending emissaries to study in China. Practice of *Kampo* Medicine was restricted to court scholars, treating the aristocracy. Around beginning of Empress Suiko's reign, Buddhism was adopted as the state religion, and centuries what would become *Kampo*, would spread to the treatment of the poor, through the Buddhist monasteries. The Empress Komyo (701-760 A.D.) established a dispensary to supply free medicine to the needy in 730 A.D using local herbs with Chinese Principles. Yet it was the religious convictions of the Buddhist monks, to alleviate suffering, led them to treat the poor for free. Two innovations to *Kampo* came from the Buddhist experience, of the need to simplify the

ingredients called for, in the overly complex formulas of the time. One came from, the Buddhist preference to eliminate the vast array of animal products from Chinese medicine (since Buddhism forbade the taking of life,) coupled with the Japanese general distaste for animal by-products, the choice of ingredients was simplified to mainly vegetarian. The second came from the Japanese need to find Japanese alternate herbs for the expensive Chinese imports, thus reducing the general pool available, to be formulated with. Over the centuries this was made even more important, due to imposed trading isolation during the Tokugawa era (1603-1867), when trade with other countries almost cut out completely leaving Japan a secluded society. These were some of the forces acting on the Japanese to focus and simplify traditional Chinese Medicine into Japanese *Kampo* Medicine.

Herbs and other treasures brought back from early Chinese expeditions were stored at the storehouse complex built in the 8th century by the Emperor Shomu. known as the *Shoso-in* at the Todaiji Temple near Nara, famous for its giant statue of the Buddha. The herbal samples had been kept for 1,200 years at one of Japan's most famous historical monuments. Amazingly these samples are still preserved today; they incredibly escaped both natural and man-made disasters, in one of the oldest structures in Japan. Even more remarkably is that these herbs, according to a recent study still had some active ingredients. They included basic herbs, such as rhubarb (*Rheum palmatum*), Licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) and ginseng(*Panax ginseng*), which are still commonly used today in modern *Kampo* practice.

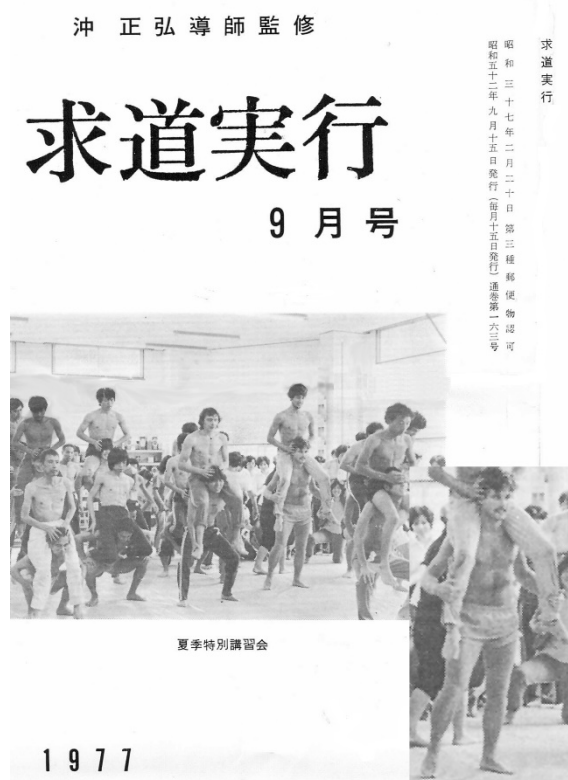
Written in 918AD. The *Honzo Wamyo* 'The Japanese Names of Drugs' described 1,025 different herbs. Japan's oldest existing medical work, the *Ishimpo*, 'Prescriptions at the Heart of Medicine' compiled by Yasuyori Tamba in 982, is consisted almost entirely of excerpts from Chinese medical texts. However, the selection of material and the structure clearly mark the beginnings of a uniquely Japanese interpretation. From this period Japan had started putting drastic limits on foreign contact. Medical teaching was in the hands of a few families and would only teach the old ways. As the medicine at court was descending into a stagnant age, dominated by magic and superstition

Buddhism was flourishing. Priests were able to travel to Asia, unimpeded by the travel restriction of the Court. This allowed access to new medical ideas and brought new books and incited renewed interest to improve Japanese medicine. The founder of the Zen Rinzai sect Eisei (1144-1215AD) traveled to China and wrote the *Kissa Yojoki* 'Guide to Good Health through Drinking tea' He expounded the health benefits of tea. Today of course we just now appreciating the anti-aging compounds that protect us against cancer and viruses know as polyphenols in green tea. Over the history of the course of 1200 years, the masters of Japanese herbalism have simplified the principles of Oriental medicine; Kampo theory is built entirely around how to choose the formula for the patient rather than figuring out a complex diagnosis. Dropping 16,834 formulas in favor 365. They included 120 'Upper Class Medicine' remedies designed to increase longevity and could be taken over a long period of time, with no side-effects. There were 120 'Middle Class Medicine', formulas designed to renew energy and keep the body healthy. These formulas and herbs sometimes produced side effects and were to be used with caution. Finally, there were 125 'Lower Class Medicine', remedies for very serious ailments that often produced side effects, and these were for short-term usage. From early on, *Kampo's* quest was to focus and simplify formulas to heal effectively with the fewest side effects. As with Traditional Chinese Medicine during the period of the late 19th and early 20th *Kampo* fell into disfavor, yet continued practice and research. Today *Kampo* has 148 approved formulas for reimbursement by the State. The role of *Kampo* in the Japanese healthcare system has become widely acknowledged with 70% of physicians using some form of herbal Medicine in their practice. In 1991 the Japan Society for Oriental Medicine was recognized as a branch of the Japan Association of Medical Sciences. Japan is becoming an example of integrating Conventional and Herbal Medicine, its research accomplishments into Herbal Medicine, are an example for the rest of the world to follow. Japan is continuing to balance ancient and traditional *Kampo* while pushing the ultramodern research and practice.

My First Arrival in Japan

After my father's sudden death, the year before my arrival in Japan I was still plagued by conscious and unconscious questions regarding what health was, true, vibrant, and

optimum health, and not the conventional definition of absence of disease. The whole experience of the Oki Yoga Dojo, I see now, was answering the deep *koan*-like questions in my soul, what was health? and how to cultivate it? I came to realize about this time that through my over-concentration on the hard, “Yang like” Karate would only make me harder and more “contracted” physically, emotionally, and spiritually, to a point that my body might create a “Yin” disease to balance and compensate. At that time, balance was to be found for me by my cultivating gentleness, softness of heart, it would be found in the cultivation of my compassion. This led me away from Karate and as the martial arts started to fall away from me, I realized I was beginning my path as a healer. With these unconscious questions, bouncing around somewhere in the back of my mind, I arrived in Mishima on the Izu peninsula of Japan at the Oki Yoga Dojo. I needed to know what health was and how to maintain it naturally.



