

Foundations of Oriental Medicine

By Giovanni Maciocia

THE MAJOR ORGAN SYSTEMS AND ENERGETIC NATURE

The **HEART** governs the blood, controls the blood vessels, manifests in the complexion, houses the Mind, opens into the tongue and controls sweat. The Heart (Yin) is the Fire element coupled with the Small Intestine (Yang). Qualities are redness, energy strongest in summer, hot, laughter, joy/sorrow, bitter taste. Imbalances are insomnia, dream-disturbed sleep, anxiety, palpitations, mania and mental disturbances.

The **LIVER** stores blood, ensures the smooth flow of Qi (vital energy or life force, pronounced "chee"), controls the sinews/tendons, manifests in the nails, opens into the eyes and houses the Ethereal Soul. Liver (Yin) is the wood element coupled with the Gallbladder (Yang). Qualities are blue/green, wind and /internal movement, energy strongest in spring, sound of shouting, anger and sour taste. Liver dominates the psychospiritual nature and emotions. Imbalances are depression, anger, frustration; headaches, hypertension, tendinitis, eye problems, heartburn; "stagnant energy", e.g., PMS, fibroids, muscular tension; "internal wind", e.g., tics, tremors, spasms or roaming pain.

The **LUNGS** govern Qi and respiration, control meridians and blood vessels, control dispersing and descending of energy, regulate water passages, control skin and body hair, open into the nose and house the Corporeal Soul of the physical body. Lungs (Yin) are the metal element coupled with the Large Intestine (Yang). Qualities are whiteness, dryness, energy strongest in autumn, sound of weeping, grief and pungent taste. Imbalances are lung problems, e.g., shortness of breath, sinusitis, allergies, cough, asthma; dry skin and spontaneous sweating. The Lungs are the most external organs being the first line of defense and subject to external influences, e.g., cold, heat, dryness and viruses.

The **SPLEEN** governs transformation and transportation of nutrients, controls the blood in its pathways, controls the muscles and the four limbs, opens into the mouth and manifests in the lips, controls the "raising Qi" and houses thought. Spleen (Yin) is the earth element coupled with the Stomach (Yang). Qualities are yellow hue, internal dampness, energy strongest in late summer, sound of singing, pensive mood and sweet taste. Imbalances are

worry, obesity (damp accumulation), food cravings, nausea, loose stool, fatigue, abdominal fullness, organ prolapse.

The **KIDNEYS** store “essence” and govern birth, growth, sexuality and development and are the foundation of life; produce marrow, rule the brain and control bones; govern water, control the two lower orifices and house will power. Kidneys (Yin) are the water element coupled with the Urinary Bladder (Yang). Qualities are darkness (under the eyes), coldness, energy strongest in winter, sound of groaning, fearfulness and salty taste. Imbalances are retardation, back pain, sore knees, deafness/tinnitus, urinary problems, prostatitis, reduced sexual drive, fatigue, night sweating, dizziness, poor memory or concentration. Kidneys maintain life’s “pilot light” which dissipates with age and, therefore, need strengthening.

Oriental medicine stresses (Yin/Yang) balance as a key to health: balance between rest and exercise, balance in diet, balance in sexual activity, balance in climatic conditions. Any long-term imbalance can become a cause of disease. For example, too much rest and not enough exercise; too much physical exercise, too much work, too much sex or not enough; an unbalanced diet, unbalanced emotional life, extreme climatic conditions, can all become causes of disease. The balance, however, is relative to each person.

INTERNAL CAUSES OF DISEASE: EMOTIONS

The view of the internal organs as physical-mental-emotional spheres of influence is one of the most important aspects of Oriental medicine. Central to this is the concept of Qi as matter-energy that gives rise to physical or mental and emotional phenomena at the same time. Thus, in Oriental medicine, body, mind and emotions are an integrated whole with no beginning or end, in which the internal organs are the major sphere of influence.

It is important to put the role of the emotions in Oriental medicine in perspective. First of all, emotions are a natural part of human existence and no human being ever escapes being sad, angry or worried sometimes. The emotions only become causes of disease when they are particularly intense and, most of all, when they are prolonged over a period of time, especially when they are not expressed or acknowledged. The seven emotions are:

ANGER: Includes resentment, repressed anger, irritability, frustration, rage, indignation, animosity or bitterness. Any of these emotional states can affect the **LIVER**. Anger, which makes Qi rise, can manifest in the head and neck,

such as headaches, tinnitus (ear ringing), dizziness, red blotches on the front part of the neck, a red face, thirst, a red tongue and bitter taste.

JOY: What is meant here by “joy” is obviously not a state of healthy contentment but one of excessive excitement which can injure the **HEART**. Joy can become a cause of disease when it is excessive as in those persons who are in a state of continuous mental stimulation or excessive excitement; in other words, a life of “hard playing”.

SADNESS AND GRIEF: Weakens the **LUNGS** but also affects the **HEART**. Sadness leads to deficiency in Lung-Qi and may manifest in a variety of symptoms, such as breathlessness, tiredness, depression or crying.

WORRY AND PENSIVENESS: Pensiveness means excessive thinking or excessive mental work or studying. This weakens the **SPLEEN** and causes tiredness, loss of appetite and loose stools. Worry depletes and knots both the **SPLEEN** and **LUNGS** leading to anxiety, breathlessness and stiffness of the shoulders and neck.

FEAR AND SHOCK: Fear depletes the **KIDNEYS** causing bed-wetting in children and in adults a feeling of heat in the face, night sweating, palpitations and a dry mouth and throat. Shock affects the **HEART** and **KIDNEYS** causing night sweating, a dry mouth, dizziness or tinnitus.

EXTERNAL CAUSES OF DISEASE: WEATHER.

The external causes of disease are due to climatic factors—wind, cold, summer-heat, dampness, dryness and fire—which can attack the surface of the body via skin/muscles, mouth or nose. Here we are talking about excessive climatic conditions or when the body defenses are weak.

OTHER CAUSES OF DISEASE:

Other causes of disease are weak constitution, over-exertion, excessive sexual activity, bad diet, trauma, parasites, chemical toxicity and wrong treatment.

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*Linda Joy Stone, M.S., L.Ac., Dipl. Ac., 520-444-6901,
stoneland@comcast.net*