

The Heart Protector

Neil Gumenick, MAc, LAc, Dipl. Ac.

On the physical level, the Pericardium is a double-layered sac of fibrous tissue that envelops the Heart. The space between the layers is filled with serous fluid that protects the Heart from external shock or trauma and lubricates to allow for normal Heart movement.

In Classical Chinese medicine, the idea of protection of the Heart goes much deeper.

All of the major organs and functions are considered, metaphorically, to be Officials - ministers in service to The Heart - AKA The Supreme Controller. In order to rule with wisdom, love, impartiality, and to spread joy throughout the Kingdom, the Supreme Controller must be kept safe and protected. That is the job of the Heart Protector.

Protection of the Heart

The Heart Protector Official is akin to the chief bodyguard, head ninja, captain of the musketeers, or head of the secret service. In other words, this Official acts as the protector of the King or Queen, metaphorically standing before the Monarch and saying to anyone who poses a threat, essentially, "If you want to get to him, you've got to get through me." With such protection, the King can be truly fair and impartial - open to give and receive love, dispense justice, set boundaries, create order, resolve disputes, issue royal proclamations, and fearlessly respond to the needs of all. Were this internal protection lacking, the Monarch would owe favors to those who would support him, deny fairness to those who would oppose him, and thus lose impartiality. Instead of fair and enlightened rule, political corruption would arise.

Within us, if the Heart is not well protected, love and joy disappear; sadness and fear arise. We lose our connection to the Universal spirit, which pervades everyone and everything. We experience internal disorder; we can neither love ourselves nor open to the love of others. We feel vulnerable, easily hurt and "heartbroken." In the other extreme, we may shut down and overprotect ourselves. Instead of appropriate opening, the fear of being hurt shuts everyone out, making us feel separate and isolated. When the Heart Protector is doing its job, it keeps out those who would do harm and allows entry to those who are trustworthy, loving, fun, and good for our Fire.

Human interaction is an essential need. Like a plant denied the warmth and light of the sun, without interaction, we would mentally and spiritually wither and die. As well, we need privacy. Innately, we know what we need - whom to allow entry, whom to keep out, when to be social, when to be alone. Heart Protector (PC) 6, as an example of the gifts this Official can provide, named Inner Frontier Gate, conveys the idea of a frontier, boundary, or wall between the outer world and our inner being. In this wall is a gate, which opens and closes appropriately, protecting us from harm, while allowing connection to the outside. If the gate is jammed shut, we feel trapped inside and quite alone. If stuck open, we are defenseless and vulnerable. If functioning as nature intended, whether our orientation is toward the inner or outer, we feel safe, secure, and able to see ourselves and others with eyes of love and compassion.

Other Duties

This Official is also known as Circulation/Sex. It is responsible for arterial and venous blood flow, as well as internal and external sexual secretions. Without proper circulation, there may be internal coldness, or excessive heat. No organ or function can operate in health if its environment is in either extreme. Blood is the medium by which the warmth penetrates to reach every corner and every level of our being.

The Fire element, associated with the Summer season, manifests nature in its fullest expansion - in maturity. Only in maturity do flowers spread their pollen to ultimately produce more flowers. Only in maturity do animals reproduce. Thus, the act of love is one of the ultimate expressions of the Fire element. In order to fully open to another, for the sexual secretions to flow in the way nature intended, for there to be passion, trust, warmth, intimacy, joy, and ultimately unity, the circulation and protection this Official provides must be strong. It is the voice of consciousness that knows instinctively that, in this situation and with this person, the sharing of love at such a deep and intimate level is right.

When this Official is imbalanced, we tend to experience extremes of hyper-sexuality or, in the opposite extreme, coldness and frigidity. Circulation/Sex (PC) 2 is called Heavenly Spring. A spring is a place where water located beneath the earth's surface flows out of the ground. For patients who, even with the right person, cannot connect on a deep level of trust and intimacy, the heavenly waters accessed by this point can wash away fear, guilt, timidity, coldness, and all that blocks the natural flow of warmth, joy, and love between human beings. Much like sexual secretions, there is a bringing forth of the inner flow of passion where, in acts of loving, two seem as one. The boundaries of separateness dissolve in such heavenly moments.

The Diagnostics

In Classical Five-Element Acupuncture, we focus treatment on a patient's Fire Element when it is diagnosed as the primary elemental imbalance (AKA Causative Factor or CF) by identifying a scorched odor, a red or lack of red (ashen gray) color lateral to the eyes, a laughing or lack of laughing sound in the voice, and the emotion of excess or lack of joy. These will tell us that Fire is the CF, but not which side of Fire or which Officials to treat.

The Fire element has four Officials residing within it: the Heart and Small Intestine - the organ side, and the Pericardium and Triple Heater (*San Jiao*) - the function side. Invariably, a Fire CF's predominant imbalance will be either on the organ or function side. Diagnosing and treating the correct side will generally resolve imbalances of the other side, as well as imbalances, which have spread from the Fire element (where the imbalance originated) to the other elements and their corresponding Officials.

Diagnosing which side of Fire to treat is determined by interacting with the patient and assessing whether his/her biggest challenge in the Fire is one of separating pure from impure and/or maintaining order and control (Small Intestine and Heart side) or vulnerability and/or adapting to the environment (Heart Protector and Triple Heater side). Whichever aspect of Fire requires help, once the help is given, we can expect to see its benefits reach every organ, as its proper temperature is restored. We will find that the mind, whether it had been dull, weary, and uninterested, or in the opposite extreme manic and over-excited, can find a more proper balance - becoming more bright and appropriately enthusiastic. The spirit, which may have been clouded by the perception of isolation and coldness, overly guarded or, perhaps, desperate to find love, can finally open safely, appropriately, and with compassion and understanding - connecting us to the one spirit that exists in everyone.

The Questions

The following questions are useful for self-observation and can be appropriately modified to inquire as to the state of a patient's Pericardium (Heart Protector and Circulation/Sex), particularly at the mental and spirit levels. It is important to remember that a problem or symptom in this Official does not necessarily make anyone a Fire Causative Factor, nor does it mean that the Pericardium is necessarily the major problem.

Any symptom can come from imbalance in any element, as imbalance spreads from one Official and Element to the next. We determine the source of the trouble, the CF, only through odor, color, sound and emotion. Yet, if you suspect a problem in a patient's Fire element and specifically with the Pericardium Official, here are some questions to consider in assessing its state:

1. When have you been heartbroken?
2. When have you broken another's heart?
3. When have you been cold and indifferent?
4. When have you been easily hurt?
5. When have you been desperate for love?
6. When have you set and kept appropriate boundaries?
7. When have you opened your heart to the "wrong" people?
8. When have you thought you would never love again?
9. When have you felt complete trust in another?

NOVEMBER 2014