



Nourishing the Five Spirits:

Our Key to Health

by Shoshanna Katzman

The beauty of Chinese medicine is the way it treats an individual as a whole being. Its major goal is to establish free flowing qi (pronounced 'chee') throughout the body's energetic pathways. Good health is also attained by balancing

the emotional and spiritual aspects of the body. This is especially important when an individual has emotional and mental health issues. Depending on individual needs, treatment is aimed at addressing the root cause and simultaneously focusing on alleviating

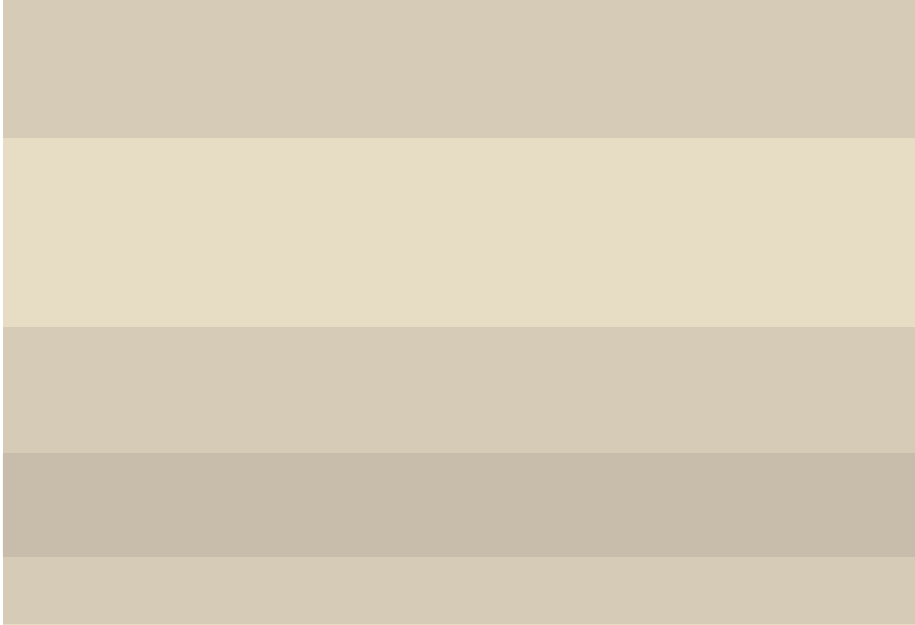
symptoms. This is particularly important during the winter months when light is diminished and cold weather impedes free flow of qi and blood, whereby a tendency toward depression arises for many individuals. It is a time when seeking help from Chinese medicine is quite useful.

The appropriate course and focus of treatment for each person is determined when a Chinese medicine practitioner conducts an initial consultation. Its purpose is to gather information about an individual's medical history and current symptoms and signs, followed by an assessment to determine their energetic "pattern of disharmony." Treatment such as acupuncture or Chinese herbal medicine is then recommended to bring a person back into a state of energetic balance and physical health. Tai chi and/or qigong also provide excellent support as forms of self-healing exercise.

According to Chinese medicine, balanced emotions have a tremendous impact on overall health. It is believed that emotions that are excessive and unresolved over an extended period of time have a deleterious effect on the body. According to the Law of the Five Elements, this leads to energetic injury of the particular emotion's associated organ. In this paradigm sadness is associated with the heart, fear with the kidneys, anger with the liver, worry with the spleen, and grief with the lungs.

For example, repressed anger builds up and injures the energetics of the liver which governs the free flow of qi, flow of emotions, and storage of blood. When the liver is injured it negatively impacts levels of energy, overall health, emotional state, as well as blood storage. This leads to conditions such as chronic fatigue, depression, digestive disorders, gynecological problems, and infertility. On the other hand, when the liver energy is balanced blood and qi circulate smoothly leading to open blood vessels, warmth, and nourishment throughout the body.

Nourishment of the spiritual component of the body is also essential for optimal health. Chinese medicine delineates this aspect of the



body as “the five spirits” of shen, hun, po, yi (pronounced ‘yee’), and zhi (pronounced ‘jee’) - residing respectively in the heart, liver, lungs, spleen, and kidneys. Taking special notice of the five spirits is especially important for individuals with emotional and/or mental health issues.

Chinese medicine treatment of these conditions is most successful when it addresses the overall energetic pattern of disharmony combined with nourishment of spirit. For example, an individual diagnosed with “constrained liver qi” and reports having depression, unrelenting anger, and anxiety during sleep would need such an approach. In this case, the excessive anger is both injuring the liver and depleting hun spirit, also known as “the ethereal soul.” This particular spirit is the one being affected because it resides in the liver and is the form of consciousness that is active during nocturnal hours. Therefore, the reported anxiety during sleep is being caused by a diminished hun. Treatment would be directed toward restoring flow of liver energy, balancing the liver energy to resolve

feelings of anger, and strengthening hun spirit. A healthy hun contributes to an individual being creative, assertive, resolute, and good at planning. Therefore, asking about improvement of these various attributes as treatment progresses would be a sign of increased nourishment of the hun spirit.

There is much to be learned and gained from this age-old holistic approach that accesses and stimulates an individual’s innate healing capability. A multitude of factors need to be addressed in order to bring an individual into a balanced state of health and well-being. Chinese medicine practitioners work to improve quality and quantity of qi flow, emotional balance, and spiritual health - all interrelated, interdependent, and mutually supportive components of healing.

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