Life at the Yoga dojo was a complete shock to me physically and culturally, so much was reversed. (I will never forget my first Japanese bath at the yoga dojo, as my fellow ‘*joukoses*’ looked on completely stunned and horrified, as I lathered up with soap and washed down in the bath!) Although I considered myself to be quite fit, the daunting schedule was a physical shock to my body. Up at 5am for a run and cold bath, then, to my shock and horror, a tiny breakfast of miso soup for fuel. After a full morning of strengthening exercises and yoga, a tiny lunch, followed by a busy afternoon of exercising, then, to my

dismay....a very small dinner! Although I underwent a mental shock, absorbing the cultural shift, physical challenges, and the challenge of joining the routine of a 400-

member dojo, most of whom I could not speak to.... I loved it. I was right where I was meant to be I was studying my answers to what is health, though I did not quite know it at the time! Most people would come to the yoga dojo for a short two-week period, and some people would stay for a much longer time. However, both groups were there basically for two reasons: 1) to get healthier, or 2) because they were sick and were looking for recovery. The schedule was designed to provide the opportunity for recovery, from the decreased input of food, the increased vital life-force of whole food, to the exercise that cleansed strengthened and created such deep healing sleep, to the therapies of the yoga dojo themselves. At the end of a very rigorous day, hundreds of people would be given acupuncture. Master Oki, or one of his assistants, would go from person to person, giving instructions, putting acupuncture needles in, then other assistants would be following up, warming them with moxabustion. The air would be thick with the smell of moxa smoke and herbal remedies cooking in the kitchen, some people would be busy contorting themselves into "corrective yoga exercises". The 'whole food' philosophy meant that you could eat anything, if it was whole! so no meat or fish except for really tiny fish! The fasting was remarkable; some people would fast from 10 or 20 and even 30 days. Allowing their bodies to rejuvenate, cleanse very deep chronic illnesses from themselves. I even went through the challenge of a 10 day fast myself. I had been warned do not eat anything mid way through the fast as the wrong food may cause a blockage in the intestines. I was also warned do no drink ice cold drinks; this will chill the digestion and could lead to digestive problems. At the time I thought to myself "chance would be a fine thing" as the dojo served all my food and the kitchen knew I was fasting and that meant 'no food' as for the cold drinks, there was never any cold drinks, so that one was ruled out. I was on the morning run with some friends who stopped off at a shop and bought some orange popsicles, and by chance I found some money in my track suit and bought one too, it was exquisite, the best I'd ever tasted it must be a specialty of the Japanese I thought. Well! After six days into a fast mud would taste good too. One led to two then four, what harm could it do? I certainly found out, after spending two day either running too or hanging out in the toilet, I received Herbal and Acupuncture treatments yet I had lost too much fluid, so it was off the hospital to get I.V. fluids. I learned a valuable lesson; do not break fasts with iced orange juice.

I entered rhythm of the dojo slowly, day by day, each day exactly the same as the other, not recognizing any holiday and much to my chagrin not even Christmas. I had asked for and received permission to go into town to study Aiado. This was the one routine that that broke the dojo-life rhythm, my weekly Aiado class.

One of my classic Japanese moments happened one winter on the way back from this class. I would put on my 'Hakama' a wide Japanese trousers /skirt worn for some martial arts. Put on a Japanese wide brimmed hat and I would run into my Aido class into the outskirts of Mishima, my teacher was a remarkable 7th Dan in Kendo (Japanese fencing), he had a huge dojo for teaching mainly children. After class along with his only two adult students, he showed me swords that had been in his Samurai family since the ninth century, when most Samurais were carrying wooden swords, and only pretended to carry metal ones, as they were so expensive. So sensitive was this metal, that we had to shield our breathe, from the blade as the touch of the condensation from our breathe would mark the blade. With the blade glinting its hammered folds of metal in the dim light. He took one hair from his full head of jet-black hair and let it fall, it descended slowly across the sword. After twelve centuries it was kept razor sharp, the hair parted into two. After receiving this honor, I would tie my Aiado sword over my shoulder (it had a blunt blade, so I or my fellow students would not lose any limbs or fingers in my practice sessions) and run back to the dojo. It had started to snow, as I ran up the hill I could see the welcoming light, glowing through the falling quite snow, of the Japanese bar/inn up on the hill ahead of me. It was a scene right out of a 'wood block print'. As I ran closer, I could smell the food steaming in the 'Unabe pots' and the delicious warmth inside. I could not resist, I walked in shook off the snow, placed my sword beside my table, and to the shock of all in the bar took off my hat to reveal a 'foreigner'. I sat there drinking hot sake, looking out on the snow-covered rice paddies from within the cozy Japanese Inn, and a stirring within me, felt at home, It could have been any century since my teachers sword was made.

Another most welcomed break to the Dojo routine were the parties, every so often there would be parties with food and beer, there were parties for the whole dojo and there were staff parties. We had a lot of fun, and if you know the right table to sit at, maybe you could drink more than one beer, and we often did. Then we would have to



find a place to hide-out in the morning, from the regular 5am routine of run and cold bath. If I was lucky, I might even be invited to sit at Master Oki's table where whiskey was served, with his guests, it might be some good-looking model, or a visiting Westerner and one night it was a Zen Roshi (teacher). One such night, I was invited and got to spend a boisterous night

with my friend Andy, Okuda Roshi and Master Oki. Zen had always interested me, and my few meetings with Okuda Roshi had attracted me even more, he was real, there was no piousness, holier-than-thou attitude that priests of many denominations, often emanate, he had a lion energy about him coupled with 'joi-de-vivre'. I asked him in the middle of the party how could I study Zen? He responded by telling me if I wanted to know Zen, I should do a ten-day meditation intensive called a *Seishin* and until I could do one, he invited me to his temple. As soon as I could get away from the dojo, I was there in *Shomioji*, Okuda Roshi's Temple, still one of the most picturesque examples of clean classic Zen design I have ever been too. Each time I would go, there would be some festival going on. On one of these visits, one morning after Zazen meditation in the Zendo, an old, wild looking gentleman with long gray haired would come and with the Roshi's permission practice Kendo fencing, I would watch mesmerized by his skills. I would often ask him questions in my poor Japanese, only to be smilingly rebuffed. He had a playful energy, and I always felt he was kidding me about many things. I had heard much later from others he had been a high-ranking intelligence officer during the war and spoke perfect English, I could never draw him out.

