

DOWN WHAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU

BY STUART J. ROBINSON



"Take two aspirin and call me in the morning." That old adage just doesn't cut it anymore. As Americans take a greater role in directing their own healthcare, we are opening our minds, and our wallets, to a broad range of holistic treatments. But before doing so, it's important to learn the lingo. Sometimes terms mean different things from different people – for reasons having to do with language, marketing and differing philosophies.

Take “holistic healthcare,” for instance. Literally, it is a “system of healthcare based on a concept of the ‘whole’ person as one whose body, mind, spirit and emotions are in balance with the environment,” according to the *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia*. Stressing personal responsibility for health, a holistic approach may include treatments such as acupuncture, biofeedback, faith healing, folk medicine, megavitamin therapy, meditation or yoga, among other things.

Taken at face value, that’s clear enough. But like many faces in Scottsdale, “face value” is open to alteration. Health-policy expert Daniel I. Shostak, president of Strategic Affairs Forecasting, boasts a master’s degree in public health from the University of California, Berkeley, and has led health-policy seminars on Capitol Hill. He says marketing has transformed holistic healthcare into a buzzword that tries to incorporate everything under complementary and alternative medicine.

“The usual question people ask is, ‘What is the difference between complementary medicine and alternative medicine?’ It’s that complementary practices usually are used in conjunction with medicine,” he says. “Alternative practices are independent of what is practiced by medical doctors.” Shostak is careful to avoid using the word “traditional,” which could mean two different things – practices employed by MDs or the ancient practices of China, India and various native peoples.

Some treatments could be complementary or alternative, depending upon their application. For instance, Valley massage therapist Jenna Sparks focuses her practice, MassageWerx, on therapeutic massage – supporting other treatments a patient may be receiving. But she also believes that massage therapy has stand-alone benefits.

“Alternative treatments, such as massage therapy, acupressure or reflexology, can take the place of pain relievers, sleeping pills or anti-anxiety drugs,” Sparks says. “While you have to keep taking pills because they wear off, these body treatments trigger long-lasting changes.”

Other terms likely to come up while researching holistic healthcare are “allopathic,” “homeopathic” and “naturopathic.”

Allopathic simply refers to treatments utilized by medical doctors. In response to symptoms, practitioners make diagnoses and employ whatever tools are necessary to suppress or eliminate the cause.



Shirodhara, an Ayurveda treatment

Homeopathic treatment is a different approach. "When people talk about holistic medicine, often they're talking about homeopathy," Shostak says. That is a form of alternative medicine that seeks to stimulate the body's defense mechanisms and processes to prevent or treat illness, according to the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), one of the National Institutes of Health. A key premise is that every person has energy, sometimes called a vital force, and when this energy is disrupted or imbalanced, health problems develop.

Homeopathic treatment involves giving extremely small doses of substances that usually produce symptoms in healthy people when given in larger doses. This approach is called "like cures like." NCCAM reports that while various explanations have been proposed as to how homeopathy might work, none has been scientifically verified. The positive effects of homeopathy are not readily explained in scientific terms. And research studies on homeopathy have been contradictory in their findings.

Homeopathy often involves the use of nutritional supplements. Among the many on the market is Cinnergen, produced by Scottsdale-based eFoodSafety.com Inc. Cinnergen is a liquid nutritional supplement aimed at promoting healthy blood sugar levels in diabetics and pre-diabetics. Its ingredients are natural, not synthesized, and include cinnamon bark extract, which is thought to make insulin work more efficiently.

Naturopathic medicine is a method of treating disease without surgery or synthetic drugs. Rather, it uses special diets, herbs, vitamins and massage to assist the natural healing processes." Naturopaths have their own medical schools, including the local Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine, where they earn four-year naturopathic doctor (ND) degrees. They are licensed in Arizona by the state's Naturopathic Physicians Board of Medical Examiners.

"In naturopathy school, you learn all the medical sciences the first two years," says Meghana Thanki, a Scottsdale naturopath. "The second two years, we learn clinical nutrition, lifestyle, acupuncture, homeopathy and Western botanicals."

