



Chinese Medicine & the Emotion of Grief

by Shoshanna Katzman, L.Ac., M.S.

The Chinese medicine system of holistic healing teaches that health is restored through establishment of harmony and balance in terms of the physical, emotional, mental, spiritual and energetic aspects of life. This includes quality of daily living habits as well as expression and behavior in relationship to self and others – all having a monumental impact on one’s health. Accordingly, a major tenet of Chinese medicine classifies one’s emotional state as an endogenous cause of disease with a direct impact on health status and eventual longevity.

The Law of the Five Elements explains that anger injures the liver and gall bladder, fear the kidneys and urinary bladder, worry the spleen and stomach, sadness the heart and small intestines and grief the lungs and large intestines - yin and yang organs respectively. Each of these naturally occurring emotions needs to be felt, processed, expressed and then released, rather than repressed. However, potential negative impact to the energetic balance and qi flow of its associated vital organ happens when an emotion becomes excessive and builds up within the system over an extended period of time. Therefore, according to Chinese medicine diagnosis the root cause of a problem with a particular organ system

oftentimes stems from an energetic imbalance of its associated emotion. And vice versa, a persistent disease state oftentimes leads to imbalance of its associated emotion.

This is easy to understand in terms of grief, an emotion that often arises with great intensity and without much warning - one that must be fully felt, experienced, processed and then released. Otherwise grief lingers, leaving an individual incapable of moving forward in a positive and emotionally healthy way, whereby a condition involving the lungs and/or large intestines has repressed, excessive levels of grief as their underlying root cause. For example, it is not unusual for chronic asthma to be related to deep-seated issues of unresolved grief. This connection between the lungs and grief is clearly illustrated when a person who has successfully quit smoking to begin smoking cigarettes upon experiencing a profound loss.

It is thus prudent to stay mindful about feeling and experiencing personal grief to its fullest when it arises. Regardless of the loss, one must work diligently to accept, process the feelings associated with grief in a reasonable amount of time, and then move forward in a productive state of mind. Chinese medicine treatments such as

acupuncture, Chinese herbal medicine and dietary therapy are also tremendously beneficial in helping to release unresolved grief. These along with practice of qigong or tai chi involving gentle, flowing movements integrated with deep breathing can help an individual process grief appropriately to prevent future damage to the body. Of course, working together with a psychotherapist is also beneficial for working through one’s feelings. Therapeutic massage is also quite helpful to release constriction of tight muscles as a result of unrelenting and unresolved grief.

The lungs are essential for bringing in oxygenated air, then releasing carbon dioxide. Accordingly, healthy qi of the lungs promotes the natural life cycle of “bringing in the new” and “letting go of the old”. This is analogous to the specific functions of lungs and large intestines - whereby the lungs bring in fresh clean air and the intestines release waste from the body. According to Chinese medicine principles, this also explains why an acupuncturist treating a patient with asthma will query them to make certain that they are eliminating their bowels sufficiently on a daily basis.

In general, the act of “belly breathing” in combination with purposeful qigong movements strengthens the ability of the lungs and large intestines to function properly. Furthermore, there is a special qigong exercise to strengthen the lungs that is part of a set called the “Five Healing Sounds”. This exercise releases grief from the lungs through mental imagery combined with movements. It includes instruction to “bathe the lungs” with the color white upon inhalation, followed by releasing grief with vocalization of the “see-ah” sound.

According to the Law of the Five Elements, white is the color associated with the lungs and large intestines, pungent is their associated flavor, and autumn the season when their energy is at its height. Eating pungent or white foods are thus recommended to nourish the energetics of the lungs. Examples of pungent foods include garlic, ginger, onion, radish, black pepper, chili, cinnamon, cardamom, mustard greens; and white foods include cabbage, pear, rice, leek, soybeans, almonds, asparagus, cucumber, celery, banana, and eggs.

Special attention to lung health during autumn is important to protect them from invasion of external climatic factors, also known as exogenous causes of disease. In this case it is the characteristic dryness during this season that injures the lungs leading to conditions such as worsening of asthma, onset of colds, chronic cough or other respiratory issues.

Working mindfully to keep grief from becoming congested within the energetic system reduces the risk of stagnant qi leading to physical symptoms and vice versa. Personal commitment to loving and honoring oneself, thinking clearly, communicating honestly, staying open to creativity and joyfulness, and feeling emotions fully provides an excellent plan for health and healing enabling a keen ability to deal with personal grief effectively.

Shoshanna Katzman, L.Ac., M.S., is the author of Qigong for Staying Young, co-author of Feeling Light and the director of the Red Bank Acupuncture & Wellness Center in Shrewsbury, NJ. For more information, visit www.healing4u.com

Red Bank Acupuncture & Wellness Center

Balance Your Energy

Acupuncture • Chinese Herbs • Therapeutic Massage
Tai Chi & Qigong Lessons

Shoshanna Katzman, L.Ac., M.S., Director

Red Bank Acupuncture & Wellness Center is a caring group of individuals who are dedicated to helping you heal naturally

Enhance Your Health Today by Calling : **732-758-1800**

830 Broad St. Suite A, Shrewsbury, NJ 07702

www.healing4u.com

Gift Certificates Available