One time I arrived at the Temple to find out that Okuda Roshi would be inaugurated as a Roshi, over the next 3 days but also as the head of the Obaku Zen School. It was the most amazing three-day event. I was honored to be invited to participate in, and I was told would be the first Westerner initiated into Obaku-Zen, along with my friend David. For three or four days we sat Zazen meditation along with other rites and ritual and



thousands of prostrations culminating in the final day, the temple was packed with other Roshis, old and new, monks, and lay people. Roshi's formal questioning by his teacher, was in the Hondo, if he answered correctly he would be come a Roshi and leader of Obaku, If not I was told by my friend the wily old Kendo master in perfect English "he would be thrown-out kicked and punched from the ceremony, never to return to this beautiful temple or Obaku Zen again" I sat mesmerized by this vocal duel that everyone was straining forward to hear. In high ceremonial 'kabuki-like tones' questions were thrown out by the teacher only to be batted back by the Roshi. Finally, it was over the Roshi was head of Obaku Zen School and would shortly move out of Shomio-ji to become the Roshi-of-all-Roshis and Master of Mumpuka-ji Temple complex, in Kyoto and keeper of it is 60,000 nationally designated treasures of art, yet more importantly, the keeper and guardian of Obaku's lineage and its spirit, and dharma.

The formalities and ceremonies were over and in true Japanese fashion the party began. Sectioned off from the lay people was the master's party. In attendance was every living Zen Master of the Obaku tradition, some were in ancient Chinese/Tibetan looking robes others curiously were in suits, and all had a priest in attendance. The noise started gently and by evenings end, after drinking and eating the noise was booming, and a lot of the Roshis were getting quite drunk, some not drinking at all, and still others, ancient looking gray haired Roshis with long Chinese whiskers and classic Chinese looking robes were being carried-out by their attendant priests. I asked my wily Old Kendo master, "So how come Zen Buddhists can drink? when other Buddhists are held by the precept not to 'partake of wine?" He smiled at me wryly "In Zen, its true they have to take that precept, but they add two words, that make all the difference. They add that they shall not partake of wine 'of illusion'!!" Okuda Roshi drink or no drink, would be in the Zendo for Zazen meditation at 4.30am clear-as the bell he would ring to begin Zazen, and I always had to be there too, in his temple there was no place to hide!

Leaving the Oki Yoga Dojo after one year

It was an exciting, yet sad day for me when I left the yoga dojo after one year. The juxtaposition and contrast of the gentle rural Mishima to the Tokyo metropolis, from the large yoga dojo to a tiny one, from the sheltered dojo life to the big world again was

intense and fun and beckoning me. Once established in Tokyo in a house with other foreign friends and a job teaching English, I started to study acupuncture and shiatsu exploring how to help people establish themselves in health. I also came into real meaningful contact with Zen, (I remember after my first lecture on Zen, in the train on the way home, I was so engrossed by the philosophy, I vowed right there and then, always to be alert! Always to be 'in the moment'! always to maintain perfect awareness! Then I realized to my shock and horror I had missed my station stop!! That is when I realized, this Zen-thing was not going to be easy. The questions of how to stay healthy, mentally, and spiritually were starting to swirl around inside me.

Zen Seishin

Before I left Japan, Okuda Roshi had instructed me to do a 10-day meditation intensive. It was with great trepidation that I arrived at his temple, to complete this instruction before I left Japan. He and his wife took me to Mampuka-ji's cultural center. In my mind, since the invitation to do a 10-day intensive at the Oki Yoga Dojo, I had an idealized image of sitting with a handful of monks in an ancient Zendo, within an ancient Temple. So, as with all expectations I suffered, when he walked me into a gleaming new cultural center with 300 other civilians Japanese and Western, all milling around waiting for this 10 day to start. Suddenly I was not special, my preconceptions met reality and I was upset. I went to the Roshi and whined about it not being what I expected. Suddenly the lion roared, he grabbed me by the scruff-of-the-neck and whisked me off, to the Mampuka-ji temple. Even as I knew my audacity, might be getting me in-over-my-head, we were whisking through the dark of night through ancient door ways, passed huge statues of the Buddha, passed a whole Zendo of crazy looking statues of past masters, as we whisked through the large complex, darting through watchmen's houses, I had the strange feeling of intense familiarity swirl-over me, this seemed like a 'known place' to me, yet I had never been here before, as we moved with monks appearing from here and there, opening locked doors and the Roshi barking orders it seemed like a scene from ancient Japan, and it felt uncannily like I knew where I was going and that I belonged in that ancient scene. It felt to me that if I had a sword at my side protecting the Roshi, one step behind his authority, I would have truly belonged in that ancient

scene. Before I could muse further, we were led to the Zendo, to the beating heart of every Zen Temple, the place where national-monuments, national-treasures, national heritage and the museum stops.... and the living Dharma begins..... the Zendo. It was just as I had pictured in my imaginings, the air thick with incense, a handful of monks, no westerners one other non priest and a huge statue of the Buddha dominating the ancient Zendo. It was a cold, full moon December night, the Roshi introduced me to the Roshi-in-charge of the *Seishin* and left. My clothes and my luggage were nowhere to be seen. The night wore on, Zazen in at-least a 'half lotus position for 40 minutes followed by Dozen, walking Zen and then back to Zazen, it was freezing cold, and feet had to be bare. I had only a shirt on thin sweater on, the rest of my warm gear was in my luggage, somewhere across town with the Roshi. The night wore on, I was beginning to wonder about sleep, finally they closed the flap of the Zendo the material unrolled down from the top of the massive open doorway into the Zendo, but it reached two feet from the floor, the wind whipped under and this Zendo was freezing. Finally, I was told from 11pm until 4.00am we will sit Zazen outside in the grounds around the Zendo Wait a minute I asked what about sleep?? "I was told this is the *Rohatsu Sieshin* there will be no sleep" I could not believe it! It seems the priests would sit one or two *Sieshins* every month for a year, with sleep, yet every December for the *Rohatsu Sieshin* they really go-for-it and try to achieve enlightenment with every effort they can muster, even forgoing sleep. I thought to myself, and this happens to be the one I had the audacity to ask the Roshi for, just my karma and as it turned out it was.

