

# Treating Trauma: Lessons From Wang Qing Ren and the Luo Vessels

Nicholas Sieben, LAc

Acupuncture is a medicine of spiritual origin, heavily influenced by Taoist, Confucian and Buddhist traditions. Among the most famous chapters from the medical classic *Ling Shu* is chapter 8 - "Ben Shen": Rooted in Spirit. As we treat our patients for physical and mental ailments, says Chapter 8, we must always be "rooted in the spirit." Beyond just the physical or even psychological, we must also consider the "spirit" of the patient and its relationship to their disease or disorder.

## Karma and Trauma

An important concept within Eastern spiritual traditions is *karma*. Classically, karma meant cause and effect: actions from past lives that have influenced this life and future lives. To our modern mind, however, the concept of karma can be viewed more broadly. Study of trauma shows events and experiences from our past that have remained unresolved or unhealed can influence our present and future experience of life.

As William Faulkner famously said: "*The past is never dead. It's not even past.*" Many of us, due to unresolved trauma, keep the painful past preserved and present even after it's long over. This arguably becomes the root of our disease.

## Treating Trauma: Liver Channel and Luo vessels

Trauma is often associated with blood stasis in Chinese medicine. Therapeutically, trauma associated with blood stasis is best treated by the liver and pericardium acupuncture channels, as well as the *Luo* vessels.

Two acupuncture points on the liver channel speak of the tendency to preserve the dead past: LR 13 (*Zhang Men*: the "Camphorwood Gate") and LR 5 (*Li Gou*: the "Wormwood Canal" or "Insect Groove"). Both points speak of *Gu*: parasites and ghosts, or the insecticides used to preserve the dead in their coffins. Something that should have disintegrated and disappeared is lingering or being kept alive' maybe as a ghost, maybe as an alter to a past pain or an inability to let go of the past and move on.

The ultimate expression of the liver channel is defined by its final point, LR 14 (*Qi Men*: the "Completion Gate"). To move on and become free, all experience in life must reach a state of completion. The first point on the liver, LR 1 (*Da Dun*: the "Great Pile"), sets the theme of the channel. We are faced with a pile of unresolved experiential material that we must bring to completion, acknowledging that we may be harboring "ghosts." We may be keeping the dead alive and preserved, and we need to learn to complete our "karmic" lessons so we can move on to the next cycle, the state of renewal.

Trauma can be physical and non-physical. Blood is associated with bruising, but also with emotional instability, insecurity, and repeating mental and behavioral patterns. Blood is said to be

"the mother of *qi*" in Chinese medicine. *Qi* can be defined as relationship or action. The *shen* (spirit-animation or mind) is said to circulate via the blood. Therefore, the state of our blood (including its trauma or stasis) will influence our actions, as well as our relationships.

Wang Qing Ren is the patriarch of the school of treating blood stasis. His formulas for "Dispelling Stasis in the Blood Mansion" and their subsequent variations provide many strategies for resolving blood stasis. Ren placed particular emphasis on the *Luo* vessels as dispensaries for static blood states.

The *Luo* vessels are collaterals; they are created as needed, due to trauma. The *Luo* are filled with traumatic events encapsulated in the body. The body's blood and fluid supply continually feed these vessels, keeping the traumatic material contained within held in latency, without resolution. The issues contained within remain subacute, suppressed and unresolved. They slowly bleed us to death, requiring constant blood supply to be kept in latency. Like the philosophy of the liver channel, the *Luo* act as "altars" to past hurts; addictions and aversions we are unable or unwilling to let go. We worship at these altars, honoring our traumas, disappointments and obsessions.

The *Luo* are unique as a channel system. They contain, yet cannot treat the issues they encapsulate and circulate. The telltale sign a person may have *Luo* vessel activity is lack of diffusion of lung *qi*, showing inability to let go.

The strategy within Ren's first formula, *Xue Fu Zhu Yu Tang*: "Drive Out Stasis From the Blood Mansion," focused on ensuring the outlets for eliminating blood stasis were open. Lu Wan Su, of the School of Attack and Purge, said any catharsis must be accompanied by a fluid release to be successful.

If blood is experience and emotional memory, then purging blood stasis becomes the process for eliminating trauma and clearing static, old memories. Classically, the *Luo* vessels and their associated *Luo* points were pricked or plum blossomed to bleed, allowing the necessary outlet for static blood to come out. This provides the fluid release necessary for the full catharsis that Su spoke of.

There are two *Luo* vessels with descending trajectories, the lung and the gallbladder, which is rare within *Luo* vessels. All other trajectories ascend. Ren's formula contains two herbs that release the upper and lower burners of the body: *Tao Ren*, which releases the lower burner, and *Hong Hua* to release the upper burner. The region of the chest and lower bowels must be open to purge blood stasis.

To bleed the *Luo* vessels of the lungs and gallbladder is to encourage the body to "let go" of that which is held in the chest, and to "move on" by purging blood stasis from the bowels. Purging via defecation can be likened to burying something that is dead, allowing it to discompose. This resonates with the imagery of the liver, especially the point LR 13 (*Zhang Men*: the "Camphorwood Gate")

Camphorwood was classically used to preserve the dead within coffins. To open the lower burner via GB 37 (*Guang Ming*) is to encourage the decision to stop preserving something that is dead and lingering like a ghost; to choose renewal instead. Both the point names of LU 7 and GB 37 contain imagery related to an awakening. LU 7 (*Lie Que*) is translated as "a break in the sequence," and also sometimes as "lightning strikes." GB 37 (*Guang Ming*) is translated as "bright light." Both points give images of illumination, recognition and realization necessary to move on and let go.

