

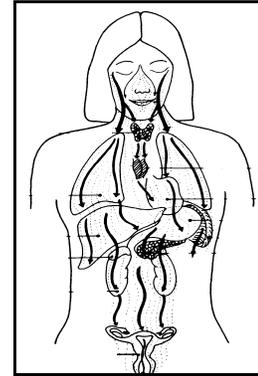
## *exploring*

# Chinese Medicine

Many Westerners find the energetic concepts of Chinese medicine to be confusing, unfathomable, or even mystifying. This seems understandable given the differences between our two cultures. However, I believe it doesn't have to be that way. I have spent most of my adult life traveling, exploring, studying and generally immersing myself in the large ocean of Chinese energetics. With these experience and my western cultural roots I hope I can sometimes act as translator, interpreter, or field guide. That is, I try to explain some foreign sounding ideas in ways that are easier for Westerners to understand. I think this is important on many levels – cross cultural understanding; decreasing us vs. them; etc. But, more to the point, we can learn and access useful information on maintaining health and limiting dis-ease. So, occasionally in these brief articles, I will present some of the Chinese energetic information that may be of benefit to you – as it has to me.

## Organ Energy

In Chinese medicine the internal organs are the foundation of all energetic functions, as well as the physical functions as described by Western medicine. For example, the lungs physical function is to bring fresh oxygen into the body and release toxic waste products. Chinese medicine recognizes this, but also adds a broader, more general energetic function to the lungs: let things come, let things go. This is easy to understand with breathing as an example; let things come – inhale, let things go – exhale. There are also many other aspects of letting come/letting go in our lives: money, relationships, love, jobs, etc. When it comes to the *energy* of letting any or all of these actions happen, it falls in the domain of the lungs. Consequently, if we are struggling with some aspect of this energetic letting come/letting go, regardless of the details, focusing therapy, healing, herbs, etc. on the lungs may be helpful.



This broader action of organ energetic action may be the largest obstacle for Western minds approaching Chinese medicine. In this, and future articles, I hope to present energetic information on specific organs which will help clarify the sometimes confusing landscape and terminology of Chinese medicine. The focus of this article is the spleen.

## Spleen & Nourishment

Whenever the term 'spleen' is used in Chinese medicine it also inherently includes the pancreas. While structurally they are separate organs, they are right next to each other. The early Chinese did little dissection and considered their functions combined.

The key energetic function associated with the spleen is nourishment. The most obvious aspect of nourishment is through food. The spleen is energetically responsible for the entire process of transforming food into usable nutrients and energy to support the entire body, mind, and spirit. The stomach, large and small intestines each play a role in this nourishment process as well. However, their function, while important, is focused on *transporting* or moving food through the body. The spleen is responsible for *transforming*, overseeing, coordinating, and supplying the energy for the entire digestive and eliminative process.

Consequently, any issues relating to digestion, assimilation, absorption, nutrition, elimination may be addressed by focus on spleen energy.



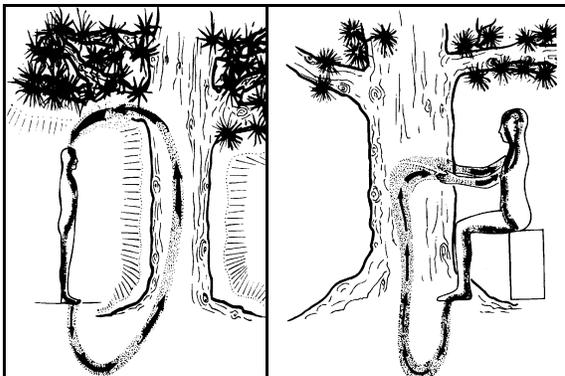
Food is not the only way we nourish ourselves. There are many aspects of our lives which provide nourishment as important as food: relationships, nature, love, family, work, play, music, gardening, art, earth. All of these and more are important nurturing aspects; however, each aspect may not be equally nourishing to every person. Gardening may be one person's passion while for another it is mere drudgery. The same way we each need to find our own optimal diet – the right combination of foods, which physically nourish us – we also need to find those other aspects of our lives which nourish us body, mind, and spirit.

The spleen is associated with earth within the five element theory. Earth is the soil that feeds us. It is the literal ground, which provides a sense of time and space. Earth provides stability from which we can move, grow, live. Earth cradles and nurtures the life that depends on it. The quality of the soil determines the stability of a tree's roots. Energetically the body, mind, spirit balance is dependent on the quality of our spleen-earth function.

***There is nothing which heaven does not cover  
and nothing which earth does not sustain.***

Chuan Tzu 369-286 B.C.

Just as there are many levels to nourish ourselves, there are many ways to support the spleen-earth energy in the body. In my work I focus on nourishing spleen-earth energy through touch (bodywork), plants (Chinese herbs), and internal energy development (meditation). These are services I offer, but you aren't limited to these. Any activity that helps you connect with the earth and feel nourished is perfect spleen support. Sometimes it takes some experimenting to find what works, but the benefits are well worthwhile. I find that physical contact with earth, soil, and rocks to be very helpful. I enjoy gardening mostly for the chance to dig in the dirt. Even in my very urban-industrial neighborhood, I 'play in the dirt' in deck containers and in the few square feet of ground outside my building.



Trees are a wonderful way to connect with deeper sources of earth energy. Sitting or standing next to a large tree with deep roots can be a simple way to access the grounded, earth quality. Simply use your breath to follow the tree roots and create a circular flow of energy between earth, tree, and yourself.

Spleen energy is about nourishment. And there is more to nourishment than food.

Understanding some of the Chinese energetic concept of spleen and earth may provide us with ways to more thoroughly nourish body, mind, and spirit.

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