Ancient Practices

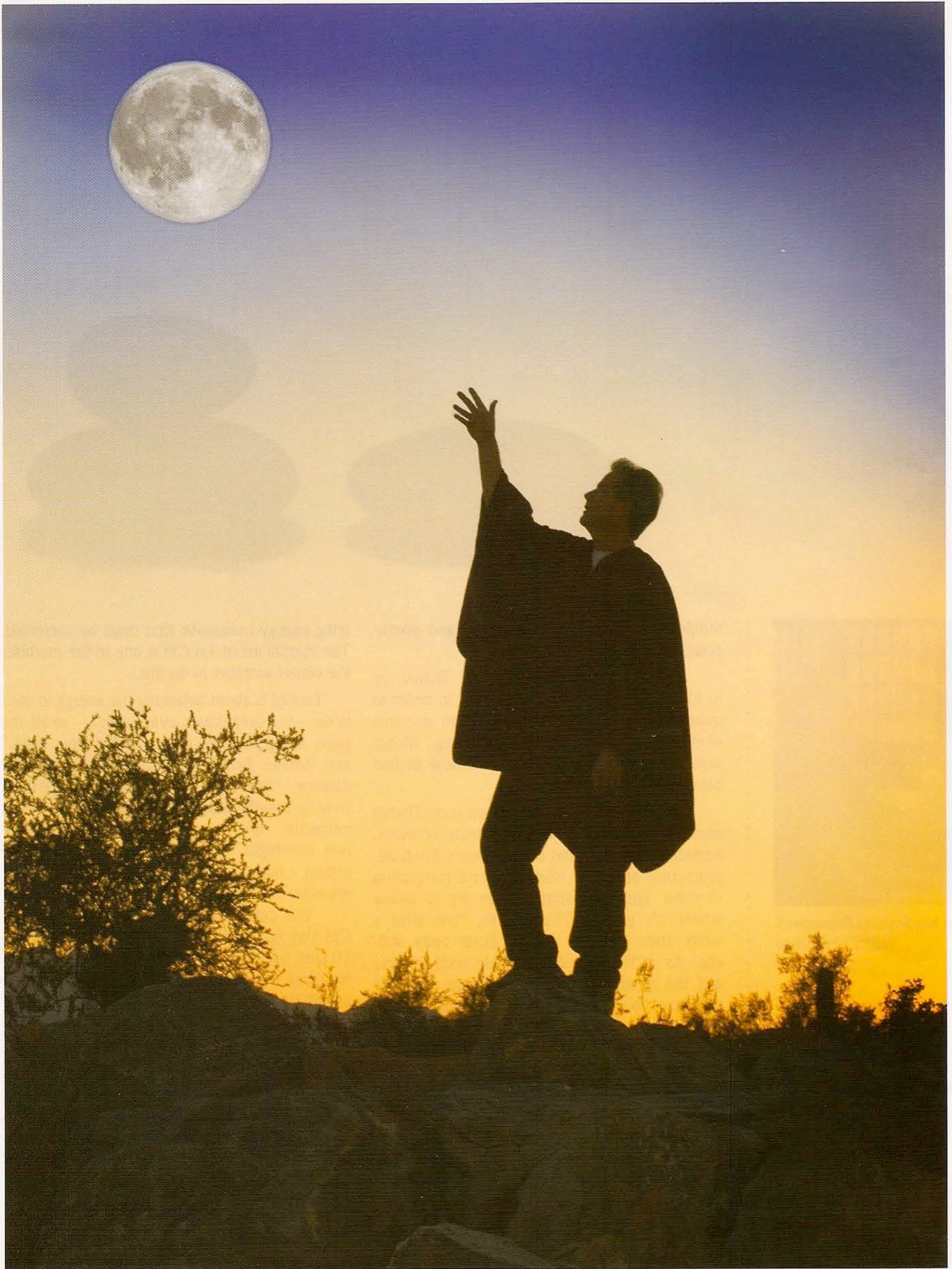
A number of ancient civilizations have handed down holistic philosophies. What most have in common is the quest for personal equilibrium.