Keeping the tension exactly right in the Zendo, was the *Jikijitsu* the head monk. He sat Zazen like a stone statue of the Buddha, he also had training in Kendo for the *kyosatsu* a flat paddle-like stick about 3inches wide and 3 feet long with a handle. Every so often through exhaustion, with a knotted back muscles from long hours of meditation, concentration of my mind would spiral out of control. The *Jikijitsu* would some how sense this and patrol up and down the Zendo long black monk robes rustling, bold shaven head gleaming, calm even expression on his face. Then monks meditating on raised platforms 2 feet above the floor would bow, the *Jikijitsu* would stop and bow in reply, the monk would lean forward almost to prostration. The *Jikijitsu* would take perfect aim and then POW!...POW!...POW! hitting the *kyosatsu* along side of the spine

on each side. The noise would echo through the Zendo, the concentration in the Zendo would go up a notch. I thought my gosh that poor monk must have moved or did something wrong. That's when the *Jikijitsu* stopped in front of me and pow!...pow!...pow! along side of my spine, it seemed my muscle spasms had dissolved, the drowsiness had left my mind and sharper concentration was back. I even started to ask for it on occasion.

Every early evening there would be a formal encouraging discourse from the Master in charge, unfortunately I could not understand any of it. One night I was fighting drowsiness and mild conscious dreaming that occurs when the barriers between consciousness and unconsciousness breaks down though no-sleep and meditation. Suddenly the wooden building with its shoji started to rattle violently it was as if a giant had picked up the building and was rattling it like a toy house. The monks after four days of meditation for evenness of mind, had panic in their eyes, I did too, only the Zen Master and the *Jikijitsu* were completely unperturbed, un-shaken, the Roshi never missed a beat with his discourse, and it looked as though the *Jikijitsu* never missed even a split second of his concentration of his breathe. Within minutes the violent earthquake had gone as fast as it had arrived. Leaving only myself and the monks shaken inside. In another cold night spent amongst the shrubs and bushes of the manicured grounds. I



would meditate until I would literally keel-over in half-lotus position and fall fast to sleep, If I had found a particularly cunning hidden-spot, this peculiarly positioned sleep might last until I would be awakened by discomfort. However, if not and the *Jikijitsu* would find me, clearly looking in need of his *kyosaku*, I would be awakeded by POW!...POW!...POW!...along my spine.

Eventually by day four the Okuda Roshi's wife brought my luggage and finally I was able to stay at least partially warm with extra clothes, although curiously with –out the ever-present cold biting at me I found my meditation deteriorated more. I could be more easily claimed by the dream-life which was now, ever present imposing itself on me

more and more . Eventually I finished and the Roshi's wife cooked me such a meal and the Roshi and I forgot that we could not communicate well and spoke all ate and drank until I fell into a sleep of all contented sleeps. The *Sieshin* was one of the most remarkable ways to leave Japan. It felt like six months or so before I returned to my regular consciousness, I am extremely grateful for the experience that started my regular practice of meditation, I now do an intensive 10 meditation every year, yet thankfully these intensives allow sleep. I left Japan, to study Oriental Medicine in my native tongue. I would be forever changed.

Return to Japan

In twenty five years later my wife and I were invited to return to Japan. Our trip to Japan, was to give an herbal seminar in modern metropolis of Tokyo, yet it began with a reunion of Ancient Japan and with one of my old teachers. I had not seen Okuda Roshi since his visit to my hometown in Bristol England, where I had organized a *Sieshin* for him to teach, 22 years earlier. Upon arrival we immediately went to his temple, Jukoku-ji, a few hours away from the ancient capital of Japan, Kyoto. When I had left Japan, he was just inaugurated as the Head of the Obaku School of Zen and Master of it's head temple Mampuka-ji, a large temple complex in Kyoto. After all this time, I was returning with my wife, and I wanted to pay my respects to him, upon landing in Japan. He was now recently retired to the small temple he was born in Kukoku-ji. It was an emotional reunion with a man and his wife, who had basically changed the course of my life as a young man, with my intense introduction to meditation. He reminded me that I had the knack of showing up at his temple, on the days when there would be important festivals, and to our surprise he announced tomorrow would be no different. Tomorrow there would be the festival for the 'Buddha of Medicine'. It was uncanny really, after all these years apart, that the day I arrive back would be the festival for the 'Buddha of Medicine'. After a 24 year separation, when I return, I return as a Herbalist and Doctor of Oriental Medicine and at the shrine, one of only 2 in the whole of Japan with a 1,300 year old sculpture of this



'Buddha of herbal medicine'. I was given the honor of starting off the festival, by the ringing of a large ancient bell in the bell tower.

The Buddha of Medicine

The Buddha of Medicine is entwined with herbal medicine throughout Asia.

Bhaisajyaguru (Sanskrit) or Yakushi Nyorai (Japanese) or Sangs-ryas (Tibetan) better known as 'Medicine Buddha'. Sometimes portrayed with his right hand is in the *abhaya*



mudra - a gesture of reassurance and loving-kindness. Nearly always holding a medicine bowl. In Tibetan images of the Medicine Buddha, the left hand typically holds a blooming myrobalan plant. *Terminalia chebula*, is the third ingredient in the famous Ayurvedic formula *Triphala*. It is a small round fruit, historically used as a rejuvenator helping to normalize the general balance of the body. The Buddha of Healing is believed to have the power to see the true cause of any affliction, whether

spiritual, physical or psychological, and who does whatever is necessary to alleviate it.

Artistic depictions of Buddha of Medicine often show a deity whose skin is the color of lapis lazuli, like the Ayurvedic diety *Dhanvantari* Lord of Ayurvedic Healing. The Medicine Buddha offers medicine to people suffering from illness, and grants nourishment to the mind and body.

During the festival a group of older women gathered around holding a photograph and started to point at me it was a photograph of 24 years earlier at the Roshi inauguration, they were laughing at how much older we all were. If you look closely in the bottom right hand corner, you'll see a young foreigner third from the right front row.



The Botanical Gardens, University of Tokyo.

One of the highlights of my recent trip was to visit with some old friends I had never actually met. The many plants of Traditional Chinese Medicine that do not grow in the West, even though I use them each week in my practice, I have never had the pleasure of meeting them personally. At the Botanical Gardens, Faculty of Science, University of Tokyo I was able to finally meet them. They have facilities and wild plant collections for botanical education and research. The Botanical Gardens, located in midtown of Tokyo, are open to the public and are sometimes referred to as the Koishikawa Botanical Garden.

The Botanical Gardens originated as the 'Koishikawa Medicinal Herb Garden', which was established in 1684 by the Tokugawa Shogunate. There are many historic plants and ruins that reflect the long history of the Botanical Gardens. The Botanical Gardens were the birthplace of modern scientific research in botany in Japan after the Meiji Restoration. Field studies are carried out in Japan and abroad, including east and southeast Asia and collections are brought back to the gardens. Besides the living plant collection, connected to the Botanical Gardens are a herbarium with 1.4 million specimens (including those of the associated University Museum) and a library of 20,000 books and journals.



