

Women's Reproductive Lives and the Modern World

Kaleb Montgomery, DTCM

One of the core concepts of TCM is *yin* and *yang*. The beauty of the *yin* and *yang* philosophy is that one can use these basic concepts to explain or elucidate all sorts of aspects of our health, lives and the universe in general. Today, we will apply *yin* and *yang* to a woman's emotional and mental life in respects to fertility.

As you know, when it comes to the act of conception, the *yang* aspect is the man's sperm and the *yin* aspect is the egg. However, this oversimplification lacks some important details on the *yin* side, mainly implantation and embryo/placental growth in the uterus. The exact details of this aspect is relatively poorly understood in Western medicine, so we will not delve into the details of what actually happens, instead here we will use *yin* and *yang* theory to look at the *yin* aspect of conception from a mind/body perspective.

Changing the angle of the lens slightly and using different language, the *yang* aspect in conception is the spark and the *yin* aspect is the space necessary for this wonderful event to take place. Here the *yin* correlates more directly with a woman's uterus than it does with the egg that provides half the genetic material for the emerging embryo. However, you also can look at the egg as the smallest physical space, smaller than the uterus or the woman's body as a whole, which provides the space/physical form in which the genes combine to create this new person.

Using this uterus as the space schema, you can see that just as in all TCM, both the *yin* and *yang* aspects are vital and necessary to make a baby. You need both the *yang* spark and the *yin* space for conception to take place. The space for conception cannot just be any room in your house. It has to have the correct environment for the fetus to grow. A woman's uterine lining needs to be soft, thick and rich in blood to be receptive enough for the embryo to implant in the first place. This is the first layer of receptive energy required.

The next step is to provide the food, correct temperature, fluid levels, waste removal, etc. ideal for fetal growth. As the baby and placenta grow in size, the womb must also provide the strength for the placenta to anchor, be flexible enough to stretch in response to the growing baby and tough enough to protect the growing baby from physical harm as well.

You can see that for everything to go well, a woman has to cultivate active energy for the egg to pop out and ovulation to occur plus to move the growing embryo down the fallopian tubes, open receptive energy and physical space for conception to happen, nurturing receptive energy for implantation to occur and nurturing, strong, flexible and tough energy for the pregnancy to continue and the baby to grow and thrive. This is an amazing array of varying and sometimes opposite processes or energies to cultivate. No wonder it can be difficult to get pregnant. Sometimes I think that it is a miracle that anyone gets pregnant at all. Luckily, that miracle happens all the time.

In my practice, I help mostly couples who are trying to get pregnant. I have noticed a trend. Most

of the women I see are busy career women in their early 30s and 40s. They have spent most of their adult lives pouring their heart and soul into their work. Most of them work a minimum of 50-hour weeks, do a fair amount of business travel and play fairly hard too. They have spent the last 10-20 years in a "go-go, make-things-happen-now" world.

Most successful business people inhabit a world-based goal by setting and achieving a single goal - more profit. This successful business woman almost exclusively inhabits the world of manifesting things, and consequently the male aspect of their energetic selves. The irony of this is that after they have spent all their time cultivating their *yang* aspects, they now need to use their receptive *yin* aspects so they can have a baby. They are now trying to create a "womb space" so they can conceive and carry a healthy baby to term. I do not think that it is a coincidence that these busy, smart, driven and successful career women are having a hard time trying to conceive, considering that it is their *yang* aspects that are more developed than their *yin*. It is their *yin* aspect that they now need more for pregnancy.

I am not discounting the undeniable fact that a woman's eggs become less viable as they age, especially after 35, and how the stress of their busy lifestyles negatively impacts their fertility. These two facts are ever present and combat a large part of my treatment strategy. What I am suggesting is that we look beyond the ordinary reality that we inhabit to delve deeper into the underlying spiritual patterns that underpin all of our lives, and more specifically, conception and pregnancy.

What smacked me in the face was that here were a bunch of women with very strong male sides who (when you scratch the surface a little more) have largely lost touch with their feminine *yin* sides. Their nurturing and receptive sides have largely been placed on the back burner. It's not that these women do not have a *yin* side; it's that to succeed in today's business climate and become the high-powered business executives, they have had to almost exclusively cultivate their male sides.

Now that they were trying to get pregnant using the same formula that provided their success in the business world, using their *yang* "go-go, make-things happen" strategy and energy, they are finding that it is not working. They are running headlong into some very real frustration. Their usual formula for success is not working. They are confronted with the reality of relearning and slowly, steadily cultivating their *yin* sides. This is a difficult and frustrating process, compounded by their perceived "failure" of not conceiving. These are not people who are used to failing or not getting what they set their minds on. For many of them, this may be the first time in their lives that they have ever run into any real difficulty getting what they want. Because they are smart, generally these women can solve any problem they encounter, given hard work. Hard work does not scare them; not being able to control the outcome scares them. The thought that even though they could do everything right and still not become pregnant that month drives most of them crazy. Unfortunately, you cannot force Mother Nature to do anything.

Mother Nature is *yin*. As any gardener or farmer knows, you cannot make nature do what you want it to. You can work with Mother Nature to help create better conditions for your plants to grow. But even if you have done everything right, you still might not get good tomatoes. Maybe it is not sunny or hot enough for your tomatoes, but then the conditions are better for your cucumbers so they grow better. Farming is *yin*. You create the conditions for things to grow and then try and adapt to what actually happens. The problem with high-powered business execs is that if they want tomatoes then they are not happy if they get cucumbers.

My point here is that trying to get pregnant often is like the weather. You know that summer is going to come eventually, but each year it comes at a different time. Even then it might be a cool,

rainy summer and your tomatoes don't grow well. So you have to make do with the cucumbers and wait until next summer to try for the tomatoes. Again, not a situation that a high-powered business exec usually is equipped to deal with in a calm equanimous manner. They have to come to grips with the fact that the *yang* strategy of hard work forcing success does not work with trying to get pregnant.

A good example of a *yang* strategy trying to deal with a *yin* situation is a story that a friend related to me about the Tokyo subway system. It was early June and the temperature was about 90 F and very humid, as Tokyo tends to be in the summer. He commented to a fellow worker who was Japanese, how hot and sweaty he was in the subway and was wondering why they did not turn on the air conditioning in the subway car. His colleague replied that it could not be hot because it was not yet June 22, the day that summer begins and the day that the air conditioning goes on in the subway. This is a humorous and an obvious example of not adapting properly to the conditions at hand, but that is exactly what is happening to my patients.

The condition at hand is that they lead very busy lives and do not have the energy and *yin* left over for their reproductive systems to function well. They need to slow down and start putting some energy in the bank for their reproductive systems to work. They also need to learn to cultivate those receptive *yin* energies necessary to conceive and have healthy babies. Stay tuned for more discussion on this subject next time.

MARCH 2008