



GENERAL ACUPUNCTURE

## Strengthening Our Stance, Opening Our Chest: Stress Management & The Luo Vessels

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Managing stress can be a challenge. For many of us, our inability to deal with stress is the cause of most of our mental and physical difficulties. Within the acupuncture Jing Luo (channel systems), the Sinew channels and Luo Vessels are most responsible for stress management. In my last article, "[The Luo Vessels: Restoring Connectivity](#)," The Ling Shu speaks of them largely in terms of their ability to deal with pathology.

They take on stress factors from the Primary Channels, acting like holding vessels for stressors that the body's first line of defense has been unable to discharge. The body's first line of defense is the Sinew Channels. They are the most superficial channel system within the body. As conduits of Wei Qi, the Sinews help mediate external stimuli and challenges. From an organ point of view they rely on the Qi of the Lungs and Liver: the ability to "diffuse and descend," so as to continually flush the body and let go on a moment-to-moment basis.

### Managing Stress in the Body

Wei Qi also controls peristaltic ability. It is the way we keep things moving in the body to prevent stagnation. It also provides us with an energetic shield so as not to absorb or host harmful, unnecessary external forces. Wei Qi conducted and controlled through healthy Sinew Channels, Lungs and Livers allow us to flow freely through life, well protected and at ease.

As the Sinew Channels manage the external aspect of the body and its stimuli, the Luo Vessels manage the interior. Internal components of body function include diet, and also our emotional life. Whatever the Sinew Channels are unable to manage and resolve, often due to insufficiency of Wei Qi, can go into the Luo. In addition, whatever the Primary Channels are unable to resolve emotionally can be shuttled into the Luo for storage within a state of suppression and/or repression.

## A State of Balance

According to Confucian philosophy, healthy processing of emotional material is predicated on the ability of the Spleen to maintain a healthy "Yi," a state of balanced mindfulness related to proper separation of "the pure from the turbid." The Spleen in its relationship with the Stomach controls the body's "axis of Qi": normalcy of movement.

The major representation of this is through the original Great Luo of the Spleen: GB-22 Yuan Ye, which according to acupuncture point energetics has the unique capacity to "normalize the Qi." When external Wei Qi via the Lungs and Liver, and internal Ying Qi via the Spleen and Heart/Pericardium are functioning well, the Sinews and Primary Channels will adequately process and manage external and internal stimuli and stressors. What they fail to manage will enter into the Luo.



## Understanding "Empty and Full"

The Luo are described by the Ling Shu to manifest states of "fullness" and "emptiness." They don't treat or resolve the stress, challenges or pathology they inherit from the Sinews and Primary Channels; instead they hold onto them. The Luo are tangibly associated with the blood vessels of the body. Ying Qi in the form of blood and body fluids are the mediumship which traps and maintains the stagnant holding of pathology in the Luo. As stress pathology is continually deposited into the Luo, the blood vessels which usually take the form of varicosities on the surface of the skin stretch, manifesting symptoms of fullness as detailed in Chapter 10 of the Ling Shu.

Fullness of the Luo shows that the holding vessel has become saturated, causing further stress on the Luo blood vessel collateral system. When the Luo surpass saturation, its contents will empty back into the Primary Channels and the symptoms will change.

The concept of empty and full is that of stress management. When the Qi of our Lungs and Spleen

are strong and healthy we will be able to manage stress well. The Liver and the Heart/Pericardium will be calm and well nourished as a result. We will have a strong Wei Qi field to protect our exterior and sufficient Ying Qi to process our internal emotional life. However when Lung and Spleen Qi are insufficient, we will rely on our Luo Vessels to help us manage the things we are unable to process and let go.

### The Luo Vessels & Stress

There is a progression to the process of the Luo. Chapter 10 of the Ling Shu illustrates how unresolved issues will progressively afflict various areas of the body as well as aspects of the mental-emotional faculties. The Luo Vessels culminate in the Great Luo of the Spleen, showing a major breakdown in the body's ability to manage stress.

The symptom of fullness of the Great Luo is pain all over the body: a debilitating state. Emptiness of the Great Luo is looseness of the joints, suggesting the inability to bear weight physically and emotionally. Within the progression of the Luo, the Great Luo is followed by the Luo of Yin and Yang, which the Nan Jing says are the Qiao Vessels.

The Nan Jing describes the Extraordinary Vessels as "ditches and reservoirs." They are simultaneously vessels that hold onto surplus energy as well as ditches where pathology from the Primary Channels drain into. When the Qiao Vessels become diseased, this leads to a polarity problem in the body. The Yin and Yang fail to harmonize properly. The Yang or Yin aspect of the body becomes either tense or slack, creating the opposite state for the other. The Qiao are drainage ditches for the Luo Vessels, which are themselves a type of ditch for the Primary Channels.

However within the level of the Extraordinary Vessels, unresolved material begins to affect the constitution. As with any acupuncture channel system, pathological progression must be understood and respected. We must know the level into which a problem has penetrated.

### Understanding LUo Vessel Progression

The Luo Vessels follow a progression different than that of the Primary Channels. Chapter 10 of the Ling Shu describes the system of the Luo beginning in the chest, moving to the shoulders and head before going into the abdomen and lumbar spine. After which the Great Luo becomes saturated, draining into the constitutional Extraordinary Vessels.

Bao Mai, a sub-vessel of Dai Mai shows the process by which the Great Luo empties into the constitution. The Nei Jing suggests we can build and support the constitution via the Luo points of the Ren and Du Channels: CV-15 Jiu Wei and GV-1 Chang Qia-ng. This helps support the Luo Vessel system in its capacity to hold onto unresolved pathology.

The Luo points of Ren and Du along with the Qiao Vessels help a person gather and consolidate enough Yin and Yang (Qi and Blood) to "revive" the Luo. One can say they "strengthen the joints" to give the person the fortitude to continue. The image of the Qiao are especially powerful, beginning at the ankles and continuing into Xi Cleft "consolidation" points before traveling into the Brain.

The Luo don't treat the problems they hold onto. They lack sufficient Wei Qi to do so. It is the acupuncturist who helps the Luo do what they cannot through bloodletting. By lancing the Luo point along with varicosity along the Luo Vessel trajectories we help release fullness to promote cathartic detox. When the Luo has become empty, we add moxabustion to the process, treating lipomas and swellings along the trajectory as well.

The process of treating the Luo via bloodletting is ritualistically making a choice that we are ready to let go of what we are holding. Sometimes we require a spark in the form of fire to empower us in this process. Underneath all is our stable Qiao "stance" Vessels, helping us to feel strong enough to stand up to ourselves and our lives. The Qiao are the basis of all the strength of the Luo system, as well as our ability to deal with life as it comes. They are empowerment channels that support the vessels of connectivity.

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