The main collections contain wild collected species of higher plants from eastern Asia (e.g., Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and China) and many species collected from various other regions of the

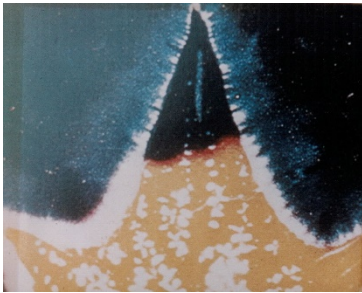
world. The 4,000 species of plants in the living collection comprise 1,400 hardy woody species, 1,500 hardy herbaceous species, and 1,100 tropical and subtropical species. What a treat! Right in the middle of urban Tokyo.

The Bio Electromagnetic Energy of Living Things

“It may be said that the electrical structure of the human body must have an architecture as precise and important as the biochemical structure, between which there is continuous interdependence. We must not forget we all are composed of electrically charged particles.”

Ionescu-Tirgouiste. ‘Measurement of acupuncture injury potentials’

Can this precise architecture be an electromagnetic energy body? It may well resemble a hologram, a truly three-dimensional energy body interfacing with the biochemical body in all living things on the planet! This is what modern research may be beginning to suggest. A Kirlian photograph on the wall of my office, pictures a leaf with the top part



cut off and thrown away. The photograph captures the “corona discharge” that represents millions of electrons streaming from the leaf. The upper portion of the leaf is cut off yet one can clearly see the “phantom leaf” or “energy body” that remains. All living organisms must have an attending energy body interfacing with the

physical body. All plants possess an energy body with its own unique vibrational frequency.

Bio-Energetic Research

In a series of experiments done in 1920, Elmer J. Lund demonstrated how the energy potentials of the body of a hydra could be reversed changing the biochemical structure. He found that he could control the energy architecture of the hydra’s body by passing small direct currents through the animal’s body and could cause the head to sprout out of the tail and vice versa. Dr. Robert O. Becker pioneered research that developed Lund’s early work. Dr. Becker was also inspired by early Russian research in to tomato plants. This research showed that when the tomato plants were damaged, they would release

what would be called later “currents of injury”. These Russian researchers demonstrated if they interfered with these “currents of injury”, the healing of the plant would take much longer. Yet what astonished the researchers, were if they aided these subtle currents, the plant would heal much faster. Dr. Becker’s own research revealed how minute electrical currents (millionths of an amp) could stimulate bone and tissue repair and regeneration. He studied the way the body utilized minute currents to stimulate biochemical repair and rejuvenation — a phenomenon now known as the “current of injury.” During his early research on salamanders, his data suggested that when a salamander’s leg was amputated, it generated measurements at the stump that initiated a non-differentiated cell-gunk (blastema), possibly generating an ‘electromagnetic phantom limb’ or energy body that then coded the cells into fulfilling the growth of a new limb. One stage up the evolutionary scale, Dr. Becker also worked with frogs, which cannot regenerate new limbs. His experiments suggested that the difference between frogs and salamanders was that the frog did not have the energy, at the end of the process, to generate a strong enough negative potential. In the laboratory, Becker then added the missing element and remarkably, the frog grew a new leg. Adding the missing negative potential facilitating energy flows seems to have boosted the energy body and empowered the physical body to re-grow the leg.

Humans also lack the power to regenerate limbs, but not completely! Studies have also shown that children up to age 11 can re-grow the first phalange of a finger that has been cut off. English surgeon, Dr. C. M. Illingworth fostered these studies and discovered that, as in salamanders, if the wound is not covered surgically by a skin flap, the non-differentiated cell gunk (blastema) forms (and I believe is coded and empowered to fulfill the energy body’s phantom limb.) and the finger regenerates itself. Dr. Illingworth has since measured a negative current of injury off the end of the stump, as was found in salamanders.

Many decades ago, Burr proposed that “Life-Fields” extended out from the body, like a hologram, and provided a field into which the biochemical body could grow. Standing on this research, Becker, and more recently, Dr. Andrew Bassett, have produced electromagnetic devices that stimulate healing of fractures. The devices are no longer

implanted but placed outside in the cast. They produce external applications of weak electro-magnetic fields across the site. Non-union fractures have been healing in a remarkably short amount of time, even after several years of non-union. Dr. Becker had reservations about such devices giving constantly stimulation 24 hours a day might excite any cancer cells that may be in the area into growth also.

Dr. Becker was not the first to stumble on these ideas of exciting our own currents of injury to heal bones. In his book, *Body Electric*, Becker relates that a Dr. Hall of Pennsylvania used electro-acupuncture to stimulate bone repair in the mid-1800's. Benjamin Franklin also used electrotherapy to heal a friend's frozen shoulder. These ideas are not new. From ancient China to India and Greece, many traditions believe that humans have an energy body, and that stimulation of energy flow within this body facilitates healing. One of the basic tenets of ancient Chinese and Japanese medicine is that Energy = Matter, and that by stimulating energy, matter is affected. It is this same foundation of thought that Einstein proved to scientists, that energy and matter are dual expressions of the same universal substance, with his equation, $E=mc^2$. That universal substance, "Qi", is a primal energy or vibration. Therefore, it is possible to attempt to heal the body with 'energetic medicine', by manipulating the basic vibrational or energetic architecture of the body, which I believe Acupuncture, Homeopathy and Herbal medicine does.

Medical science has been using energy concepts to create insights or windows into the body with imagery equipment, from x-rays, CAT scans, EEG, ECG, PET, to the MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imagery) that is able to visualize a tumor inside the body. The MRI stimulates atoms by stimulation of the transfer of energy of a specific frequency. All these remarkable diagnostic tools provide glimpses into the body at different energetic frequencies — a glimpse into matter at the energy level. The truth is we are both chemical and electrical. Modern scientists can detect and catalogue human biofields using SQUIDS (Superconducting Quantum Interferometric Devices.) SQUIDS are ultra sensitive magnetic fields detectors. These tests show us how we generate AC electromagnetic fields around our nerves and muscles, and DC electromagnetic fields around our brain. When the body's energy becomes imbalanced, organic problems and

disease follows. Cancer tissue and healthy tissue have different electrical capacities. Research by Dr. Nordenstrom has found a “negative potential” electrical reading in the vicinity of cancerous tumors. He has reported some tumor remissions by the insertion of electrodes in the tumor and on its surface and then applying a current between the two. This technique normalizes the abnormal current of injury, perhaps righting the energetic imbalance or “hole” in the energy system. Astounding results in recent scientific inquiry has spawned a renewed interest in the subtler working and circuitry of the body’s bio-electromagnetic energy. Scientists are already manipulating the body’s own incredibly small currents for healing of tissue, nerve, bones, and cancers. They are discovering trigger points and acupoints in the same locations. The possibility of subtle measurement is now available. We already know that acupoints have a precise location on the body’s surface that can be measured. Classic acupoints identified thousands of years ago by the ancients are measured today using scientific means and indeed show a precise decrease in electrical resistance.

