

## AG28: Agallamh le Alasdair MacMhaoirn: Leigheas Sìonach

Interview with Alasdair Mearns: Chinese Medicine

Presenter: Seumas Dòmhnallach (James MacDonald)



### SEUMAS:

Còmhla rinn an-dràsta tha Alasdair MacMhaoirn, a tha fìor eòlach air a leigheas Sìonach. Alasdair, ciamar a chaidh thu an sàs ann an cuspair a tha gu math neo-àbhaisteach?

### ALASDAIR:

Uill, thòisich mi ann an clasaichean ealain màirsealtach, no ealain glacaidh, agus bha an tidsear den bheachd gu robh gnothaichean mar sin fada, fada na b' fheumaile na dìreach na stuthan fiosaigeach agus bha feallsanachd dha-rìreabh inntinneach aige, is a' chiad turas a thàinig mise tarsainn air, agus 's e sin gu bheil fèin-dhìon a' tòiseachadh le bhith ga do dhìon bho gnothaichean cumanta mar tinneas, bhon a bhith gort, bhon a bhith trom na d' inntinn is a leithid de rud. Bha esan den bheachd, a dh'aindeoin cho feumail agus math airson eacarsaich 's a tha sgilean fiosaigeach airson fèin-dhìon, chan eil a' mhòr chuid de dhaoine againne a' dol am bad a chèile le duine eile. Chan ann gu tric a bhios e a' tachairt - ma bhios e a' tachairt idir - ach tha sinn uile a' sabaid an aghaidh na gnothaichean eile, agus airson fèin-dhìon a bhith dha-rìreabh ga do dhìon, sin ri ràdh airson a bhith ga do chumail reusanta toilichte agus fallainn 's ann air gnothaichean mar tinneas agus slàinte a dh'fheumas fèin-dhìon tòiseachadh, agus, leis a sin, a dh'aindeoin gu robh sinn ag ionnsachadh na dòighean fiosaigeach, beag air bheag, bhiodh e a' teagasg dhuinn an fheallsanachd a tha air cùl an leighis Sìonach.

### SEUMAS:

Agus nuair a bha thu an sàs anns na h-ealain a tha sin, na "martial arts", an do mhothaich thu gu robh thu a' faireachdainn nas fheàrr annad fhèin, nad bhodhaig 's nad inntinn?

### JAMES:

With us now is Alasdair Mearns, who is an expert in Chinese medicine. Alasdair, how did you come to be involved in a subject that is so unusual?

### ALASDAIR:

Well, I started off taking classes in martial arts or grasping arts, and the teacher believed that such disciplines were far, far more useful than just physical things and he had an extremely interesting philosophy, and it's the first time I'd come across it, which is that self-defence starts by defending yourself against ordinary things such as diseases, from pain, from being depressed and that sort of thing. He was of the opinion that despite how beneficial and good in terms of exercise physical self-defence skills are, very few of us are going to have a fight with someone else. That doesn't happen very often - if it happens at all - but we all fight against other things, and for self-defence to really protect you, that is to keep you reasonably happy and healthy self-defence must begin with things like diseases and health, and, in that way, despite the fact that we were learning the physical techniques, little by little, he taught us the philosophy behind Chinese medicine.

### JAMES:

And when you were involved in those arts, the martial arts, did you notice that you felt better within yourself, in your body and in your mind?

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### ALASDAIR:

Uill, nuair a thòisich mi, cha do mhothaich mi mòran. Bha mi òg agus nuair a bhios sinn òg, tha sinn slàn, fallainn co-dhiù, is chan eil tinneas an agus a' mhòr chuid a' tighinn oirnn gu mòr. So, 's e rud a thàinig a-steach orm beag air bheag mar a chaidh na bliadhnaichean seachad, agus aig an ìre sa tha mi an-dràsta, tha na gnothaichean sin fada, fada nas cudromaiche na bha iad nuair a bha mi òg.

### SEUMAS:

Tha mi a' creidsinn gu bheil daoine buailteach ìomhaigh a bhith aca de leighis Sìonach a bhith a' cur prìnichean ann an diofar àiteachan na do bhodhaig. Bheil thu fhèin air a thoirt chun na h-ìre a tha sin?

### ALASDAIR:

O, tha gu dearbha. Às dèidh a bhith a' gabhail ùidh anns a' ghnòthaich airson gnothaichean pearsanta, smaoinich mi gum bu chaomh leam trèanadh ceart a dhèanamh agus rinn mi cùrsa a bha còrr is trì bliadhna - 's e ceithir bliadhna a th' ann an-dràsta - dìreach ann an taobh acupuncture, agus an uair sin rinn mi barrachd trèanadh ann an lusan leighis. Agus le TCM, no "Traditional Chinese Medicine" - leighis traidiseanta Sìonach - tha an dà chuid làmh ri làimh agus tha na prìnichean ag obair dha-rìreabh math airson cuid de rudan ach tha na lusan leighis ag obair nas fheàrr airson gnothaichean eile - air no measgachadh eadar na dhà. So 's e dha-rìreabh dà thaobh dhen an aon rud a th' ann, ann an leighis Sìonach traidiseanta co-dhiù. Tha fios 'am gu bheil acupuncture meadaigeach ann gu tric, ach thèid a dhèanamh le physios agus dotairean bhon taobh an iar, a dh'fhaodadh a bhith diofraichte, ach gu traidiseanta, 's e dìreach dè an inneal as fheàrr airson an obair a tha romhad.

