

Medical Qigong for the Heart: Part III

Lisa VanOstrand, DMQ

Part 1 and Part II of this series focused on the physical aspect of the Heart and mental emotional aspects of the Heart respectively. Now, I would like to focus on the spiritual aspect of the Heart. It is important to recognize that body, mind and spirit can be separated only in theory, for in experience they are different dimensions of the same human consciousness.

In Chinese medicine, the Heart's spiritual aspect is the *Shen*. The Heart is said to house the *Shen*. There are enormous differences in reference to *Shen* in the Chinese Medical classics depending on the time period that it was written as well as the perspective of the author. One interpretation of *Shen* is as the Heart's connection to the mind. Another interpretation is as the Heart's connection to our individual spirit, as well as our connection to a consciousness greater than ourselves. Still from another perspective, each yin organ contains spiritual attributes that reside in the body as *Shen*, *Hun*, *Po*, *Yi* and *Zhi*. In this article, we will primarily focus on the *Shen* as the Heart-Mind connection and the Heart-Spirit connection. Regardless of the interpretation, as clinicians we must have tools to help our patients navigate this territory that Chinese Medicine calls the *Shen*. Medical *Qigong* practices are meant to supplement the treatment work for our patients in between sessions, as well as to help them take responsibility for their own healing. The *Ling Shu*, one of the classics of Chinese Medicine, tells us all diseases have their origin in *Shen*. One of the more famous definitions of *Shen* comes from Chapter 54 of the *Ling Shu*, when *Huang Di* questions his master, *Qi Bo* about *Shen*. *Huang Di*: "What *Shen*?" *Qi Bo*: "When blood and *qi* are complete and harmonious When *wei qi* and *ying qi* flow unimpeded, when five *zang* are complete then *Shen* resides in heart and mind *Hun* and *Po* contain themselves within *zang* and humanity is complete."

When we feel complete we will not be under the sway of our emotions and our *qi* will flow harmoniously. Like the Heart as the sovereign ruler of the body, completeness also represents a form of sovereignty, a form of mastery.

Shen Of The Heart As Mind

This interpretation of *Shen* relies on feelings of harmoniousness and completeness. I have found the following two meditations to be of great assistance in helping our patients come to a place of completeness. Both of the following meditations are from Jerry Alan Johnson, author of five textbooks on Medical *Qigong*. Both of these meditations should be done only after the anger and grief have been fully processed and some time has passed from the original wounding. These meditations would be inappropriate in some situations such as with children or with persons suffering from severe psychological trauma or mental illness. The patient must also understand that forgiveness does not mean condoning the offense. Additionally, in both meditations, the patients must be ready to let go.

Forgiveness Meditation

The first meditation is adapted from Jerry Alan's Johnson forgiveness meditation. There are three stages of forgiveness: Forgiving Oneself, Accepting the Situation and Forgiving the Perpetrator. The clinician will need to be able to guide and individualize the meditation based on their knowledge of the patient trauma.

1. The Forgiving Oneself Stage: For patients who experienced abuse as a child, it is appropriate to skip this stage. This stage involves the patients taking some responsibility for the trauma. This moves the patient from a state of blame to a state of understanding how they might have participated even in some small way in their own wounding.
2. The Accepting the Situation Stage: This stage deals with acknowledging that the situation played some role in the trauma. In another situation or in another time and place, this trauma might not have occurred.
3. The Forgiving the Perpetrator Stage: This stage is the most difficult and final step. Working through the first step allows the patient to understand where they might have played some role in the trauma. Working through the second step allows the patient to understand that in a different circumstance they might have had a different relationship with the perpetrator. Understanding that the perpetrator was acting out of ignorance and their own emotional pain may be helpful in this stage. It is beneficial to remember that although we might have initially been a victim, we can choose freedom in the present moment.

According to a study in the *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, as cited in *Redbook*, spikes in blood pressure that are experienced during stressful situations fell back to normal faster in people who were more forgiving of a betrayal. They also had lower blood pressure. Research from the University of Wisconsin-Madison showed that people holding a grudge had more heart problems than those who forgave. Even imagining the act of forgiveness can help.

Pulling Out The Pain Meditation

The second meditation, "Pulling Out the Pain," is based on the clinician helping the patient to find the gifts from a painful situation. Like the prior meditation, care should be taken that the patient is an appropriate candidate for this type of mediation.

