

The Conscious Evolution of Healing: Importance of Opening the Sensory Portals in Classical Chinese Medicine

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The Chinese medical classics are not just clinical guides. They give advice; ways we can awaken more fully into conscious awareness. Chapter 1 of the *Su Wen* speaks of the, "people of high antiquity" and their capacity to live healthy and peaceful lives for an extraordinary number of years. The text says these people were able "to keep physical appearance and spirit together, [allowing them] to exhaust the years allotted by heaven," in many cases more than 100 years.

They did this through maintaining resonance with the "Dao of Heaven," and optimizing their ability to sense and follow the "natural" ways of the world. The text goes on to suggest it's our desires which tend to get in the way of our ability to be at one with "heaven" and its direction. We get distracted by our senses, falling into patterns of overindulgence and emotional accumulation that stagnate our *qi* and blood.

Each of the Chinese medical classics place special importance on working with the sense "portals." Healing requires change, which means most importantly a change in consciousness. Each of the channel systems presented in the *Ling Shu* and *Nan Jing* make connection to the sensory portals. Chapter 8 of the *Su Wen* describes the organs themselves "opening" to the senses on the head. Chapters 37 and 44 of the *Nan Jing* present the sensory portals as "gates" that allow the organs to function properly. When these "gates" become closed, serious problems can occur: states referred to as "resistance and closure," where the organs lose the capacity to detox and receive physiological support from the rest of the body.

According to the *Nan Jing*, conditions affecting the Zang (viscera) are particularly difficult to resolve, while the Fu (bowels) are easier to treat. Chapter 4 of the *Ling Shu* says the Zang will naturally transfer its pathology into the Fu: from the yin into the yang. The Fu channels, being naturally "yang" and therefore possessing more movement capacity, have access to the portals of elimination. It is through the Fu that the Zang are able to find release.

The *Nan Jing* places equal importance on the upper and lower portals. Chapter 37 of the *Nan Jing* calls the "nine orifices" the "upper gates of the five Zang" organs. Seven of the orifices mentioned in this chapter are the upper sense organs, the remaining two are the lower portals of elimination: the urethra and anus. Chapter 37 says the orifices impact the ability for things to pass in and out of the Zang organs.

Chapter 80 of the *Ling Shu* says when there is clumping in the intestines resulting from turbidity, this can disrupt the spirit. We can become dispirited from faulty bowel function. This is a significant

statement, as being dispirited is arguably the *Ling Shu's* main focus, stated as the root of all disease. This makes sense. However, the upper portals from which we see, hear, taste and smell are presented as being just as important in the health of the Zang organs as the lower portals of elimination.

Chapter 44 of the *Nan Jing* is another discussion of the "gates" and "doors" of the body. In this chapter, the "gates" are presented as the lips, teeth, epiglottis, stomach, the "dark gate" (or pylorus), the "screen gate" which is the area of meeting between the two intestines and "Po Men" (the anus). This chapter discussing gates and doors is a description of the gut, the hollow passageway from the mouth to the anus, the long tube that is formed by the Fu organs: that which receives food and air and also eliminates them. These "gates" and "doors" are presented as the passageway for entrance and exit from the body. When the gates along this passageway are open, the Zang (via the Fu) have capacity to receive and eliminate. When they are closed, the Zang are at a loss.

From this group of chapters, it is established that the capacity for the Zang organs to receive and eliminate is of vital importance. They do so via the portals: the upper sense organs and the lower portals of elimination. These areas act as "gates" for entry and exit for the Zang. It is also established that the digestive tract is another passageway that is seen as a collection of "gates" and "doors," which is arguably controlled by the Fu organs. When there is stagnation and accumulation within this passageway, it affects the "gates" and "doors," disallowing the Zang from discharging. This can disrupt the spirit.