### SEUMAS:

Mar sin, cha bhi thu fhèin a' dol gu dotair. 'S urrainn dhut thu fhèin a chur ceart mar gum bitheadh.

### ALASDAIR:

Well, when I first started, I didn't notice much. I was young, and when we're young, we're fit and healthy anyway, and disease and most things don't really bother us. So it was something that came to me little by little as the years went by, and at the age I am now, these things are far, far more important to me than they were when I was young.

### JAMES:

I suppose people tend to have an impression of Chinese medicine that it's about sticking pins into various parts of the body. Have you taken it to that level?

### ALASDAIR:

Oh, yes, definitely. Having taken an interest in it for personal reasons, I decided I would like to be trained properly and I took a course that lasted over three years - it's now four years - purely in acupuncture, and then I embarked on further training in medicinal herbs. And with TCM, or Traditional Chinese Medicine, the two go hand in hand and the needles work very well for some conditions but the herbs are more effective for other conditions - or a combination of the two. So they're really two sides of the same coin in terms of Chinese traditional medicine. I know that medical acupuncture is used frequently but it tends to be done by Western physios and doctors, who may use different techniques, but traditionally, it's a case of what is the best tool for what has to be done.

### JAMES:

So, you don't have to go to a doctor. You can treat yourself as it were.

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### ALASDAIR:

Gu ìre, ach mar a tha ... Coltach ris a h-uile rud eile, feumaidh inneal ceart a bhith agad airson an obair a th' agad, agus tha neart is laigsean aig leighis Sìonach mar a th' aig leighis allopathic mar a th' againn anns an taobh an iar, so, nan robh mi a' smaoinichadh gu robh sgilean an dotair gu bhith feumail, o, dheidhinn-sa ann gun trioblaid sam bith, ach air an taobh eile, nan robh mi a' smaoinichadh gu robh gnòthaichean traidiseanta, tro na prìnichean no na lusan leighis, 's e sin a bhithinn-sa a' gabhail co-dhiù.

### SEUMAS:

Agus an urrainn dhut eisimpleir a thoirt dhuinn air rud 's dòcha a bha ceàrr ort agus a chuir thu fhèin ceart?

### ALASDAIR:

Uill, 's dòcha gur e an rud as cumanta a th' ann an stuth a tha mi ag òl an aghaidh cnatan. Tha formula ann, jin ju di huang wan, agus bhon a thòisich mi ga gabhail aig fìor thoiseach a' ghnòthaich ... You know, aon uair 's a tha cnatan air greim fhaighinn ort, uill, you know, bidh e a ruith an cùrsa is sin agad e. Ach ma ghabhas tu na pileachan seo aig fìor thoiseach tòiseachaidh, cuiridh tu air falbh e, agus leis a sin, tha mi toilichte a ràdh cha robh droch chnatan ormsa airson deich bliadhna co-dhiù. Tha e dha-rìreabh, dha-rìreabh, dha-rìreabh feumail, agus ma smaoinicheas tu air na h-uairean de dh'obrach as urrainn dha daoine a bhith a' sàbhaladh agus a h-uile trioblaid a tha an lùib ri sin, 's e rud sìmplidh ach dha-rìreabh luachmhor.

### SEUMAS:

Dè cho mòr 's a tha leighis Sìonach ag obair air a' phrionnsabal gu bheil an duine a tha a' faighinn an leighis, no gu dearbha an duine a tha ga dhèanamh, a' creidsinn ann? An obraicheadh e, mar eisimpleir, ormsa nam bithinn teagmhach mu dheidhinn?

### ALASDAIR:

To a degree, but ... Like everything else, you need to have the right tools for the job, and Chinese medicine has its strengths and weaknesses as does the allopathic medicine we in the West use, so if I thought I could benefit from a doctor's skills, oh, yes, I'd go to see one without a doubt, but by the same token, if I thought I'd benefit more from traditional techniques, through needles and herbs, I would use them.

### JAMES:

And can you give us an example of something you've suffered from that you treated yourself?

### ALASDAIR:

Well, perhaps the most common thing is the drink I take to prevent colds. There is a formula, jin ju di huang wan, and since I started to take it in the initial stages ... You know, once a cold has a grip on you, well, you know, it runs its course and that's it. But if you take these pills right at the very beginning, you'll fight it off, and so, I'm pleased to say, I haven't had a bad cold in at least ten years. It is really, really, really useful, and if you think about the lost hours of work that people could save and all the problems associated with that, it's a simple, but truly valuable thing.

