

Home is Where the Heart Is

Kerry Loeb

“Let my soul smile through my heart and my heart smile through my eyes, that I may scatter rich smiles in sad hearts.”

– Paramahansa Yogananda

In the last article entitled “Love Your Liver,” which relates to the Element of Wood and the season of Spring, I mentioned that if the Liver/Gallbladder system is balanced, strong, and open, we can access our creative natures more than any other time of year, perhaps resulting in new ideas about the directions we want our lives to take.

We are now entering into the Fire element of Summer, a time when the Heart and Small intestine function are most active. If this function is balanced and healthy, this is a time when the creative ideas of Spring can become manifest in our lives. Our energy will be at its highest during Fire time and this is when we are more apt to take action, to take risks, where we might transition to another job or get involved in a new relationship, move to another location, travel to new places, take new classes, etc. This is the time of year for moving our lives forward, for jumping off cliffs, big or



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small, and trusting that the net will appear.

DIAGNOSING A HEART IMBALANCE

Here are a few ways to determine if your Heart energy is imbalanced and could use your healing attention. According to Chinese facial physiognomy, a Heart imbalance can show up in the nose area. The left side signifies the left side of the heart, and the right relates to the right side. Any heart-related blockages can show up

in the form of redness or blackheads and oiliness or breakouts in this area. This can be indicative of high blood pressure or cholesterol problems.

If you have vertical or diagonal lines on your earlobe, this may indicate a break in the Heart energy that may have been inherited from your ancestors. Long-term red or purple lines under your nails can be indicative of a Heart imbalance. Many diseases of the Heart cause fluid to build up in your feet and lower legs (edema). As the fluid builds up, you may see swelling, which can extend as far as the upper legs and groin.

There are other indicators used to determine a Heart imbalance. Take a look at the following symptoms and see if you identify with any of these: Lack of mental clarity/confusion, poor memory, poor concentration, lack of mental clarity/confusion, poor memory, poor concentration, heart palpitations, dizziness, insomnia, anxiety, restlessness, uncontrollable laughter/crying, manic depression, night sweats, fidgeting.

If any of these indicators are true for you it's time to tend to your Heart.

BALANCING THE SHEN

Joy is the emotion of the Heart and the Small intestine. When we experience true joy and happiness, we are nourishing our Heart and Small Intestine energy. Our physical heart is responsible for pumping blood through our bodies. It controls the health and vitality of the blood vessels and also controls sweating, the tongue, and speech. But perhaps the most important role of the Heart in Chinese medicine is that it houses the spirit, referred to as “Shen.” The Shen in Chinese Medicine is one of the three treasures of the body, and it encompasses consciousness, emotions, mental acuity, and thought, as well as the ability to process incoming sensory information. Each organ system in Chinese medicine is related to one aspect of the spirit (such as intellect, willpower, or instinct)—but the Shen is the most important as it governs all the other aspects. Prolonged emotional upset, mental illness, personality disorders, emotional imbalances, processing, and sensory disorders all are manifestations of a disturbed, ungrounded, or weakened Shen. When we are lacking joy in our lives, the heart suffers, and we can feel stuck and mentally chaotic. Mania or obsessive joy and laughter can indicate an excess of scattered Shen, and this over-stimulated heart energy could also cause agitation, insomnia, and palpitations. In other words, even pleasurable emotions can be out of balance.

As I mentioned, the Small Intestine is the organ that is paired with the Heart. The Heart meridian expresses movement upwards, while the Small Intestine meridian expresses movement downwards. In Eastern medicine, the Small Intestine plays both a physical and a mental role. The men-

tal role of the Small Intestine is to separate the clear thoughts from the turbid ones. Clear judgment depends on the ability of the Small Intestine to separate the pure from the impure.

When considering this pairing logically, it makes sense. When we are experiencing heartache or stress, over time this can manifest as an upset gastrointestinal tract, pain in the abdomen, vomiting, nausea, or even a lack of appetite. Therefore, the Small Intestine and Heart work closely together, and to balance and support one of these organs is very beneficial in balancing and supporting the other.

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When the Shen is balanced, we feel mentally clear and able to process experiences and to manifest our Heart’s desires. This is when we can live a life of more calm, more relaxation, and with less stress. So, the Heart energy is all about feeling very alive—from the physical heart beating in our chest, to the flow of blood through our veins, to our mental ability to stay present and focused, and to our emotional selves feeling whole and complete. This is the energy of Summer—abundant, hot, and lively.

DIET

In the Summer, fruits and vegetables are abundant so you want to try to reflect that energy in your food choices.

The color associated with the

Heart is red, and the Heart is nourished through red foods such as cherries, strawberries, red kidney beans, tomatoes (if you don’t have any inflammatory conditions), red onions, red cabbage, and azuki beans.

