



PRACTICE PEARLS

Bound by Suffering: Using the Heart and Pericardium to Resolve "Heart Pain"

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The primary channels, as presented in chapter 10 of the *Ling Shu*, provide a method for understanding physiological as well as pathological development. They are a continuum, a progression.

Movement from the spleen into the heart channel is a major event in a person's development. It marks awakening to a deeper state of consciousness and self-awareness. Within human development, the lung and large intestine allow us to develop a sensual relationship with the world; the stomach brings the capacity for emotion and reactivity, as well as the raw material to build our social and material lives.

The spleen, through its relationship with the "yi," translated as intention or mindfulness, allows the capacity for reflection and judgment: the rectification of *qi* (action) and blood (intention).

The Heart Channel Pathway

The main pathway of the heart channel is internal, beginning in the heart *zang* and descending to the small intestine *fu*. This is the only pathway of any channel that begins directly in the organ for which it is named. The heart channel shows itself to be primarily a meditative pathway whereby a person can discover purpose of the self. The spirit illumination and animation stored in the heart can travel into the small intestine, where material can be sorted and separated into knowledge and awareness.



The *Ling Shu* states that the heart channel has no acupuncture points, yet it says to treat "heart pain," use HT 7 *Shen Men*. To work with the heart is something the individual can only do alone. No one can change our heart or the spirit that resides within except ourselves. However, through acupuncture we as practitioners can soothe the *shen* and mind within this process. This becomes the major role of the heart channel.

The points along the heart channel are said to be guides for directing a person through their spiritual path: the journey of life. The reflective capacity of the *yi*, housed in the spleen, is necessary for this process to unfold. One needs a strong ability to focus and be able to "rectify" (separate the pure from the impure) to support the heart as it descends into the small intestine for deeper, more intricate processing of mental-emotional and experiential material.

Relevant Spleen Channel AcuPoints

The spleen channel presents points along the abdomen that suggest the experience of lament and knotting due to perceived injustice and suffering in the world. The points SP 14 *Fu Jie*, Abdominal Bind; SP 13 *Fu She*, Bowel Abode; and SP 16 *Fu Ai*, Abdominal Lament, treat mental-emotional upset relating to our relationship with the world. On the chest, SP 18 *Tian Xi*, Celestial Ravine; and SP 19 *Xiong Xiang*, Chest Village, address our relationship to Heaven (*Tian*) and Earth.

SP 21 *Da Bao*, the Great Wrap, is the culmination of our suffering as we interact with the world. When SP 21 as the Great Luo becomes full, it can bind the chest, preventing the diffusion of lung *qi* and the full circulation of vitality into the four limbs, as represented by the point SP 20 *Zhou Rong*, All-Around Flourishing. The heart channel becomes the way we rectify and work out these heart pains.

One of the "palaces of the heart," themes relating to our life experiential path, including health, wealth and vocation, is the "global" palace, relating to the world. The spleen channel illustrates the

potential for difficult reaction to the world, its challenges and its endemic sufferings.

In saying the heart has no acupoints, it is up to each of us individually to find a way to work through our suffering, confusion and idea of ourselves in the world. The points on the heart channel can calm and quiet the *shen*, allowing us to have a calmer, easier time as we rectify and transform our experiences; whereas the small intestine and pericardium become the major channels by which we work through our confusions, traumas and difficulties. But it is the heart channel that shows us the path set out ahead of us and what it takes to become a cultivated person.

Combining the Heart and Pericardium Points

I learned a protocol from my teacher that combines heart and pericardium points. This was presented as a way to work with addictions. Yet all the "palaces" and their associated heart pains can be considered preoccupations which can give rise to addiction, obsession or compulsion.

The heart and pericardium points are divided into three trinities of three points for each channel. The heart is worked through from its beginning to end; while the pericardium is worked through in reverse order. The first step involves using HT 1 *Ji Quan*, HT 2 *Qing Ling* and HT 3 *Shao Hai* with PC 9 *Zhong Chong*, PC 8 *Lao Gong* and PC 7 *Da Ling*.

The names of these points give the image of using the most light and transcending the heart points with the heaviest and most challenging on the pericardium, shining the celestial light of the heart into the darkness, confusion and toil of the pericardium.

The spiritual traditions that influence Chinese medicine teach that suffering is necessary for our cultivation of virtue and spirit. The heart sets this tone through the imagery of its acupuncture points. The pericardium further solidifies the processing of working through suffering. The point PC 9 refers to the Extraordinary Vessel *Chong Mai*, which represents our ancestry: material we have inherited from our family. It is a karmic idea: unfinished business we've inherited that must be worked out.

The image of PC 9 bringing us into the center of *Chong Mai* suggests facing our karma head-on. PC 8 gives the image of toil and weariness relating to one of the palaces; something we have been trying to make work, exhausting and dispiriting ourselves as a result. PC 7 as the "Great Mound" suggests material we have buried, yet which hasn't decomposed, continuing to haunt us.

HT 1 as the "Ultimate Spring" unbinds the chest and rectifies the *qi*, helping to bring our sense of spiritual oneness and openness to work through our guilt, trauma and disappointment. HT 2 as the "Blue-Green Soul" gives the image of innocence when facing the challenges of life, regulating *qi* and blood to move our thoughts and emotions so we can move through judgment, guilt and trauma. HT 3 as the "Lesser Sea" transforms phlegm and stabilizes the temperament to work through the confusion relating to who we think we are or who we think we should be.

Practical Takeaway

Therapeutically working with the pericardium harmonizes the stomach, addresses blood stagnation and clears heat in the blood, creating bleeding or *shen* disturbance. It also restores communication between the heart and kidney: the spirit and the will.

The small intestine is said to protect the *Jing-Shen*: the spirit-essence through its ability to clear heat from the heart via the bladder. The pericardium is the culmination of unresolved heat (emotional agitation) that has consumed the *yin* (damaging the kidney essence, and ability to feel calm and contained within oneself); led to stagnation of blood (fixation of the mind-emotions); and

caused bleeding (inability to control one's emotions and reactions).

Harmonizing the stomach helps the body create more blood to support the *yin* and stabilize the mind and emotions: to quiet the *shen*. Invigorating the blood and clearing blood heat moves the mind and its fixed experiences, and clears agitation from the emotions.

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