Work by Dr. Darras and Professor DeVernijoul prove some interesting results. Testing the validity of energy transportation along the meridian channels, the doctors injected a radioactive tracer (Tegg) at the acupoint and with the help of a gamma-ray camera, found that the radioactivity traveled along the acupuncture meridian at the speed of 3-5 cm/minute, (this being in the order of 25 circulations per day or night). The flow was slower for diseased organs. They discounted that the flow was of the lymphatic or blood system. The speed of this flow quickened when an acupoint was stimulated. The flow was at a rate suggestive of the flow of Qi or energy through the meridians common to Traditional Chinese and Japanese Medicine.

Dr. Smith, in his book, *Electromagnetic Man*, states that this flow was suggestive of an electromagnetically rotating field, maintaining a pressure in the direction of the target organ. Dr. Nakatani, and Dr. Voll have conducted extensive research into measuring the end or beginning acupoints electrically as being reflective of the associated organ. High readings indicate inflammation, with low readings indicating degenerative disease. Any needle inserted in an acupoint will set up an electrical contact potential. After all his ground-breaking research, Dr. Becker believes that “One of the main lessons of [the]

effects of bio-electromagnetism, so far, is that less is often more.” These electrical contact potentials may help regulate the energy body, and thus the physical body.

I believe the ancient Chinese discovered by trial and error, over hundreds of generations, what modern scientists are confirming today — that the subtle manipulation of the body’s currents provides great healing. I believe that within the experience of Chinese medicine there lie the keys, to future advances in many areas of subtle healing energy work. The manipulation of bio-electro-magnetic energy for healing is still at a crude stage compared with the lineage of Traditional Chinese Medicine and the experiential truths contained therein.

Plants also have their own ‘energy body’

The plant’s unique and individual ‘electromagnetic signatures or frequencies of these fields, are a major factor in our healing processes with medicinal plants. This Bio-energetic factor has yet to be explored from a scientific viewpoint. Yet from 5,000 years of intuitive and experiential viewpoint of Traditional Chinese and Japanese Medicine’s viewpoint, a huge body of evidence has been accumulated within its framework of the Herbs energetic qualities, which energy meridian the herb enters, which organ system it has an energetic ‘affinity’ with, which tissues it is drawn to. Modern research is just beginning to verify so many herbs. One example is Bupleurum, *Chai Hu* a Chinese herb that has been described by TCM as entering the liver and gall bladder organ/meridian systems. This herb has been well studied by Japanese researchers showing it does, in fact have an amazingly ‘liver-protective’ ingredient, and they named ‘Saikosaponin’. It is a major herb in a formula to protect against Hepatitis, ‘Minor Bupleurum’ *Xiao Chai Hu Tang*. This formula has been shown to lower incidence of liver cancer among those with Cirrhosis of the Liver by 50% and lower the incidence of Cirrhosis among those with Hepatitis B and C. Remarkably this formula also was shown to promote the clearance of Hepatitis B antigen from the blood of 14 chronically ill children. The Chinese had an energetic personality of this herb developed since the 2nd Century AD. Guiding such usage, promoting its ‘affinity’ with the liver. Another System of healing with plants is based solely upon the Bio-Energetic framework is Homeopathy. Homeopathy originating in 17th century England uses microdoses, or minute dilutions of natural substances from

the plant, mineral, and animal kingdoms. Studies show they are so diluted, that they do not even contain one existing molecule of the original plant. There is no chemistry involved in homeopathy. A healing response can propagate through your body within seconds after taking a homeopathic remedy. This is much faster than any known physiological or chemical mechanisms can explain. The plant's 'electromagnetic signature' or 'energetic frequency' is believed to be carried through the water dilution. This bio-energetic medicine has baffled scientists and out-performed placebos. It has thousands and thousands of medical practitioners and a patient following of millions throughout Europe and India. Disease, from the homeopathic perspective, is an expression of the life process, not a separate entity or an isolated target. A disease is the manifestation of a constitutional weakness coming through the weakest point in the body. Homeopathy like all Bio-Energetic medicine looks to raise-up the energetic frequency of the diseased process through resonance on a vibrational level. Resonance works on the principle that *like attracts like*. When the C string of a harp or piano is struck, all the other octave strings of C begin to vibrate. They are in resonance with one another. The different aspects of our physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual being resonate to various frequencies of vibration. An analogy for this would be the Shaman in the Amazon who explained to me from an 'altered state of conscious' he would capture the song (vibration) of the patient's illness he would go into the forest and sing the song until the rain-forest would answer, with the medicinal plant to be used (vibrational resonance?)

Bio-Energetic medicine gently coaxes or invites 'stuck energy' to move or vibrate again, or over-stimulated energy to sedate and calm itself. The analogy for this might be healthy energy as water and disease as congealed lowered frequency of matter Ice. The right resonance is called for by the body to assist it to raise its frequency or warms the frequency of the ice. Healing is achieved when all is the same vibrational level.

Over time, the system finds balance between the two, it wants to come back into its inherent state..... balance. New Physics mingling with Modern Homeopathic theory believes that all medicinal plant's have a specific vibrational frequency, that our subtle

bio-chemical and bio-energetic receptors respond to. The correct plant or formula of plants, will gently, healingly stimulate the body-mind balance itself

Medicinal Plants Straddle both the Bio-Energetic and the Bio-Chemical Worlds

Bio-Energetic Medicine	Bio-Chemical Medicine
Acupuncture-----	Homeopathic -----Herbal Medicine-----Vitamins-----Pharmaceutical

Acupuncture as I have presented is purely Bio-energetic working solely from a scientifically unexplained basis. Homeopathy using medicinal plants also is in the same position. Vitamins, minerals, and amino acids are energetically inert and also work from the solely Bio-Chemical basis. They provide the body with preventative nutritional bio-chemical nutrients, which are often deficient due to modern diet and lifestyle. These substances are gentle restorative nutrients for the most part well received by the body. Pharmaceuticals are on the extreme end of the Bio-Chemical scale, these bio-chemicals overwhelm receptor sites in an overpowering way. The extreme of 'Bio-Chemical Herbal Medicine' is fixated on understand Medicinal plants and their healing compounds reduced to solely to the recognizable 'active ingredients'. The extreme of 'Bio-Energetic Herbal Medicine' is the Shamanistic view of 'plant spirit medicine' impacting us on a deep spirit level. Either way both potentials exist. Herbal Medicine can straddle between these two worlds, not as overwhelming on a bio-chemical level, not damaging the ecosystems of ourselves or Gaia's. Moderately enough placed to get results and be effective as the best of both worlds.