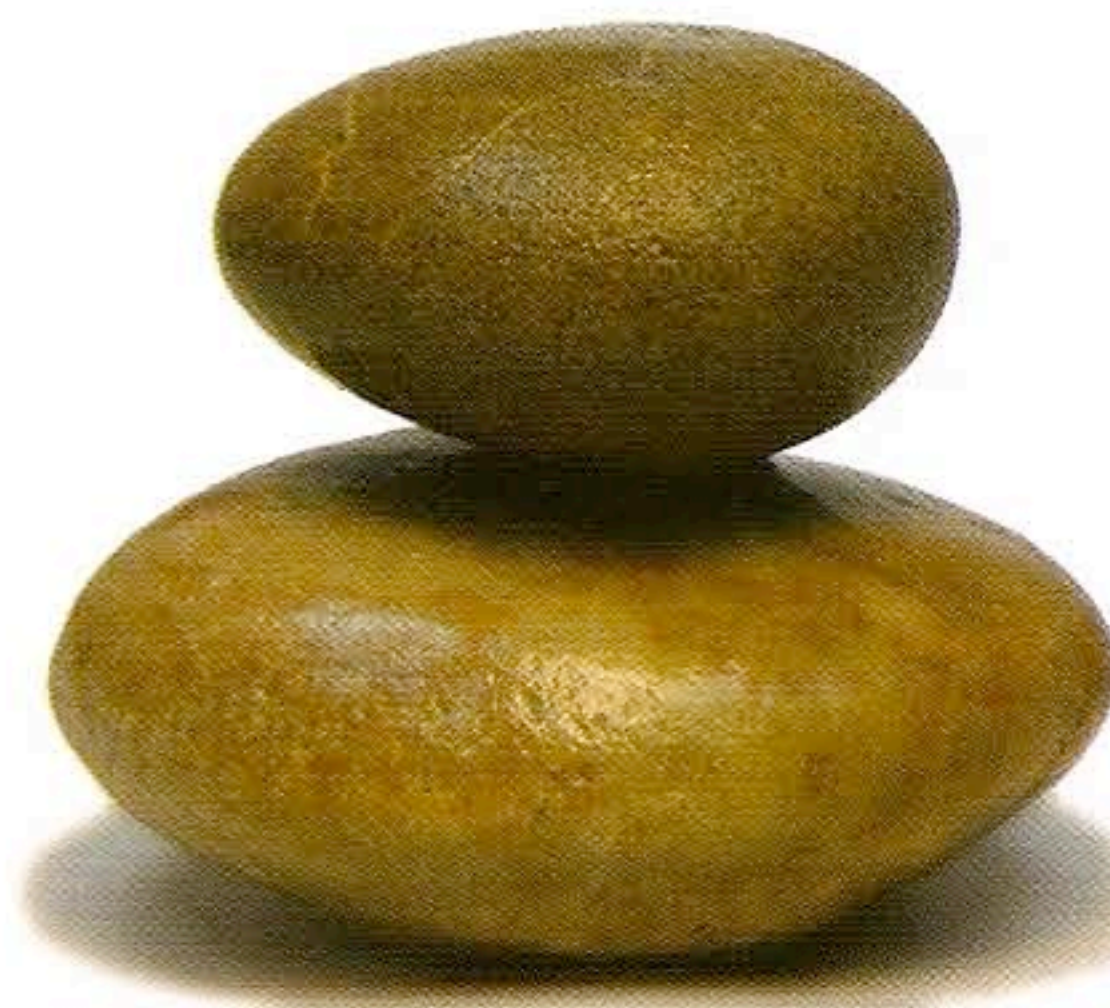
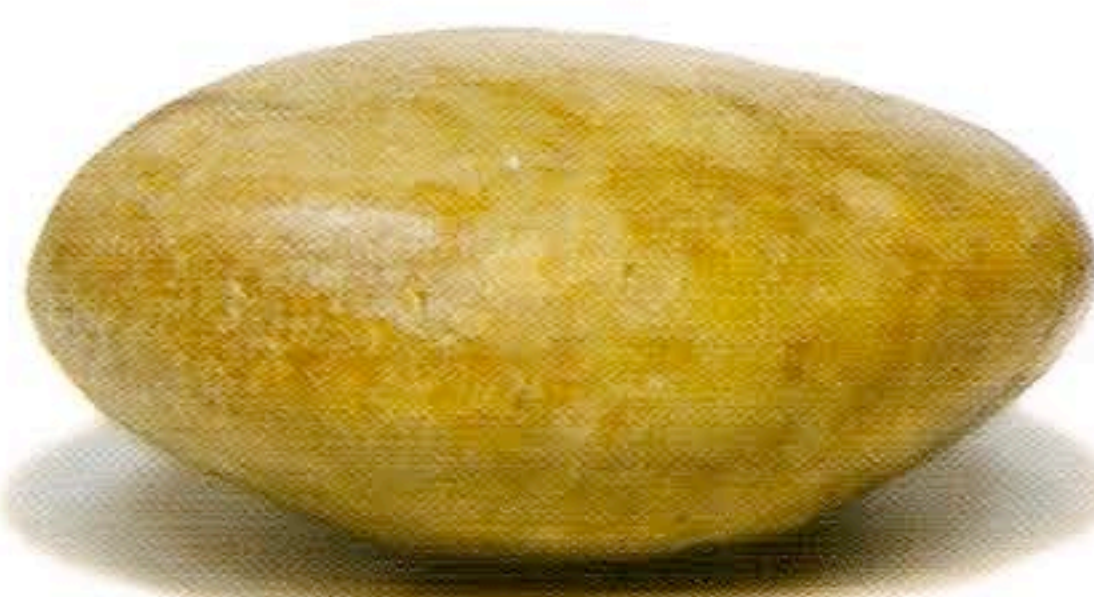
Thanki is trained in Ayurveda, a healing philosophy invented 5,000 years ago in India. Last December, she and her mother, psychiatrist Purnima Mehta, opened AyurZona, an integrated wellness center in Old Scottsdale that combines ancient Ayurvedic wisdom with the logic and knowledge of Western medicine. According to Mehta, "ayur" means "life" and "vedic" means "science."

