

## 3. 2. OSTEOPATHY, THE POETRY OF RHYTHMS

### A little more history

Osteopathy emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century in the United States. Its founder, Andrew Taylor Still, was a doctor, surgeon and minister.

He lost three of his children and his wife during an outbreak of cerebrospinal meningitis in 1865. His grief made him aware of the archaic nature of medicine, which was characterised by charlatanism. He decided to immerse himself in understanding the human body, particularly anatomy. He wanted to heal with his hands, respecting the great laws of nature and life. The son of a Methodist minister and a minister himself, his faith in God was limitless and deeply present in each of his scientific advances. In 1874, during a dysentery epidemic, he uttered the word osteopathy for the first time while treating a child. A few years later, in 1892, he founded the first American School of Osteopathy in Kirksville, Missouri, to teach his art. Among Still's many students were John Martin Littlejohn and William Garner Sutherland, each of whom created a particular branch of osteopathy. Littlejohn brought osteopathy to England. It gradually spread, first to Europe and then throughout the world.

### Osteopathy, a holistic manual medicine

We should try to define what osteopathy is today. There are three main trends in osteopathic practice, based on sciences such as anatomy, physiology and biomechanics:

- **a biomechanical approach** that targets the musculoskeletal system,
- **a fluidic approach** that focuses on the fascia, internal organs and cranio-sacral system,
- and **a biodynamic approach** where listening, the perception of energetic movements and the spiritual dimension take on even greater importance.



While osteopathy is a scientific discipline, it is also a human science and above all, an empirical one, i.e. it is subjective. It relies on a dialogue between two beings called practitioner and patient, giver and receiver. It takes a holistic view of the body and mind and seeks to promote health. Still said, "To find health should be the object of the doctor. Anyone can find disease." Osteopaths seek to restore mobility and allow vitality to express itself freely. They use fine manual perception and precise touch while taking into account the body's self-regulatory capacities.

### Working with health

Working with health is a concept present in Thai massage philosophy and is also clearly stated by Andrew T. Still. Unfortunately, this concept is no longer held in the highest esteem. Pathology takes up more and more space in the western world of health, a world that does not carry its name well. Most osteopathic schools focus on illness and pathology, and few have made this

paradigm shift. When we receive a patient and their requests have been listened to and taken into account, we end up focusing on them. But if we want to work with our patient's health, we have to take the opposite approach and ask ourselves: Where is the spark of life in this body? Where are its resources? What can I do to connect with life, strengthen this extraordinary potential and ensure that it spreads throughout the body?

Working with health also involves understanding that illness is part of life. Sometimes we are ill in order to stay healthy. Health is not the absence of illness, but rather the body's ability to fall ill and return to equilibrium each time through homeostasis. It is a phenomenon of constant and dynamic self-regulation. Life is a journey of fulfilment. When we fall ill, we renew our capacity to adapt. We need to take a dynamic view of health and ask ourselves what our illnesses mean. What is there that I need to understand? What have I done to get here? What is preventing this resource from expressing itself in my body? What do I need to change? Where is my resistance? In order to grow, you need to let go, understand and integrate.







## THE EARTH

### The earth

On a starry night in Sikkim  
I nestled into the ground near a stream  
Listening to the Earth breathe and scheme  
Lost in a lucid, enchanted dream

Under my belly, a snake slithered  
In the distance, a rockfall rumbled  
The wild reptile trembled  
Surprised, shaken and vulnerable

This roar is a sign of her magnificence  
Revealing her untamable grandiloquence  
There is no escaping this interference  
Her precious gift is her benevolence

I sit, breathing into my hara  
Before me rise the powerful Himalayas  
How beautiful is our planet Gaia  
Also aptly named Pachamama

My being is as well a small galaxy  
A faithful reflection of this great biodiversity  
More precious than a golden bounty  
My Tan Tien is an iron pearl of stability

Recognizing our essential place in this life  
The source, our origins, our ancestral drive  
I feel confident, nothing to change, nothing to modify  
The Earth is the most beautiful place in the Sky



# LESS IS MORE

We prefer to say, “doing less is better” rather than “less is more.” Practitioners often tend to overdo it on the road to mastery. There may be several reasons for this overabundance of techniques: a lack of self-confidence, a desire to impress, a desire to heal at all costs, a need to be recognised, a false belief in the patient’s inordinate expectations or a difficulty in finding the entry point into the receiver’s body system. At times like these, it is good to remember the “less is more” principle, which we like to transpose into “just enough is more.”

- This principle teaches us to:
- be rather than do. The quality of presence is at the centre of relationships again and again,
  - emphasise a listening touch,
  - respect the patient’s nervous system and give them time to integrate the changes,
  - favour simplicity over complexity.



# MOBILITY AND VITALITY

Life is movement. In a healthy body, the flow of life fluctuates, changing rhythm and intensity, colour and taste, tension and density. A flow that constantly adapts to the various changes in external and internal environments. If there were no fluctuation in the flow of life, we would gradually lose our ability to adapt. This would have a negative impact on our ability to self-regulate and, therefore, on our health. It does not matter if the rhythm is too slow or too fast. What is important is that we are able to change pace, accelerate and decelerate, increase and reduce tension and density, fluid suction and flushing.

Body structure is at its most adaptable when it is mobile and vital. Mobility is characterised by broad movements. If my shoulder is mobile, I can scratch between my shoulder blades, carry a suitcase or go climbing.

Tissue or structure vitality is expressed using our hands through a movement of expansion and retraction. This movement is invisible to the naked eye. If my shoulder has vitality, its tissue breathe with a broad, slow expansion-retraction movement.

Mobility is the body’s inherent ability to move.  
 Motility is the inherent expansion and retraction of all cells.  
 Vitality expresses the quality of tissue motility.  
 Mobility and vitality influence each other.