Quality of Herbs

Considering Medicinal Plants from both the energy perspective and the chemical perspective, the therapeutic effect of the plants, are only as good as the ability of the plant to contain the chemical compounds to help our bodies heal, it is only good as it's abilities to hold its energetic qualities intact. I always consider these two perspectives in my selection of herbs for formulas. Is it a sub-grade plant, I'm sure we have all seen

examples of plants that have struggled all their life, a rose that never blooms versus a rose in full bloom healthy with hundreds of flowerers, the quality between the two rose plants is enormous, its aroma, its color every aspect of its chemistries and energies are affected, you can see the difference and smell the difference, chemically and energetically. The environment the plant grows within effects it enormously, is it wildcrafted? taken from its natural eco-system that it has grown within for millions of years, or if it's been cultivated is it organically grown? from soil filled with all the ingredients to support the plant naturally. Plants suck all the natural ingredients, from their roots into the plant it's often that the plant is good only if the soil is good. Has it been processed without chemical herbicides, pesticides or gassed? The sad fact is that the majority of medicinal plants are gassed with carcinogenic gasses so it may keep longer in storage. Has it been irradiated? for better preservation in storage, irradiation destroys the plant's energy? All these are just some of the factors that bring to you the best quality herbs, to give your body the best possible opportunity to help it heal itself. Especially if you consider thousands of years of TCM's experiential wisdom, these perspectives will guide manufacturers to produce the best quality products they can.

Three Remarkable Healing Japanese Mushrooms:

Energetically: Oriental Medicine believes that healing Mushrooms, remove dead decaying matter from the forest floors, just as in the energy fields of our own body-minds. Mushrooms such as Reishi, Shiitake and Maitake are the stars of the mushroom realm, they also convert our own metabolic and psychic wastes, transforming our stagnant or festering emotions and negative feelings, offering the opportunity to raising the spirit and freeing the mind toward more spiritual pursuits. Just see what they have been proven to do bio-chemically and hopefully you'll be inspired to add them to your 'Wellness Supplement Plan' or at least regularly to your diet.



Reishi Mushroom (*Ganoderma lucidum*)

This mushroom has been much sought after in the East for the last four thousand years. It was fervently looked for because of its 'Elixir of Life'

qualities. It has also been known under various other names: holy mushroom, herb of spiritual potency, herb of deathlessness, and shaman's tree fungus. This mushroom was held in such high esteem by the Daoists of ancient China as the 'Supreme Tonic' ever since the first Chinese Emperor (221-210 B.C.) is said to have sent envoys on a search throughout the Eastern Seas, to search for the herb of immortality, and they returned from Japan with Reishi mushroom. It would have been a tough search then as now, for in Japan one mushroom is said to be found on 10,000 Japanese plum trees. Extremely rare, until the cultivation of this mushroom. In the 1980s, a Japanese researcher Shigeaki Mori developed an intricate and effective method of cultivating them, which has made them widely available and affordable. Today they can even purchase in most health food markets for cooking. It's classified by TCM as sweet in taste, neutral leaning to gently warming. I often use this herb in formulas to 'Calm the Spirit' (It has demonstrated the ability to calm caffeine jitters) strengthen immunity, strengthening heart, lungs, and liver. This mushroom is used as a general health tonic and as folk medicine for liver problems, heart conditions, asthma, cancer, high blood pressure, and arthritis. Reishi is central to *Fu Zheng* therapy of Traditional Chinese medicine, *Fu Zheng* is a class of herbs that Chinese herbalists believe are the most powerful herbs for all-around strength and health, these herbs are often formulated together for cancer and other chronic illnesses. Reishi has been professionally researched and tested, mostly in China and Japan. Scientists have researched several ingredients in them that have pharmacological (medicinal) effects on the body. Reishi mushrooms contain compounds called polysaccharides, which have been shown to help the body fight cancerous tumors and stimulate the immune system to combat infections and viruses. In studies on mice, reishi mushrooms have shown strong results against cancerous tumors. Other substances, called triterpenes, have been found in Reishi mushrooms that have demonstrated to lower blood pressure and improve circulation, that may account for its success for age related intellectual decline in dementia and pre-Alzheimer's conditions and the increased circulation need to resist Altitude sickness. (I have used Reishi, Siberian Ginseng and Ginkgo for remarkable success for altitude sickness and jet lag.) Reishi mushrooms contain sterols, which may influence the hormonal system, and natural antihistamines, which reduce allergic reactions and inflammation in the body. Some

studies have shown to increase white blood cell count, reduce allergic reactions, and have a calming effect on the central nervous system. Because of its neutral classification by TCM its considered safe for everyone to use as an immune tonic, this is especially important to consider when using a tonic for someone with auto-immune disorder, immune stimulation herbs such as echinacea are not well tolerated by this group. Reishi helps build-up the immunity with-out revving-up immune responses, that would only be further aggravating to already overactive auto-immune responses, such as Lupus, Chron's Disease, etc. It can be used as the gentlest of herbs that are called for in such extreme food allergies of leaky gut syndrome, where the body can generate an allergic response to anything ingested. It helps to calm and generate antihistamines to switch-off and block the inflammatory responses of allergic response. Reishi's antihistamines compounds also block the inflammation and swelling so often associated with respiratory allergies and asthma. They prevent the constriction of airways within the lungs that make breathing so difficult. Reishi is use with AIDS patients and has demonstrated its ability to help raise T cell levels. I have used it successfully with chronic fatigue syndrome where it is possible to raise up immune responses and energy levels in general over a long period of time. Reishi has been shown to inhibit bacteria and viruses, especially useful for trying to build-up energy deficient people only to see them get knocked-back to where they were, by an opportunistic infection. It's compounds stimulate the maturation of immune cells known as macrophages which engulf and digest infectious bacteria. Reish is exceptional useful for stress situations, where Reishi helps the body to adapt, while nourishing the nervous system and providing immune support at the same time. Under this stress the cardio-protective qualities are also especially important. Reishi has demonstrated blood pressure lowering qualities and cholesterol lowering properties that help prevent atherosclerotic changes in the blood vessel walls. A recent study of chronic bronchitis in China showed 2,000 patients experienced form 60% to90% improvement using Reishi. One of the areas I have used Reishi a lot in recent years, has been for the treatment of Hepatitis. Used for Liver diseases in Chinese and Japanese herbalism, where Reishi was thought generally to release "stuck emotions" which would aggravate the 'free flowing' health of the liver This would allow the patient more opportunity to turn to spiritual pursuits. Reishi is said

to elevate the spirit, it's a mood-elevating substance. Traditionally, reishi is believed to help transform the individual into a more spiritual being. Just as mushrooms transform decayed material on the forest floor, into life-giving nourishment, so Reishi converts our own metabolic and psychic waste our hostility and other negative feelings, offering the opportunity to raising the spirit and freeing the mind toward more spiritual pursuits. I have proven to myself what Chinese herbalists have found for centuries, that Reishi is especially useful for hepatitis patients who have not suffered severe loss of liver function or those whose conditions are not complicated by emotional stress, especially anger and frustration. According to TCM, especially shut-down and stagnant the Liver energy, makes it more difficult to respond to Reishi healing messages. It is also useful for conditions where fatty deposits are left with in the liver that may be irritated by alcohol or excessive fatty foods.

