

ACUPUNCTURE THE FIVE  HEALTH CENTRE ELEMENTS

Johannes Diedericus (Dick) van Buren, a pioneering acupuncturist who played a central role in bringing acupuncture to the West, died on 12<sup>th</sup> May. He was one of the finest practitioners in his field, teaching prodigiously, and by example, for many years around the world. To observe him in clinic was an inspirational experience both for students and patients.

Van Buren was born in Djakarta, Indonesia on 27<sup>th</sup> November 1921, the only child of Dutch parents. His parents were Theosophists and they moved to India, so he had imbibed Eastern philosophy from a young age. This influence permeated his life, and his profound interest in esoteric teachings led him to become both a priest of the Liberal Catholic Church and a Co-Freemason, 32<sup>nd</sup> degree. Events in his early life helped to create a self-made, independent and practical young man.

At seventeen van Buren was called up to serve in the Dutch army, and sent to Java. By the age of twenty he was a Sergeant Major in charge of seventy-six men. They became prisoners of the Japanese for four years and were moved around the islands of South-East Asia, mostly building aerodromes, or “putting hills into holes” as he put it. Those who survived did so on what became known as a rice sandwich: rice in the morning, rice in the afternoon, and rice in the evening. Later on, and nearing death, he was treated by an indigenous tribesman who cured his dysentery with a herbal remedy. Liberated by the British, he was repatriated to Holland.

In 1947 he moved to England, training firstly as a nurse before studying naturopathy, osteopathy and homeopathy. It was during these years that he attended a lecture in

acupuncture, and thought that, "as it had been in existence for three thousand years, there must be something in it". After receiving the fundamentals in only 14 days with a small group of people, he continued studying on his own and only much later began using the needle. He went to Taiwan in 1972 and attained a Doctorate from Wu Wei Ping, a Chinese Master. On his return groups of students in various countries asked him to teach them, and he subsequently founded colleges of acupuncture in England, Holland, Norway and Australia. He was, until his death, the Chancellor of the International College of Oriental Medicine in Sussex.

Van Buren's driving force was to preserve what is known as Stems and Branches, the philosophy at the root of acupuncture that emanated from, but was banned in, communist China. He received the texts of this knowledge from Korea, and made it his life's work to develop and apply it practically to treat patients. He continued researching this material rigorously until very recently. His other mission, that of creating an acupuncture hospital, is still to be realised. Hundreds of students from around the world availed themselves of his knowledge and encouragement, and many went on to become eminent practitioners, scholars and teachers. Van Buren was instrumental in turning a medicine that was not recognised in the West into what is now an established alternative.

Van Buren was a powerfully built man, with a calm, rock-like presence. Very much his own man, he was not impressed with class or status. A healer to his patients and a profound inspiration to his students, van Buren was a courageous, tenacious, even heroic figure, and will be remembered with admiration, affection and gratitude.

He is survived by his wife and devoted colleague, Pauline, and a son and daughter from a previous marriage.

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