"We all have five elements in our bodies — earth, water, air, fire and space," she says. "All of us have a basic, predominant constitution which is a mixture of one or two of these elements. Because of that, we have certain



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Master Ben Serpas of Philosophical Martial Arts Institute

temperaments, certain personalities and predispositions to particular illnesses.”

Working together, Mehta and Thanki try to identify a patient’s predisposition in order to treat him or her. “You want sufficient amounts of everything but not excess of anything,” Mehta says. “A key philosophy of ours is how to find balance in life, at every level.”

One of the Ayurvedic treatments Thanki uses is shirodhara, in which a stream of warm, herbalized oil is poured on a patient’s forehead, promoting profound relaxation and integration of mind, body and spirit. “They try to follow where it’s going,” Thanki says, “but after a while they have to let go. Their body softens. As it lets go, slowly their body relaxes and the mind relaxes. All the things from the past start to come up slowly and pass away.”

Some patients, however, need more than relaxation. They are in pain. “People come to us as a last resort a lot of times,” Thanki says. “They’ve tried medications; they’ve tried surgery; and they’re just tired of it. Eventually, they turn to this.”

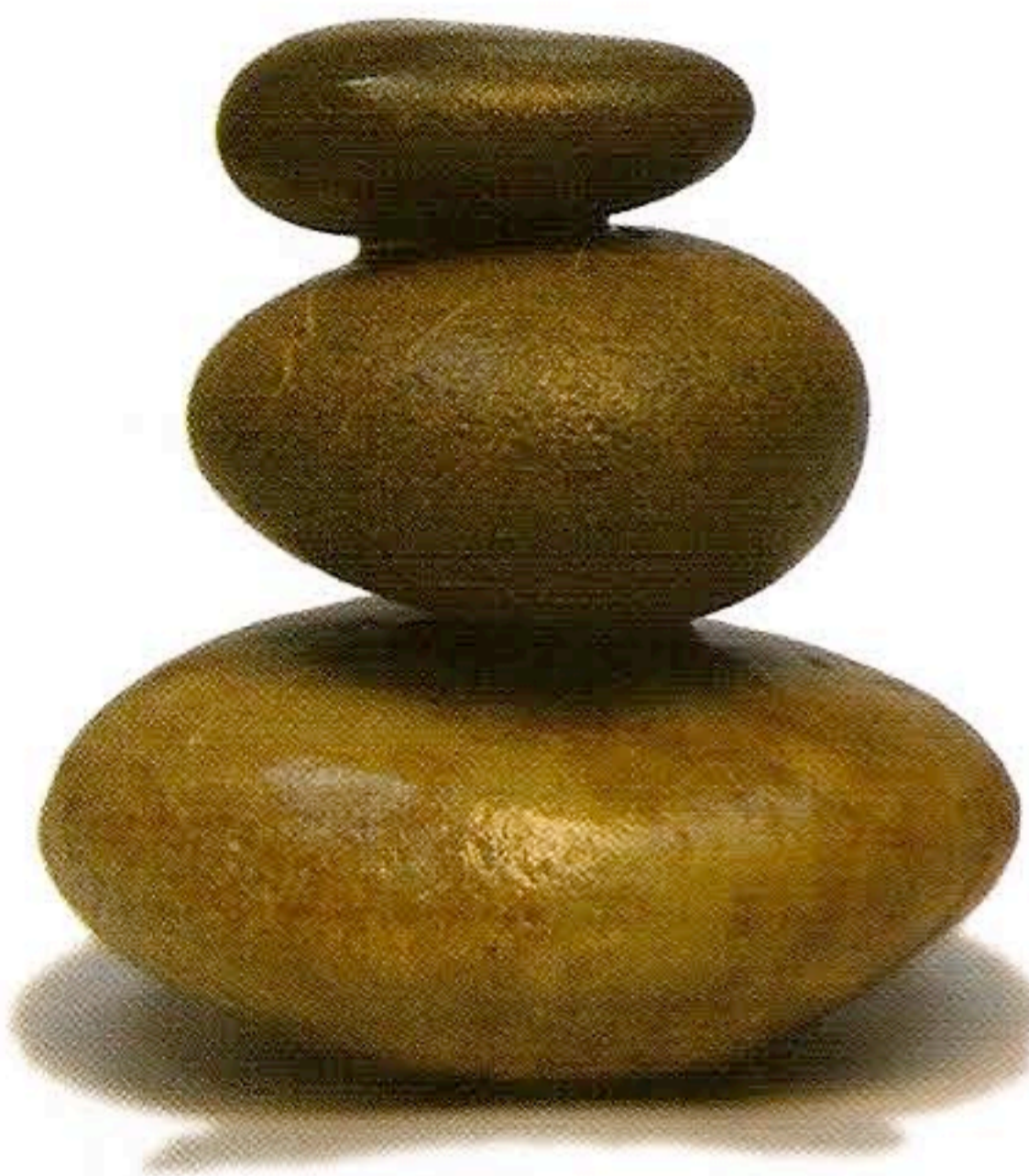
According to the Chinese tradition that governs the Philosophical Martial Arts Institute in Phoenix, stress or tension stems from an under-

