

## Chinese Medicine Newsletter - Fall 2008

Welcome. Please feel free to forward this newsletter to family and friends whom you feel might be interested.

In previous writings I have discussed various aspects of the diagnostic process in Chinese Medicine. This included the awareness of the cycles of the seasons and their various correspondences with organs and functions of our system. One aspect I have not yet mentioned is the “Chinese Clock.” This is similar in concept to the notion of daily biorhythms. It is useful for the practitioner in designing treatments to take into account and utilize these rhythms. Also, it can be helpful for each of us to be aware of these patterns in relation to our lifestyle choices in helping to optimize our health and well being.

The Chinese clock refers to the 24 hour day divided into two hour segments. Accordingly, each organ and function of our system has a two hour period of maximum functioning. This means that at that time it has more energy to perform its functions than at any other time of the day. The following are the correspondences:

3:00-5:00 AM - Lungs  
5:00-7:00 AM - Large Intestine  
7:00-9:00 AM - Stomach  
9:00-11:00 AM - Spleen  
11:00-1:00PM - Heart  
1:00-3:00 PM - Small Intestine  
3:00-5:00 PM - Bladder  
5:00-7:00 PM - Kidney  
7:00-9:00 PM - Pericardium  
9:00-11:00 PM - Triple Burner  
11:00-1:00 AM - Gall Bladder  
1:00-3:00 AM - Liver

These can be diagnostically useful in several ways. For example, waking up regularly in the middle of the night at 2:00AM may indicate a problem with the liver energy, or at 4:00AM with the lungs. Some consider themselves “morning” people while others feel more alive later in the day. If we consistently feel fatigued during a particular time of day, the corresponding organ and function may need assistance.

It is not possible in this format to elaborate on each of the organs, but I will touch on a few to illustrate the usefulness of this model.

The maximum time of the Large Intestine is 5:00-7:00 in the morning. This means that it

does it s job best during these hours. Eliminating first thing in the morning is optimum for cleaning out our system for the new day. This applies mentally as well as physically. Letting go and cleansing ourselves of any emotional and mental waste we have accumulated is essential to be able to receive the new day's input. If you are suffering from constipation, allotting the time before 7:00 AM to have a bowel movement can train your system to do so more effectively. Many are pleasantly surprised at the level of improvement in elimination by simply adhering to this guideline. So hopefully there will be a crescendo of sound that cascades through the Washington morning hours. The sound of toilets flushing!

The time of the stomach is from 7:00 to 9:00 in the morning. This makes sense. After eliminating, our system is ready to fill up with fuel for the day. This is when it is optimally ready and able to digest food. Some of us wake up and have cup of coffee and a half of piece of toast for breakfast. This is like preparing for a long road trip by putting one gallon of gas in the tank. Our system is primed to absorb nutrients at this time. Eating a healthy and abundant breakfast fills our tank. Sometime people report not being hungry in the morning. Most times ths is due to eating dinner too late in the evening. Much of it remains incompletely processed in our system, causing lack of appetite in the morning. On a camping trip, for example, when dinner is eaten early, before dark, one is usually ravenous in the morning for breakfast.

The time of the Spleen is from 9:00-11:00AM. One of it's functions is assisting in transforming the food we eat into usable energy and transporting it throughout the body. Thus, it is poised to function in conjunction with the stomach in energizing our system at in the early part of the day.

Conversely, the time from 7:00-9:00PM is the stomach's maximum time of rest and minimal functioning (opposite of 7:00-9:00 AM). Thus, eating a large and/or heavy meal during this time puts undue strain on our digestive system. Ideally, it is best if dinner is the lightest meal.

It is as if our stomach in the morning is saying, "Bring it on, I am ready to work. What? Just a half piece of toast? What's going on?.How are you going to make it through the day?" Then, when it is bedding down to relax for the evening between 7:00 - 9:00 PM, it complains, "Wait a minute. What is this meat, potatoes, vegetables, bread, dessert? I didn't sign on for night duty. This is my rest time. I'll work on it for a bit, but then I'm going to bed."

Looking at some other functions, the Gall Bladder (11:00-1:00AM) and Liver (1:00-3:00AM) are at their maximum functioning at the time when we ideally are asleep. Let's look at an example of someone who is suffering from a hyperactive gall bladder. This could manifest in a variety of ways including headaches and migraines, hip pain, lack of articulation of the joints, nausea, vision disturbance, etc. Any of these symptoms are

possible with such hyper-functioning. During the time between 11 and 1 at night, it will hyperfunction even more, since that is the optimum time of its functioning. If this is happening, trying to go to sleep during that time will be problematic. The person may toss and turn, have their symptoms exacerbated, etc. In this case it is better to try to go to sleep an hour earlier and possibly stay asleep through gall bladder time. However, if the hyper-functioning is strong enough, he or she may still wake up. In this case, treatment and life style changes will be needed to address the imbalance.

The Liver, in Chinese Medicine, assimilates most of what we have taken in during the day, i.e. food, drink, impressions, etc. On a physical level, everything we have eaten or have drunk gets filtered through the liver. It filters and organizes what toxins to remove and what nutrients to keep and assimilate. During the night, our liver also allows our other systems to rest by storing the blood, as our organs and muscles require a greatly diminished blood supply when at rest.

On the mental level, according to Chinese Medicine, it has to do with the functions of planning and decision making. The liver does its best work when we are asleep. It is helping to integrate our conscious experiences. This can happen best when our conscious mind is not active. We are all familiar with mulling over difficult decisions only to experience their resolution after awaking in the morning. We often say, "I need to sleep on it and see how I feel in the morning."

When the liver is out of balance and hyperactive, our conscious minds have difficulty turning off and we may awake during liver time and have trouble falling back to sleep. We may awake with our minds active, churning over the days events, or planning and making decisions about the upcoming day, etc.. This interferes with the optimal mode of functioning for this organ. In this case, the liver needs to be re-balanced via the use of acupuncture, herbs, lifestyle changes, other healing modalities, etc. . When it is harmonious, our system naturally wants to sleep during those times and we get the rest and rejuvenation we need.

Again, these are just some examples of the relevance of the "Chinese Clock." I suggest you pay attention to these cycles. It might be useful to learn the organ associations of these two hour periods and see what you observe. Try to eliminate, eat and sleep according to these rhythms and see if you notice any enhancements to your health.

Enjoy this transition into fall and the beauty and stillness that comes with it.

Bob