1. Begin by sitting comfortably in a chair, with both feet on the floor, hands resting on the thighs, eyes closed, tongue on the upper palate. Breathe naturally and deeply, through the Lower Dantian (abdominal area).
2. Focus attention on the area below the diaphragm where painful memories and traumas are often stored. Imagine opening up this area to release the negative energy out the body as a stream of dark steam releasing from a cooking pot.
3. As the dark steam flows out of the body, it coalesces into a dark cloud. Imagine releasing feelings and memories of guilt, anger, rage, humiliation, abandonment, degradation, rejection, insecurity, and sorrow into this dark cloud.
4. Focus your attention on this energetic cloud and begin separating the pain and hurtful memories from the knowledge and wisdom gathered from these experiences. Visualize this knowledge and wisdom in the form of golden, white, and silver light energy gathering on the right side of the room. Continue to drain the dark cloud of misery and pain, now occupying the left side of the room, until you have extracted all the new insights from it. As you do so, you notice the dark cloud becoming heavier and darker.
5. Focus on the right side of the room. Through your intention, begin to inhale and imagine this bright, illuminating energy flowing back into your body. Absorb this knowledge and wisdom gathered from past experiences, void of any feelings of hurt, pain, or judgment, into every cell of

your body. This distilled knowledge and wisdom empowers you to heal from your wounds on a physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual level.

6. Focus your attention on the dark black cloud containing all your pain and suffering. Imagine a divine being, righteous and holy, holding a "Sword of Truth" standing by your side ready to sever the dark energetic cords still connecting your physical body to this dark cloud of despair. The sword descends and severs the cords (if the clinician is present, they clap his or her hands at this moment).
7. The cloud of darkness begins to ascend through the ceiling, floating through the sky into space. Far in the distance you begin to perceive divine, emanating waves of compassion, love, and mercy descending towards the Earth. One of the waves touches the ascending dark cloud of hurt and pain, exploding it into a brilliant light. The cloud is immediately transmuted into fluorescent crystal blue drops of light. This pure, clean energy descends from the Heavens like a gentle rain. Breathe in this crystal blue healing energy, let it penetrate deeply into every pore, every tissue and cell, saturating your body completely. Feel the light cleansing, healing, and radiating throughout your being.

Emily Smith of *The Atlantic Weekly* noted that similar to forgiveness, finding the silver lining of a painful situation can provide positive physical and emotional benefits. Research shows that people who are able to find meaning from their most painful experiences are healthier and more well adjusted than people who do not. Christina Pulchalski, in her article *The Role of Spirituality in Health Care*, illustrated this concept when she cited Victor Frankl, a psychiatrist who wrote of his experiences in a Nazi concentration camp: "Man is not destroyed by suffering; he is destroyed by suffering without meaning."

Shen Of The Heart As Spirit

I vividly remember a patient facing the imminent death of her young niece who was dying from leukemia. Naturally, she grappled with the morality of such a tragedy. Such tragedies bring to the forefront all of our beliefs about life, purpose and fate. I was listening to her and being with her in this incredibly grief-stricken space. I was aware of how heavy and dark the energy in the room was. I was aware of how I struggled with what to say and what would be the best treatment protocol. I had an idea to just light a candle with her and sit in silence and ask her to turn this situation over to a higher power. I asked her to invoke whatever spiritual leader, deity or tradition she felt most akin to. After just a few moments, the change in the energy of the room was palpable. Additionally, this enormous burden of grief had lifted and she even remarked she felt so much lighter, even relieved. This was also discernible in her face which looked as if she had already received a treatment. One of the beauties of Medical *Qigong* is that we offer our patients exercises and meditations to continue the effects of our treatment. This meditation to light a candle and connect to her spiritual tradition became her daily Medical *Qigong* prescription.

The other interpretation of *Shen* mentioned earlier comes from the idea that *Shen* is our heart spirit connection and is something that exists prior to our physicality. Jeffrey Yuen, an 88th generation Daoist priest and revered teacher of Chinese Medicine, calls this cosmic influence the *Big Shen*. The *Big Shen* is stored in the brain. It is able to resonate with the higher part of ourselves, the part of us that is more than this physical form in this lifetime. The *Big Shen* is also able to resonate with other spiritual forces. According to Jeffrey Yuen, conception occurs when the vibration of the parents' intercourse attracts a spirit from the cosmos. This spirit decides to incarnate as this gender, in this particular family, time period and culture. During pregnancy, the heart of the fetus is imprinted with the spirit's curriculum for this lifetime. This aspect stored in the heart is called the *Little Shen*. The

Shen attributes of the Kidneys is the *Zhi* or the will. The fetus, choosing this life experience and this set of parents, has the will and wisdom from the parents and ancestry to fulfill this chosen curriculum. From a meridian perspective, The *Chong* also stores the blueprint and reflects this same idea via kidney-heart communication that occurs via its main trajectory.