lying energy imbalance that must be corrected. The martial art of Tai Chi is one of the methods the center employs to do this.

“Tai Chi is about balancing the energy in your body – in every organ, every gland – so all the parts are producing exactly what you need,” says Master Ben Serpas, the center’s national director. “From the very beginning, you learn how to breathe correctly, stand correctly, walk correctly. It’s a process; it doesn’t happen overnight. You learn to be more disciplined with yourself and control your appetite. In time, this will lead to more balance.”

The center plans to celebrate World Tai Chi Day on April 27, at Roadrunner Park from 10 a.m. to noon. There will be a free workshop for those who want to learn and experience the art of Tai Chi.

Shamanic healer John English draws much of his philosophy from the Peruvian Quero tribe, which descended from the Incas. “I’ve taken the approach of the shamans of Peru and different mystical traditions and, in an effort to strive for simplicity, have developed techniques and ways of working with things so that they are easily adopted by the Western mind.”



“Everything exists as energy,” he explains. “By learning to work with energy, you can really change your life – physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.”

“If a person has an emotional problem that has manifested some physical condition,” English says, “there is an energy that is that emotional problem. By removing that energy from that person’s energy field – often referred to as their aura – that problem no longer manifests in their life. It doesn’t have its energy anymore.”

English teaches people to do this in a series of videos available on his Web site, NoSpiritLeftBehind.com. He also leads training seminars and workshops. “They’re all geared toward sharing what I’ve learned about healing,” he adds.

Mind Over Matter

Sandy Cowen, a Scottsdale-based holistic healing coach, speaks from personal experience. She has recovered from five different conditions in the last 25 years: rheumatoid arthritis, leukemia, hyperthyroidism (Graves’ disease), chronic allergies with respiratory issues and psoriasis. “I don’t always believe the prognosis,” Cowen

says. “Once you decide to be well, it comes. Sometimes the answers are there and you are too afraid to try them. I’m a big believer in seizing the opportunity and trying. With chronic illnesses, you have a long window in which to work. In those kinds of situations, alternative methods and the holistic process, which is multifaceted, can work for you. I don’t tell other people how to do it, because their bodies are different from mine,” she says. “But I do tell them that there are answers for them, and I help them find them.”

But Cowen doesn’t write off modern medicine. “If you have a very short window, an emergency, pain or trauma, then you’re better off going with allopathic treatment right away and then trying to supplement it with alternative approaches,” she says.

With the myriad of healthcare options, the good news is you don’t have to commit to just one type. Do your homework and find out what’s best for you and your body. **.SM**



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