The discussion of "portals" in Chinese medicine is complex. A portal is a passageway, gate or door. There are many passages that focus on "entry" and "exit" within the Chinese classics: how things transmit from one place to another, physiologically as well as pathologically. Portals can mean exits where the organs and channels eliminate something, they also mean entrances where resources and information can be received. As with all of Chinese medicine, some of what is spoken about is physical, some is energetic, some is esoteric. For example, the "qiao" are energetic gathering places along the midline of the body, which are said by Taoist meditation theory to be portals of perception much like the sense organs of the face. Chapter 5 of the *Ling Shu* arguably presents this idea in its discussion of "Roots and Terminations." The channels discussed in this chapter begin at the Jing Well points of the feet. The yang channels terminate at the sense organs of the face, while the yin channels terminate at the abdomen, chest and throat, arguably at three of the "qiaos" on the front of the body. The theory of energy centers along the midline of the body is not unique to Chinese medicine. The Indian tradition talks about "chakras," which are similar to the "qiao." Also, I recall in Elisabeth Gilbert's book, *Eat, Pray, Love* that her teacher, a Balinese herbalist advised her to see the world through her heart, teaching her through meditation to focus on the area at the center of her chest to open that area's perceptive capacity.

The *Ling Shu* teaches that an important part of being human is spiritual evolution. When the protagonist of the book asks his teacher in Chapter 54 what is spirit, he is answered with a statement that includes mention of the Zang organs reaching a state of "completion." The internal organs go through a type of evolutionary cultivation process throughout our lives. The fact that the organs "open" to the senses takes on a new significance. The sense organs are called "antennae" of the internal organs. They express what is contained within the organs. They also pull in information that can potentially influence and change the internal organs, helping them to evolve.

The translations and commentaries of Claude Larre and Elisabeth Rochat de la Vallee offer an interesting perspective on the writings of the *Nei Jing*. Their descriptions of the humors of the body in

relation to the organs are especially rich. They speak of the body's "Essences," and its spiritual attributes like the Hun and Po as being like assistants that help a person realize their life's purpose. Larre and Rochat de la Valle don't discuss the humors of the body like inert material, rather they describe them as very much alive, almost personifying them. Their contributions to western translation of the Chinese medical classics are especially helpful in understanding the more esoteric chapters in the *Su Wen* and *Ling Shu*.

The humors of the body: essence, *qi*, blood and spiritual attributes are presented as maintaining health of body and mind, but they also connect a person to their path in life, and the ultimate realization of their Shen-spiritual self. Emphasized in Larre and Rochat de la Valle's translation of Chapter 8 of the *Ling Shu* is the capacity for "knowing-how." Suggested in this chapter is the innate capacity within us all to instinctively know what is best for us: where to go, what to do based on who we are. This is imbedded in our Jing-essence and manifest through the Zang organs. Chapter 8 seems to physiologically describe what we commonly hear in popular culture: that we all possess everything we need within us. The process of life is one in which we unlock what is already within us. We awaken the internal organs, unlocking their innate wisdom. This internal wisdom then emanates from our eyes, affecting the way we sense the world. This is known as "Jing Ming": the brightness of our essence that shines out of our eyes. "Jing Ming" is also the classical name of the acupuncture point BL-1 located near the eyes.

It is easy to focus on the pathological side of the human condition when studying Chinese medicine. There is so much written about what can go wrong and the ways in which we suffer as a result. Most of the acupuncture channel systems are described via their pathology. This is arguably representative of a treatment strategy attributed to the *Nei Jing*: the first stage in the healing process is acknowledgment of what is going wrong, where we have gone off the path, and how we are suffering. This places our focus on cleaning up and letting go of what is causing us problems. A period of purification is frequently the first step in most spiritual traditions as well. We first get rid of the junk. Then we can rebuild that which has become damaged or weakened.

We can't really force ourselves to "see" the world differently. This just doesn't seem to work, because the root of the eyes is located deep in the body, arguably in the Liver or the Kidneys. To change the way we see the world, we must work on the organs. This is one theory, possibly inspired by Chapter 8 of the *Su Wen*. According to Chapter 5 of the *Ling Shu*, to affect the eyes, we need to work on Tai Yang: the Bladder and Small Intestine Channels, perhaps a statement suggesting the need to work on the bowels. There are many chapters that discuss the eyes and the channels that affect them. Seeing the world differently is quite important in the *Ling Shu*. At any rate, before we can change and cultivate our senses, we must first "unlock" and free up the interior of the body.