Connecting To Our Source Meditation

The next meditation is based on the original *Chong* and is based on my own meditative practices. The original *Chong* is the central axis that travels through the center of the body and connects us to heaven and earth. This practice also involves the three elixir fields known in *qigong* as Dantians. The Lower Dantian is in the abdominal area below the navel and houses the kidneys. The Middle Dantian is in the area of the chest and houses the heart. The Upper Dantian is in area of the 3rd eye or the space between the eyebrows and houses the brain. The three Dantians are connected to each through the original *Chong* axis. Gathering and cultivating the energy inherent in each Dantian is a form of inner alchemy. Inner alchemy is practiced for the purpose of improving physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health. Inner alchemy is ultimately about uniting our physical self with our original true nature as spirit.

1. Light a candle and take a moment to connect to the flame. Feel the sensory aspects of the flame: the light, the warmth. The flame symbolizes the connection to the light, our light. Again this could be the light of our higher self or the light of a spiritual connection or a tradition we feel close to. The flame is also a representation of the alchemical transformation of the darkness into the light.
2. Breathe deeply into the Lower Dantian. Feel the Lower Dantian expand in all directions with your inhale. As you inhale, feel the deep wisdom and knowingness that resonates with the kidney energy and your *Jing*. This knowingness comes from your own precious essence as well as the gifts of your ancestry. As you exhale, let this feeling recede like a wave into the kidneys. Repeat this for several minutes.
3. Breathe deeply into the Lower Dantian. On the exhale, let this wisdom and know-how that you have gathered into your kidney, flow up to the heart. Feel this flow, following the channel that is deep in the center core of your being. Repeat this for several minutes.
4. Breathe deeply into the Middle Dantian. Feel the Middle Dantian expand in all directions with your inhale. As you inhale, feel the peace and harmony that resonates with the heart energy and your *Shen*. This peace and harmony comes when you can feel complete with how things are in this moment. In this moment, there is nothing else to do and no one else to be except yourself. As you exhale, let this feeling recede like a wave into the heart. Repeat this for several minutes.
5. Breathe deeply into the Middle Dantian. On the exhale, let this peace and harmony that you have gathered into your heart, flow up to the brain. Feel this flow, following the channel that is deep in the center core of your being. Repeat this for several minutes.
6. Breathe deeply into the Upper Dantian. Feel the Upper Dantian expand in all directions with your inhale. As you inhale, feel the connection between this life and a consciousness bigger than yourself. This larger aspect of yourself can come from a feeling of a connection to a spiritual tradition that you follow or your own higher self. This connection represents your bigger *Shen*, the part of you that is more than this physical body. As you exhale, let this feeling recede like a wave into the center of the brain. Repeat this for several minutes.
7. Now allow that central channel to extend from the Upper Dantian into the heavens. Feel that connection between your Upper Dantian and the heavens. As you feel this, reaffirm the connection to your spiritual tradition or your own higher self. Feel this connection sending you love and light for a few minutes.
8. End this practicing by allow that love and light of your chosen spiritual connection to flow down

the central channel and into the heart. Feel gratitude for this spiritual connection and for any other things in your life that you feel grateful for. Sit peacefully for another few minutes.

As previously stated, the *Ling Shu* tells us that all diseases are rooted in *Shen*. Whether we define *Shen* as the Heart-Mind connection or the Heart-Spirit connection, the importance of addressing this dimension of our patients cannot be underestimated. This could mean letting go of old hurts and learning to forgive. It could mean that the patient's experiences are a lesson to look at what they may need to be learned. This lesson, according to Daoism, is not to be interpreted in a punitive way. It may simply be that we need to slow down, do what we really love, change our lifestyles or even to surrender to what is. Or perhaps it is to understand life as a continuous ebb and flow of different experiences. It could mean it is an opportunity to reconnect to this dimensions of ourselves that according to Daoism is where we originally come from and where we must go when we die. It is also an opportunity to perhaps find that completion.

References:

1. Chinese Medical Qigong Therapy Volume 4: Prescription Exercises and Meditations, Treatment of Internal Diseases, Pediatrics, Geriatrics, Gynecology, Neurology and Energetic Psychology (pages 459-460) By Professor Jerry Alan Johnson
2. Jeffrey Yuen lecture notes
3. www.redbookmag.com/health-wellness/advice/emotional-healing-forgiveness
4. www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/03/the-benefits-of-optimism-are-real/273306/
5. www.psychologytoday.com/blog/your-mind-your-body/201308/clouds-and-silver-linings
6. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1466687/
7. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1305900/

SEPTEMBER 2014