

The Roots of Mastery, Part Two: The Heart

Peter Fairfield, LAc

In the first article in this series, I discussed the process of development that allows for full usage of our neurological and energetic capacity and its importance in our healing work. In this article, I would like to consider the Eastern and Western implications of the heart, both for our own growth and for its importance in a clinical understanding of one of the most essential issues that underlies all pathology.

The heart is the first complex structure to function in the developing embryo. It descends from the area of the crown chakra into the developing chest cavity. One week after a woman first misses her menstrual period, a tiny heart is pumping single red cells in a growing cellular complex barely visible to the naked eye. The heart's electrical field is 60 times greater, and its magnetic field is 5,000 times stronger, than that of the brain.

A large percentage of heart cells have neuralgic and hormonal functions that, when combined with pattern variations in pressure and electromagnetic wave formation, have vast regulatory abilities in the system at large. Recent research shows that the heart has a central role in emotional perception and experience and in fact can learn, remember and make decisions independently of cortical function. Karl Pribram, a neuroscientist and researcher in psychology and cognitive science, has proposed that "...low-frequency oscillations generated by the heart and body in the form of afferent neural, hormonal and electrical patterns are the carriers of emotional information."

In the past 15 years, the emerging field of neurocardiology (see www.heartmath.org and the work of other researchers) has brought to modern science implicit evidence of the heart's primary role in regulating human physiology. Over 2,000 years ago, the *Huang Ti Nei Jing*, an early classic of Chinese medicine, said basically the same thing: "The heart is the emperor." When the emperor is in his rightful position, the land will be in harmony. We learn this in our first year of acupuncture school in *zang fu* studies, yet very few of us have taken the deep and pervasive implications of the heart to heart.

Historically, we have schools of thought pronouncing the kidneys to be the most important consideration. There are also schools of the spleen and of the Five Elements, Eight Principles, *San Jiao*, and so forth. Although these are considered important, most do not acknowledge the deep underlying significance of the heart.

One day it dawned on me that the heart concerns the two areas of life that are traditionally more fundamental than medicine: the family and its corresponding link to humanity as a whole, and spiritual development. In our modern world, with the breakdown of the family and of the foundations of old spiritual paradigms, several generations have failed to receive the proper care the heart needs for healthy and secure development. As such, it has become more important in its clinical significance and for our study.

It is the heart that forms the energetic connections that allow beings to bond in the deepest way. Disconnected cells *in vitro* respond in unison when near a beating heart. When we love or are loved, we can feel it in our chest, in the area of our heart. Yet in our complex culture, we are often denied the truth of ourselves, which is also the truth of our heart. Many don't express or experience warmth and humanness in their work, and many live in a personal or social isolation that offers "things" as a replacement for love and essential human contact. This is the true disease of our time.

All diagnosis must consider the symptoms of slight thoracic tension; facial tension; stiffness at T-4 through T-6; coldness at Du-14; food allergies and gastrointestinal problems; diabetes; autoimmune diseases; underlying sarcasm; fear or doubt; tendency to settle for less; hints of frustration or anger in the voice or a monotone voice; an accentuated intellectualism; a lack of intuition; and many other little indications (among with the better-known heart symptoms) as signs of this deeper heart involvement. The pulse at the heart position may be slightly flat, tense or empty. It just won't have a happy, alive feeling, and neither will the patient.

Heart disease is our biggest medical problem, and it is as much about our emotions and spirit as it is about the pump. In my opinion, all treatment protocols must at least consider this, if not in the use of actual points and medicines, then at least in language and heartfelt attention from the practitioner and feedback on this level to the patient. Sometimes the addition of one point or herb within a treatment plan can make a difference over time. I have seen many difficult cases turn around after this point was addressed. Also, an unconditional acceptance of the patient as a worthy human being, no matter what the person's issues, begins a process that heals the bonding deficits learned in the family. (I will address that topic in a separate article.)

Traditional Asian medical systems have a rich theoretical basis on which to adequately address this worldwide problem, but we must first understand our own personal situations. I have seen many people who were open-minded and caring; who lived good lives but were emotionally closed. When they loved, it was from their head. There was no energy or warmth either emanating from or felt in the heart center of their chests, even though their personalities were warm and concerned. This is the key differentiation.

Of course, many of us have done healing work on our hearts, but if we have come from emotionally distant families and have grown up with those patterns, it takes great vigilance to hold a soft openness in our heart and not to revert, once we move on to the next topic. Recently, I was teaching my weekly *qi gong* and meditation class. We had done a practice to open, energize and soften the heart earlier, and we were now "resting in stillness." My big cat, Boinkers, jumped up and put his chest next to mine and started to purr. As I felt his heart, I realized that the tactile perception of openness in my chest had already tightened in just those few minutes.

Completely changing the deep patterns of the heart can take decades or even lifetimes. This is a fundamental spiritual turning point. Our patients, our families and our world need this from us now. As humans and healers, it is our work and, hopefully, our joy.

Editor's note: Part one of Mr. Fairfield's article appeared in the April 2004 issue.

AUGUST 2004

