

The 100th Monkey

By Mary Elizabeth Wakefield, LAc, Dipl. Ac., MS, MM

In a recent interview for an article that appeared in the December 2007 “Style” section of the *New York Times*, the reporter repeatedly asked me when facial acupuncture had “come of age.” When did I, one of the pioneers in this field, notice a change in the level of interest from the general public in this simultaneously new and yet venerable modality? Could I attribute the phenomenon to a marked proliferation in the availability and numbers of facial acupuncture practitioners? Could it be word-of-mouth, advertising, public relations, Web sites, the 21st-century business card, etc.? What was the mysterious X-factor that swayed the barometer of public opinion away from the monolithic business of cosmetic surgery toward this more holistic alternative?

In my opinion, it’s never one thing, but a sequence of energetic events that precipitates a sinoidal wave of interest in change. A number of people have offered explanations of the mechanics of such a process. Our awareness of the “100th monkey effect” originated with biologist Lyall Watson. In his 1979 book, *Lifetide*, he describes the proliferation of an adapted behavior among a tribe of monkeys on the Japanese island of Koshima. Certain members of this group had begun washing sweet potatoes given to them by researchers, prior to eating them. However, after reaching a certain critical mass (the 100th monkey) among this geographically isolated community, the entire group was seen to participate in this ritual. Even more remarkably, an identical pattern suddenly became apparent on a nearby island, and then on the mainland. These later manifestations occurred without direct contact between the simian collectives.¹ This occurrence lends credence to the idea that innovative ideas possess an archetypal thrust that influences collective behavior on a subconscious level. More recently, biologist Rupert Sheldrake has offered his theory of morphic resonance, in which what he calls morphogenetic fields “work by imposing patterns on otherwise random or indeterminate patterns of activity.”²

Baby Boomers Come of Age

A similar dynamic may be seen at work in the emergent fascination of the general public for facial acupuncture and related organic approaches to aging, driven by the “graying” of the predominant baby boomer demographic – more than 76 million in the U.S. alone. Within this group, the potential for such a 100th monkey effect is enormous! Baby boomers definitely are coming of age, with the first wave of them having arrived at the ripe old age of 61. These individuals are eagerly seeking increased longevity and healthy alternatives to invasive, toxic approaches. They form the largest collective of potential “elders” in the history of our culture and already have embraced many of the current trends in healthy living – organic food, sustainable living, recycling, etc. Many of them are well-heeled former hippies, who have extended their desire for spiritual transcendence to one of transformation of not only their physical bodies, but also their quality of life.

As this group is presented with the potential for enhanced longevity at a level of health not generally shared by previous generations, they are turning away, in increasing numbers, from the pre-existing paradigm of rest homes, assisted living, or government-sponsored programs like Medicare. Similarly, the safety net of health insurance seems ever more elusive. Consequently, this group is no longer willing to consign responsibility for their continuing health exclusively to Western allopathic medicine, unlike their parents. Many more are having acupuncture and complementary medicine treatments than at any other time in history, achieving a new harmony between body and spirit, rather than simply treating the former as a malfunctioning machine.

Facing the Change (and Challenge) of Aging

This column historically has focused on the impact of aging upon the individual, but as we have seen, the face of our society also is undergoing a profound metamorphosis. As the individual boomers choose to “change the face” of their aging, our civilization is “facing the change” of an entire corpus of beliefs about what it means to be “elderly.” Sixty is now the new 40, the harbinger of middle age, or so they are saying. It’s indisputable that the influence of the baby boomers has contributed to the 100th monkey effect and is permitting us to reconfigure our relationship with the aging process.

Yes, facial acupuncture has indeed begun to come of age and it’s our fervent hope that this holistic, non-invasive, transformative approach to the challenge of aging will continue to make inroads into popular consciousness.

References

1. Watson L. *Lifetide*. New York: Bantam Books, 1980:147-8.
 2. www.sheldrake.org/Articles&Papers/papers/morphic/morphic_intro.html Accessed 1/20/08. _
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