

Treating the Spirit via the Kidney Meridian

Martha Lucas, PhD, LAc

When you look up anxiety in the dictionary it says that it's a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease and statistics show that it is a fairly common condition in today's world. The National Institute of Mental Health reports that about 40 million adults are affected each year by anxiety lasting longer than six months at a time.

At my practice we receive an increasing number of calls each year from people who are suffering through emotional conditions but who don't want to take prescription medication. We also have patients who report what they think of as ambiguous pain - pain that was not caused by any trauma or activity, but which is caused by deep seated anxiety.

The Anxiety and Depression Association of American states that "pain is a very common symptom and even a good indicator" of some sort of anxiety disorder. Here is where TCM shines in terms of diagnosis: pain does not always have a physical cause and our diagnostic skills can determine an emotional/spirit causes.

For example, I find that a common movement or lack thereof in the pulses of people suffering from anxiety is that their spirit/heart/upper *jiao* position is not receiving energetic support from the other organ systems. Without that support, our spirits can't rest at night and that sleeplessness adds to the feeling of anxiety. Further, a closed spirit sector in the pulses means that the person can't feel joy very well; the energetics of joy are not available to that person's spirit/heart.

In my practice I am studying a pattern of what I call "inherited fear" in patients who report with anxiety, but who also say that their life situation isn't such that they should be experiencing any anxiety. They're not in excessive debt, they have happy close relationships, they like their job or being in retirement, they are physically active, etc. They are especially curious about why they feel so anxious.

This is the type of patient with whom I work on the "inherited fear" pattern. Using pulse diagnosis, we can tell when emotions have an old history to them and they are, in some cases, the result of prenatal issues. So the fear/anxiety is an integral part of them, part of the energetics of their DNS, despite their intellectual knowledge or thinking that they do not have anything to worry or be anxious about. But that's another article for the future. Right now I want to focus on information from an article in *Medical Acupuncture, Vol. 24, Number 3, 2012* by Ann Jeffrees, DAOM, L.Ac., about the use of *Yu Zhong* to treat anxiety.

This article was interesting to me in particular because frequently, with anxious patients, I can feel *ashi* or trigger points on the upper chest near or sometimes in the kidney channel whose needling helps relieve the symptoms of anxiety. Further, another combination of points that I use in part to treat anxiety includes kidney channels points but *Yu Zhong* is not one of them per se unless it is one of the *ashi* or trigger points. So the article's title caught my eye. First of all, treating the kidney channel for those who have anxiety makes common sense because of the kidneys' relationship with fear; out of balance kidney energy can lead to a person's feeling fearful and vice versa, fear may

scatter the kidney *qi*.

The issue would be making certain that the other organs are in a state of balance such that they can support your work on the kidney channel. More than one source, including the article by Jeffrees, reminds us that in the common treatment of anxiety practitioners often focus on the liver and the heart. A common fall back combination of points is what I call the "old 4 gates" Liver 3, LI 4. I prefer to use the "new 4 gates" GB34, Heart 8 which still, in theory, treats liver energy as well as the heart. Other common parts of treatment include points like *Yintang* and *Shenmen* whose functions include calming the spirit.

In the article, Jeffrees points out that the classical interpretation of the characters for *Yu Zhong* (K27) can be interpreted as "a point that represents the center of a territory with no known boundaries" which she says "fits exceedingly well into the current understanding of anxiety being a state of anticipatory apprehension ... in people who cannot find the center of the situation" or I might add, the "end" of the situation. Often, in conditions like panic attacks, there is no real situation so it's true that points like *Yu Zhong* would have a beneficial impact on treating anxiety (as Jeffrees illustrates with her case studies).

What kidney points do I use? As I said, I palpate points in the upper chest that may fall on the kidney channel but are *ashi*/trigger would be *Shencang* (K 25), *Lingxu* (K 24), and/or *Shenfeng* (K 23) and will needle those when tender. I do this after I am certain that the chest/heart/spirit/upper *jiao* is open and receptive.

The first part of the treatment is to regenerate *qi* flow to the heart/spirit. When those points are tender, it makes sense in that *Shencang*'s classical name is spirit storehouse and its use is appropriate to help restore or nourish one's spirit. *Lingxu* (K24) is called spirit ruins or spirit burial ground so it makes sense that when someone's emotional state is overcome by anxiety it is possible to lose oneself in that struggle thereby creating painful stagnation around K 24.

Last of those three, one of the issues that can be treated via *Shenfeng* or spirit seal is the loss of connection to your spirit or your feeling of who you are. I am treating a woman for panic attacks and she very often says that "I feel like my body is not my own" and statements similar to that are very common in those who are suffering from severe anxiety. Kidney 1 is also a favorite point of mine to use for conditions of the spirit in addition to the points that I have used to balance the pulses which is the primary goal. The beauty of our medicine is that through the combination of balancing pulses and using points with special functions we can resurrect that spirit connectedness.

MARCH 2013