### JAMES:

How much does Chinese medicine depend on the principle that the person being treated, or indeed the practitioner, believes in it? Would it work, for example, on me if I had my doubts about it?

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### ALASDAIR:

O bhiodh e ag obrachadh ort. Tha mi làn cinnteach. 'S dòcha gu bheil thu air an t-slighe a thaobh "placebo effects", agus tha sin a' tachairt ge bith dè an leighis a th' ann, agus chan urrainn dhut faighinn air falbh bhon a sin. Ach 's dòcha gur e an fhreagairt as fheàrr a th' ann gu bheil na prìnichean no "acupuncture" air a chleachdadh le racehorses on a tha e saor bho dhruagaichean is gnothaichean, you know, a bhiodh cunnartach anns an obair a tha sin agus tha e ag obair dha-rìreabh math. So, mura h-eil thu gu bhith a' dèanamh argamaid gu bheil seòrsa de bhreitheanas aig eich, you know, tha e a' sealltainn dhut gu bheil e ag obair co-dhiù, dìreach gu fiosaigeach. Agus a bharrachd air sin, a-thaobh "placebos", an àite a bhith a' cur sìos air "placebo effect", mar a tha cuid de dhaoine: "O tha a h-uile càil na do cheann, dìreach," uill, nach e rud mìorbhaileach a th' ann gum b' urrainn dhut leighis a dhèanamh dìreach a bhith a bhith a' smaoinichadh air rudeigin ann an dòigh "positive"? 'S e mìorbhail e fhèin a th' ann.

### SEUMAS:

Tha thu an seo ann an coimhearsnachd a tha fad air falbh bhon an àrd an ear, air an taobh an iar, coimhearsnachd Ghàidhealach. Bheil daoine a' gabhail, creidsinn na rudan a tha thu a' dèanamh an seo?

### ALASDAIR:

Oh, it would work on you. I'm sure of that. Perhaps you are going down the route of the "placebo effects", and that happens regardless of the type of medicine, and there's no getting away from that. But perhaps the best answer is that acupuncture is used on racehorses because it doesn't involve using drugs and things, you know, that would be risky in that line of work and it is very effective indeed. So, unless you want to argue that horses have some degree of awareness (judgement), you know, it shows that it really does work on a purely physical level. And besides that, regarding placebos, rather than dismissing the placebo effect, as some people do: "Oh, it's all just in your head," well, isn't it wonderful that you can achieve healing just by thinking about something in a positive way? That's a wonder in itself.

### JAMES:

You're here in a community which is far removed from the East, on the West Coast, in a Gaelic community. Do people accept and believe in the things you do here?

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### ALASDAIR:

O, gu ìre mhath. O, gu dearbha fhèin, agus mhothaich mi diofar mòr eadar croitearan agus tuathanasan, daoine a tha ag obair an dùthaich an taca ri daoine nach eil, às a' bhaile mhòr. Tha mi fhìn den bheachd gur e rud seann-fhasanta a tha sinn a' dèanamh. Nan deidheadh tu a-steach le druim goirt mar eisimpleir, bhithinn-sa, no cuideigin coltach rium, a' coimhead air na tha ceàrr a feuchainn ri obrachadh na gnothaichean ... a' feuchainn ri obrachadh a-mach dè tha ceàrr agus an uair sin a' dèanamh rudeigin mu dheidhinn anns an spot, agus ann an dòchas gum bi thu a' falbh bhon an oifis a' faireachdainn, you know, nas fheàrr na bha thu nuair a thàinig thu a-steach ann. Agus tha mi a' cluinntinn gearanan a-rithist 's a-rithist bho iomadh duine. Nuair a thèid iad chun an dotair, gheibh iad mionaid no dhà de dh'èisteachd, agus an uair sin, pileachan dìreach sgrìobhte air pàipear a' tighinn thuca tarsainn an deasg. Rud beag neo-phearsanta, so 's caomh le daoine gu bheil cuideigin ag èisteachd riutha agus dha-rìreabh a' feuchainn ri rudeigin a dhèanamh anns an spot airson an cuideachadh.

### SEUMAS:

Alasdair, mòran taing an-dràsta.

### ALASDAIR:

Làn di-beathte.

### ALASDAIR:

Oh, to a great extent. Oh, yes, indeed, and I've noticed a difference between crofters and farmers, people who work in the country as opposed to those who don't, from the city. I believe that we are doing something old-fashioned. If you went in with a sore back for example, I, or one of my colleagues, would look to see what was wrong and try to work things out ... try to work out what was wrong and then do something about it on the spot, in the hope that you would leave the office, you know, better than you were when you came in. And I hear complaints again and again from lots of people. When they go to the doctor, they get a couple of minutes of consultation, and then a prescription for pills comes at them across the desk. It's a little impersonal, so people like it when someone listens to them and really tries to do something on the spot to help them.

### JAMES:

Alasdair, thank you for now.

### ALASDAIR:

You're welcome.