

Chinese Medicine Newsletter - Summer  
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Welcome to the summer 2007 newsletter. Again, please feel free to forward this to family or friends if you feel they would enjoy it. If someone is not on the mailing list and would like to receive this on an ongoing basis, please have them forward their e-mail address to me. ([bob@acupuncturefamilyhealth.com](mailto:bob@acupuncturefamilyhealth.com))

This is an edited version of the newsletter I sent out in the summer of 2005. I realized that it contained much of what I wanted to emphasize again. I've elaborated more on a few ideas.

Previously, I've discussed the model of the 5 Elements in Chinese Medicine and Cosmology. The elements, **fire**, **earth**, **metal**, **water** and **wood** have correspondences with the cycle of the seasons, with times of the day, with colors, sounds, odors, emotions, patterns of thought, different organs and functions in our being, etc. Diagnostically these correspondences assist the practitioner in assessing the state of harmony in a person, thus providing a roadmap for the treatment process.

The summer is associated with the **fire** element. **Summer** is the full expression of Yang, which is the warming and expansive energy in us. It is also our metabolic energy. The energy of growth and development of the spring matures in the summer. All of nature is in its fullest display. People and animals are out and about, circulating, interacting, dancing the energy of summer. The **fire** element manifests as the warmth of relationships, the joy of interaction, the capacity for intimacy, the heat of passion, the celebration of life. The emotion associated with the fire element is "**joy**" and the main organ and function is the **Heart**, along with three functions called "ministers" that assist and support the functioning of the heart. They are the **Small Intestines, the Pericardium and the Triple Heater**.

The color associated with the **fire** element is red, the odor is scorched, the sound is laugh. These are diagnostic correspondences that are useful in choosing acupuncture and herbal treatment. When there is an imbalance in our system that needs attention, signs are present to the skilled practitioner. When the **fire** aspect needs balancing, for example, there may be a reddish hue, or the opposite, a kind of an ashen hue, on the face. A scorched odor may be detected. Physically there could be fatigue, shortness of breath, body temperature fluctuations, certain types of insomnia or dream disturbed sleep, etc. Emotionally there could be anxiousness, being easily startled, feeling generally unsettled, problems with attention and focus. There can be inappropriate expressions of joy or maybe a lack of joy. For example,

if we are laughing when describing a grief experience, this incongruity calls attention to the fire aspect in us and a possible imbalance there. Conversely, it would be equally as revealing if we are unable to generate joy when describing a happy event or situation. There are many other signals, including the qualities of the pulse and the appearance of the tongue that further inform the practitioner as to what needs to be balanced in the system.

The **Heart** is called the **Supreme Controller** in the kingdom of the body/mind/spirit. It is like the monarch that sits on the throne of our being. When the monarch is healthy on every level, our entire system relaxes with the awareness and confidence that the kingdom is safe, secure and harmonious.

As we know, our **Heart** insures the rhythmic circulation of blood that nourishes all our cells. This allows our energy to be consistent and available. Emotionally, a balanced **fire** energy manifests as having healthy boundaries in terms of intimacy and relationships. This function is ascribed to the **Pericardium**. Physically it is the sac that surrounds and protects the heart. On the emotional level, in Chinese Medicine, it is sometimes referred to as a swinging gate that supports the openness of our heart, yet protects it from injury and insult. The gate needs to be able to swing open so the heart can circulate, engage, be intimate, yet also swing close at times to protect from emotional intrusion. When imbalanced this could manifest as guardedness and a fear of intimacy or, conversely, as porous boundaries with inappropriate intimacy. When in balance, we feel comfortable, relaxed, safe and available when relating with others.

The function of the **small intestine** is to “sort the pure from the impure.” Food enters the **small intestine** from the stomach. What is essential and needed is absorbed through the walls of the small intestines to become nourishment, to become “us.” What is not needed is sent to the colon to be eliminated. On a physical level when this is not working properly, we are not absorbing the optimum nutrition from the food we eat, This can manifest as a lack of energy and vitality. Also, we are not eliminating the impurities efficiently. This can result in toxic build up in our system reflected in such symptoms as digestive discomfort, general malaise, skin problems, muddled thinking, etc.

The **small intestine** is said to assist the heart on the emotional and mental levels by performing this same function of sorting the pure from the impure. When this is in

balance, we “take to heart” what is nourishing and essential from life experience and eliminate or let go of what is unnecessary or unhealthy. When impaired, we may feed our heart negative emotional states, self critical judgements, take others sincere feedback as an attack , misinterpret good intentions as personal affronts. To the practitioner, if other signs and symptoms correlate, this can signal that the small intestine function needs attention.

On the mental and spirit level, the **fire** aspect allows us to be in harmony and deeply content in the present moment. Our inability to experience this results, in part, from our habit of seeking happiness outside ourselves; in things, objects, situations, relationships, status, material gain, power, etc., When the **fire** energy and **heart** are deeply harmonious, the quality of the joy that manifests can be incredibly varied. It can be boisterous, quiet, serene, subtle, outrageous, etc. What is common, however, is that it is a joy that is self-generated. It comes from within. It is not erroneously ascribed to an external cause. It is a joy that celebrates life but is not dependent on how life shows up. At the most profound level there is an expansiveness, depth and connectedness that feels as if the beating of ones heart is the pulse of all creation and not a drop of it is rejected. It is all celebrated. One of America’s greatest poets, Walt Whitman, is a wonderful example of this quality. His classic, Song To Myself, reveals a mind and heart large enough to encompass and celebrate the richness of the human condition in all its variety.

There is a saying in one of the Chinese Medical Classics that says, “A healthy heart receives the joys and sorrows of the world without breaking.” The deepest joy rests on a foundation of equanimity. This allows one to keep one’s heart open in the midst of life’s pleasures and assaults. It is not a sentimental or idealistic quality. It responds to whatever is needed, sometimes with amazing gentleness and compassion and sometimes with tremendous directness and power. (Think of Mother Teresa). It is a heart that stays open, secure in the potency of love.

Some summer suggestions:

- eat what summer offers, plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables. Our body thrives on lighter fare in the summer. We don’t need as much of the heavier foods that are appropriate in winter.

- the heart is connected with our true impulse. We want to be able to be in touch with our deeper impulses for guidance. We need to start with whatever impulses we have, regardless of how mundane or lofty. For fun and practice, allot plenty of time to take a leisurely walk or drive somewhere. Have no agenda about where you are going. Put your attention in your heart briefly from time to time and give yourself over to your impulses and intuitions. See where they take you. What interesting roads do you turn down and follow, what captures your imagination on your walk and where does it lead. Feel the fascination with getting completely lost.

- remind ourselves that the when we feel happiness and contentment, it is only possible because the capacity and state already exist within. Be aware of our tendency to say or think, "I am happy because....." When happiness arises, practice

letting go of the supposed "cause or reason" for it and simply rest in the sensation.

As our capacity to experience this expands through practice, we realize directly that this well of peaceful joy within is potentially always available. We come to recognize that at a deep level, beyond our varied experiences, we are "already always happy." We just have to locate it.

Enjoy the summer.

Bob