



feature article...

## ***A day in the life of an Acupuncturist***

***By combining Chinese medicine with a gentle touch, Dr. Leaf Song spends her days creating positive energy***

By Vesna Vuynovich Kovach

In the reception area of the Beijing Acupuncture & Chinese Herbal Medicine Clinic in Middleton, the air is fragrant with the scent of Chinese medicinal herbs. On the counter a blue vase brims with fresh flowers in purple, yellow and pink. Their blossoms even have a bite, albeit a painless one: they're snapdragons.

These particular flowers seem to be an apt decoration for the acupuncture clinic founded in 1997 by Leaf Song, O.M.D., M.S., L.Ac., who specializes in creating the energy flow she says promotes weight loss, facial rejuvenation, pain relief and more. The snapdragons are a fit not only because they're beautiful but because their gentle nip mirrors her style of acupuncture needle insertion as well.

"Her touch is very soft," explains husband Dr. Jonathan Song, who is also a traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) doctor who joined the Beijing Clinic early in 2005. "Patients like when she's needling. She knows the American style."

After the Chinese-born Dr. Leaf realized that "Americans' bodies tend to be more sensitive to needles," she developed techniques she was certain would be acceptable to the most needle-shy among us.

"She practiced at home to learn how to maneuver needles so that they would be painless. That's what makes her different from other acupuncturists," says her spouse. "She practiced on her own body. And on me and our daughter," he adds with a laugh.

### **Different strokes for different folks**

Jonathan says that each TCM practitioner has a different style — it's more of an individual art than Western medicine — even though both are rigorous professions based on vast, time-honored bodies of knowledge. His wife, he says, "has a unique view. She sees the problem precisely and gets a very good result. She's particularly good at lower back pain and at women's health issues like infertility. It's often a complicated situation. She can see it as a simple thing and treat it in a simple way."

Leaf Song's therapies include Chinese herbal medicine as well as acupuncture. In fact, both have been essential components of TCM for thousands of years.

The slim 44-year old acupuncturist is particularly enthusiastic about her herbal approach to weight loss.

"We've developed our own herbal formula that's very safe and effective," she says. "It opens up your energy and moves out stagnation. It's a circle: [extra] weight causes energy stagnation, and stagnation causes [extra] weight."

### **Deciphering the terminology**

Though terms like "energy" and "stagnation" might sound like fuzzy New Age talk to the Western ear, they have precise meanings for a doctor of TCM. And Dr. Song is well qualified to use them. She began her studies at the Zhejiang College of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Hongzhou, where she met her husband. They moved to Beijing, where he went on to get his M.D. at the Peking Union Medical College while she continued TCM studies at the China Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine. There, in 1987, she was awarded the Hu Shi-Xi award for distinguished achievement in Chinese medicine.

In 1989, Jonathan arrived in the U.S. to attend the Ph.D. program at Michigan State University. Leaf followed soon after with their baby daughter, Willa, who is now a 15-year-old student at Middleton High School. Following post-doc work at the University of Rochester, where he studied Alzheimer's disease, Jonathan came to the UW-Madison in 1997 to do research on multiple sclerosis.

The doctors chose their lyrical, Westernized names (they go by "Dr. Jonathan" and "Dr. Leaf") after coming to the States. Jonathan's birth name, Jian Xiong, is pronounced like "John Song." He found the name "Jonathan" in a baby name book.



Leaf followed suit, translating her family surname, "Ye," into its English meaning, making it her new first name.

### **The road to Western medicine**

The daughter of a doctor of Western medicine and an office administrator, Leaf Song was born in China in 1961.

"I grew up in a hospital," she says. "The front was the hospital building and the back was where the doctors and nurses and their families lived." When it came time to choose a career, Dr. Leaf says medicine was the natural choice.

"I didn't know anything else."

In the mid-1960s, during China's Cultural Revolution, "Mao gave the order that all doctors must study acupuncture." Her mother, who later encouraged her daughter to study TCM, was among them.

"She said it was a good career for a female," Leaf says. "Western doctors are on call and in the hospital for such long hours. So acupuncture would be good for a woman, a wife. That was the reason I went to school for Chinese medicine."

Since then, Dr. Leaf has distinguished herself as an accomplished and caring healer. Along with her years of practice, she has published several peer-reviewed journal papers and book chapters on TCM. She is currently working on a book about diet and health.

In addition, she and Jonathan are senior clinic supervisors for the Midwest College of Oriental Medicine in Racine. One or more students work as interns at the Beijing Clinic — the only clinic authorized by the school — most days.

Debbie Gordon, R.N., who is graduating in June, is impressed with her experiences at the clinic. Many patients, she says, arrive after Western medicine hasn't been able to help them. "They have test after test and can't get a diagnosis for their pain or chronic fatigue. But their condition fits an Eastern diagnosis," she says. "This is a wonderful clinic. They do wonderful work here."

Dr. Leaf says that in recent years, awareness and acceptance of TCM has come a long way. Still, "there's a lot we can do. The American diet, stress ... people don't know how much these things affect your health. They never make any connection with their chronic pain or allergies," she says. "Diet and herbs, properly chosen for the proper effect," can be powerful tools for health. "You can revive your body and move your energy," she explains.

Looking to the future, Dr. Leaf plans to move the clinic out of the storefront rental in Middleton and into its own building, expanding it into a total center for holistic health.

"I want to do more group practice ... add other kinds of health care, with nutritional consultants, massage therapists and more," she says.

After practicing in two countries and several American cities, Dr. Leaf Song says she's here to stay, where she'll continue to grow and to blossom. Now that's good energy.

*The Beijing Acupuncture and Chinese Herbal Medicine Clinic is located at 6273 University Avenue, Suite B, in Middleton. You can reach them by calling (608) 238-3333.*



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