Chapters 11 of the *Ling Shu* and the *Su Wen* are arguably key chapters to solidifying and clinically implementing the strategies for "unlocking" and freeing the internal organs. Chapter 11 of the *Ling Shu* discusses the trajectories of the Divergent Channels, while Chapter 11 of the *Su Wen* presents the Curious Organs. Numerology was important to the ancient Chinese. The fact that these two subjects share a chapter number is significant. The Curious organs are often called "organs of evolution." Throughout human history, they have changed shape much more than the 12 Zang Fu organs. They have seemed to evolve as man does.

The Divergent Channels make connection to the constitutional "Yuan" level of the body. They are presented in the *Ling Shu* as having a strong resonance with the "Dao of Heaven," aspects of the

universal code. They were the classical channel system that connected to the Yuan level of the body, before the Extraordinary Vessels were developed and popularized for clinical use. The Divergent Channels are arguably the main channel system indicated in the *Ling Shu* for freeing up the internal organs, chiefly through penetrating the various "gates" and "doors" of the body as described in the *Nan Jing*. It can even be said that the main role of the Divergent channels is to promote the evolution of the Zang organs.

Conditions affecting the Zang organs can be especially serious. The Zang collectively hold onto the life-force of the body. They are sources of power and resource. Chapter 8 of the *Ling Shu* says the Zang are also residences for all the spiritual and mental attributes of the body. It is through the Zang that we are able to experience the emotions. They also allow our personality to manifest.

Larre and Rochat de la Valle's translation of Chapter 8 of the *Ling Shu* describes the role of the Zang, and how they become diseased: "Xue (blood), Mai (vessels), Ying (nourishing *qi*: blood and fluids), Qi, Jing (essence) and Shen (spirit), these are stored by the five Zang. By a succession of overflowings and total invasion they leave the Zang, then the Essences are lost; and Hun and Po are carried away in an uncontrollable agitation, will and intent become confused and disordered. Knowing-how and reflection abandon us."

According to Chapter 8 of the *Ling Shu*, the blood, vessels and *qi* provide a safe, nourishing place for the essences and spirits within our body. When these structures are damaged, the essence and spiritual attributes will scatter and become lost. Obviously, one's physical health will suffer. In addition, says Chapter 8, the diseased person's "will and intent" will also suffer. Their mind and therefore outer life will become "confused and disordered" and they will lose their capacity to know where to go or what is right for them.

Chapter 8 says it is through "invasions" or by "a succession of overflowings" that the Zang become ill. Invasions obviously refer to external pathogens such as "wind" and "cold" that can penetrate into the interior of the body. Overflowings are obvious references to the Luo Vessels.

Chapter 37 of the *Nan Jing* says when the Zang are not "at ease," the orifices will not be "passable." It also says when the "vessels" are not at ease, "*qi* and blood will stagnate in them," causing them to "overflow." This is also arguably a reference to the Luo Vessels, which are described in Chapter 10 of the *Ling Shu* as manifesting in states of "fullness" and "emptiness." When the Primary Channels come in contact with something that they cannot deal with, they pass the unresolved challenge off to their collaterals: the Luo Vessels. The issue becomes stuck in the level of the blood: the humor the Luo Vessels utilize to trap an unresolved issue. However, the Luo can only hold onto so much. When they "overflow," the Luo can emptying back into the Primary Channel, whereby something that was in the background of our conscious life now becomes in our face. If the problem can still not be resolved, another collateral system will inherit the issue: the Divergent Channels. Instead of using blood to trap the issue, the Divergent Channels use Jing-essence, sublimating the problem into a subconscious area of the body, often into the joints. Instead of just blood and *qi* stagnation, pathology being held in the Divergent Channels creates Jing stagnation, which taxes the essence, depleting it over time. This is the way in which the essences are lost, the Hun and Po are carried away, the will and intent become confused and disordered and the capacity for "knowing-how" is lost. Depletion of the essence is also a way of saying one's lifespan is reduced; the focus of the Jing is diverted from living out its "Ming" or purpose.