This is probably the most useful medicinal mushroom in the world, it most definitely should be in all our bathroom cabinets as a most useful 'wellness tool'.

Shiitake. (*Lentinula edodes*)

Shiitake, comes from the Japanese Shii, which means oak and *take* which means mushroom. The Shiitake mushroom is the most widely cultivated gourmet mushroom in the world and is both a prized medicine and culinary delight. Production dramatically



increased in the late 1940's after the development of modern cultivation techniques by the Japanese. Shiitake is a primary wood decomposer; it degrades the lignin and other components of wood and extracts the nutrients to feed itself.

Shiitake has antifungal, anti-tumor, and antiviral effects. Scientists today are finding

that shiitake can help the body combat heart disease, cancer, and viruses.

In the 1970's and 1980's there was a major research effort in Japan to understand the medicinal properties of the mushroom Shiitake and these efforts develop patentable medicines, Shiitake is often used in the Japanese diet and its cultivation dates to the

13th century in China. By the 1980's it had become one of the top agricultural crops in Japan. In 1970, Dr. Goro Chihara, of the National Cancer Center Research Institute in Tokyo, isolated and purified polysaccharide compounds from shiitake that exhibited strong antitumor activities. The most active of these compounds he called lentinan. Lentinan is an extract of Shiitake which is the name given a highly purified polysaccharide fraction extracted from Shiitake mushrooms, it is an approved drug in Japan. It is generally administered by injection and has been used as an agent to prolong survival of patients in conventional cancer therapy as well as in AIDS research. LEM is another extract from Shiitake. This protein-bound sugar is soluble in water and has been the subject of intense research. In Japan, mushroom extracts like LEM and Lenitan have become the leading prescription treatment for cancer

Shiitake has been revered in Japan and China as both a food and medicinal herb for thousands of years. Around the year 200AD. it was offered to the Japanese emperor Chuai, by the Kyusuyu people of Japan. In China Wu Ri, a physician from the Fourteenth century noted its ability to increase energy, dispelled hunger, cure colds, eliminate worms and nourished the blood circulatory system. Wu-Rui described shiitake as a food that activates "Qi". Activating the circulating life force, a which helps protect the immune system. Shiitake's antiviral effects are believed to be caused by Shiitake's ability to produce interferon. Researchers have also reported that consumption of Shiitake mushrooms lowers blood cholesterol levels by as much as 45 percent especially in those already on a high fat diet. The most dramatic results occurred when high-cholesterol foods were eaten simultaneously with Shiitake it seemed to block or counter the cholesterol uptake. Research conducted in Japan identified a specific amino acid in shiitake that helps speed up the processing of cholesterol in the liver The active principle is an amino acid named eritadenine, lowers all lipid components of serum lipoproteins in both animals and man. Shiitake has also shown the capacity to lower high blood pressure in laboratory. One study reported that Shiitake was able to reduce weight when taken by women over a 6 week period without changing their diet. An interesting point to report is that that this mushroom block the formation of cancer causing nitrates, chemicals found in meats and many preserved products, it would seem shiitake

mushrooms should be included in the menu's to counter balance these carcinogenic substances.

Maitake (*Grifola frondosa*)

Maitake (*Grifola frondosa*) means 'dancing mushroom' in Japanese. Supposedly named in ancient Japan, because those who found it knew they would be paid the mushrooms weight in silver, and then they would celebrate by dancing! Many doctors in Japan also must be dancing because of maitake use to lower blood pressure and blood lipids, key risk factors in cardiovascular disease, without having to resort to powerful pharmaceuticals. Yet maitake may best be known for its cancer-fighting properties. One study in post operative bladder cancer patients showed reduced rates of recurrence after surgery 65% down to 33%. Researchers have also discovered that Maitake when taken with mitomycin a chemotherapy inhibits the growth of breast cancer cells, even after the tumors are well formed, preventing the spread of cancer to the liver. These anti cancer compounds are believed to be Maitake D-fraction. Used for Stomach, colorectal, liver, lung cancers or leukemia by Chinese doctors.

Some studies also show Maitake's liver protective qualities for Hepatitis B even clearing antigens in 40% of those in one study. It is used in Japan to protect the liver from drug-induced Hepatitis. It contains grifolan, an important beta-glucan polysaccharide (molecule composed of many sugar molecules linked together). Grifolan has been shown to activate macrophages, a type of cell considers the "heavy artillery": of the immune system, explains Larry A. Walker, Ph.D., R.D., author of "Natural products update," published in Drug Topics, June 1997. D-fraction, one of the polysaccharides in maitake, also energized the cellular immune system.

People with non-insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus (NIDDM) may also benefit from maitake, according to researchers Hiroaki Nanba and Keiko Kubo, authors of "Mushroom biology and mushroom products". Researchers investigated a specific, high-molecular polysaccharide in maitake called the X-fraction. They found that mice given maitake had an increased ability to recognize glucose, and the control group had higher blood

glucose levels. The researchers suggested that maitake can reduce insulin resistance, thereby increasing insulin sensitivity.

Three Healing Wonders of Japanese Mushrooms Combined.

Maitake, shiitake, and reishi mushrooms have many overlapping properties: all boost immune function, all support cardiovascular health, and all show promise in lowering the risk of - or treating - cancer. However, maitake is specifically recommended for the stomach and intestines, as well as blood sugar levels; shiitake treats nutritional deficiencies and liver ailments; and reishi promotes respiratory health and spirituality. These medicinal mushrooms have been shown to boost heart health; lower the risk of cancer, promote immune function; ward off viruses, bacteria, and fungi; reduce inflammation; combat allergies; help balance blood sugar levels; and support the body's detoxification mechanisms. I often use all three combined into one formula to be taken regularly as part of a 'Wellness Supplement Plan' and at very least try to include them regularly in your diet for your optimum health!