Chapter 37 of the *Nan Jing* discusses the conditions of "closure and resistance," which involves insufficient communication between the Yin and Yang, Zang and Fu, viscera and bowels in the body. When there is closure and resistance, the Zang cannot discharge or detox to the Fu for elimination of toxins. Furthermore, the Zang and Fu cannot receive fortification of *qi*, blood and fluids from one another to rebuild or nourish themselves. They basically become isolated and cut off. Chapter 37 warns that this is a very serious situation, saying: "When closure and resistance are present, one may not complete his life-span and shall die a premature death."

Chapter 8 of the *Ling Shu* suggests it is through overindulgence and living a life out of moderation that the body becomes damaged, potentially leading to "closure and resistance." Overfilling of the Luo Vessels can also relate to an overabundance of unprocessed emotions. The emotions are like food, they have the capacity to nourish and fortify our bodies. They provide lessons by which the internal organs can cultivate wisdom. However, like food, if they are not properly digested, they can accumulate and become problematic.

Chapter 69 of the *Ling Shu* is called "Grief and Anger Without Words." It speaks about situations where a person is unable to express and therefore discharge emotion. The treatment suggested for this situation is the Luo point of the Kidneys: KI-4, with CV-15 and CV-22. This is interesting as the classical symptom for "fullness" of the Kidney Luo Vessel is the inability to urinate and defecate. Commentators have said this is somatic imagery for obsessive-compulsive behavior. The "emptiness" symptom of the Kidney Luo is sharp pain in the area of the lumbar and genital region, impotence and paranoia. This treatment protocol seems to emphasize opening the area of the diaphragm and throat to discharge unreleased emotions. The trajectory of the Kidney's Luo Vessel, as described by Chapter 10 of the *Ling Shu* travels from the foot into the lumbar spine, terminating at the area around KI-21 and CV-15 at the level of the diaphragm below the chest.

Chapter 69 of the *Ling Shu* can also be seen to make reference to the classical symptom associated with the Jing Well points, as described by the *Nan Jing*: "fullness below the heart": the area where the Kidney's Luo Vessel terminates. The Jing Well points are said by the *Nan Jing* to have an especially strong effect on the Zang organs. Jing Well points also have strong resonance with the Liver and Lungs, as they are designated "Wood" or "Metal" points within the Primary Channel waterways system. The Jing Well points are able to release pressure from the Zang partially through regulating the diaphragm, which is arguably controlled by the Liver and the Lungs: the organs that represent our relationship with the external world. Jing Well points also have a strong resonance with opening the sense orifices, as suggested by Chapter 5 of the *Ling Shu*, which says the Yang Jing Well points of the feet "terminate" at the eyes, ears, mouth and nose. This chapter helps illuminate further the information within Chapter 5 of the *Ling Shu*. We can work with Jing Well points to release the upper sense portals, as they have a natural resonance. This has a strong relationship with the diaphragm. To be able to open the portals: above and below, one must release the diaphragm. The combination of information from Chapters 5, 8 and 69 of the *Ling Shu* suggests that in order to allow free expression of the emotions, both the upper and lower portals must be open. The areas of the diaphragm, throat and lumbar spine must also be free.

Kiiko Matsomoto cites a quotation from Sun Si Miao in her book, *Five Elements and Ten Stems*, that suggests all disease, even if it originates from the exterior of the body via "wind" has an internal cause: "We have to know that the four hundred and four diseases in the body are created by ourselves. There are no other reasons. Clean up the five Yin organs and the body, and then the heart will become still, equal and balanced."

All disease, according to this quotation comes from the state of our body's internal landscape. It's not so much about what is happening outside of us, our issues come more from our own personal reactions to what we see. When the Zang are not at ease, the portals close and become impassable. When we lack capacity to let go and discharge, the Zang become stuck. This leads to inability to take in new sensory information.

We become rigid and stagnant in the way we sense the world. Modern Chinese medical commentators actually say aging is not so much an issue of decline of Yin and Yang, it is more a problem involving fixation of the senses. We lose capacity to see the world anew, and so we age. This is opposite of the state of consciousness described as "enlightenment" by many spiritual traditions. In enlightenment, we are supposedly able to see the world with the eyes of a child, as if everything we see is for the first time - totally new.

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