Summer is hot, so we need food to cool us down. Bitter is the flavor associated with the Fire element. The bitter flavor cools and tempers the excitation associated with excess heat that can be present if the Fire element is imbalanced. This may manifest as racing thoughts, irritability, anger, sleeplessness, or worry. Bitter foods can also be used to treat edema and obesity or excess heat conditions associated with a Heart imbalance, including red eyes, headaches, and hypertension. Some examples of bitter-tasting foods are rhubarb, apricot kernels, radicchio, endive, romaine lettuce, dandelion leaves, mustard greens, burdock root, and kale.

Other foods that cool heat and are beneficial this time of year are asparagus, banana, chicken egg whites, clams, grapefruit, lemon, lettuce, millet, mung beans, mung bean sprouts, potato, salt, tofu, watermelon, cucumber, and all forms of seaweed.

EXERCISE

As I mentioned, this is the time of year when we will naturally be most active, so exercise may come easier for many of us this time of year. I recommend getting outdoors and breathing in the fresh air while doing a brisk walk or run. Or during these warmer months maybe swimming suits you or playing tennis or golf. Whatever form of exercise that floats your boat, just make sure you get out and do it.

For me, in addition to some cardio and strengthening exercises, I always like to include a daily full-body Self-Massage routine to keep the energy from getting stuck in any of

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the meridians or internal organs. One particular acupoint that can be very beneficial for anxiety, stress, insomnia, over-thinking, is called Heart 7. [View this short video](#) to learn how to activate this point.

Another effective point for calming the Shen is called Conception Vessel 17 which is easy to access and important to work on daily, especially before going to sleep at night. You can learn how to access this point by [viewing this video](#).

SPECIALTY ITEMS

As I mentioned, in Chinese medicine the Heart is associated with the bitter flavor. In Mexico where I live, cacao is very highly touted for its healing properties. I like a nice morning cup of hot cacao as it has an affinity for the Heart in multiple ways besides just its bitterness. It is well-known for its impressive antioxidant content, making it a tasty way to combat cardiovascular and cellular damage in the body. From an Eastern medical perspective, it also tends to the spiritual Heart, moving Liver chi to facilitate access to joy and inspire passion. Just make sure to use 100% cacao powder, preferably organic. Add one tablespoon to a cup of hot water. I also add a teaspoon of curcumin and a bit of cinnamon because it helps with circulation and moving vital energy to harmonize body, soul, and mind. Sweeten with a healthy sweetener of your choice.

Since the 1980s I have been a student and consumer of medicinal mushrooms, and I believe at the top of the list is Reishi (called *Lingzhi* in Chinese). It has been referred to as the “herb of longevity” and it also has many positive applications for the Heart. It has been shown to enhance activities of the heart mitochondrial enzymes and respiratory complexes,

as well as being effective in the age-associated decline of cellular energy status. It also prevents the decline of antioxidant status by scavenging free radicals.

HEART OPENING HACKS

In addition to the ways described above to nourish and strengthen Heart energy, there are other important things you can do to help to support and open the Heart. Giving back to others is one way to do this. You know that wonderful feeling of open-heartedness when you unconditionally give to others? Many people

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believe that to open one’s heart it is necessary to receive love coming from others. While this is somewhat true, the bigger truth in my opinion is that one of the best ways to live an open-hearted life is to give to others. They say that happiness comes from getting what you want but Joy comes from giving.

This can take many forms, maybe just a friendly smile to someone you pass on the street or share an elevator ride or bus with. Maybe it’s leaving an oversized tip for your waiter. Maybe it’s from doing volunteer work and helping those that are less fortunate. Maybe it’s creating beauty in the world for others to experience, whether that be music, art, or poetry.

Maybe it's lightening up another's day with humor. Or giving the gift of deep listening to a friend in need. Whatever your gift is, it's important to share it with the world.

The heart is nourished through any activities that bring you joy. We can nourish the Heart by appreciating things that matter to us—people, places, and ideals. As the heart governs our relationships with others, it is nurtured by feeling connected to those that we love. Reach out to friends and family, strengthen these bonds, and make new ones. The heart is also nourished through beauty so take time to appreciate the beauty of nature as well as music, poetry, art, and dance. And really appreciate what you have in your life now—a good practice is to think about the things you are grateful for in the morning and also before going to sleep. And of course, taking some time for contemplation, meditation, or prayer is always healing no what time of year.

I have a note on my desk that I look at in the morning and then at the end of my day. It's just a few directional reminders that help me keep my heart open and experience Joy and laughter every day. It's a good practice to always be on the lookout for opportunities for laughter and lightness.

- Who did I help today? (This can be more than one person.)
- Did I accomplish what I wanted with ease, joy, laughter, and presence?
- Did I have fun?

Try these or create some of your own. Your Heart will thank you for it.

CONCLUSION

Remember, the Five-element system has everything to do with

aligning our body's rhythms with the rhythms of the natural earth cycles to help us move in the direction of living in abundant and optimal health. The next edition will be all about the very important organs related to our digestion system, the Spleen and Stomach. As with all the seasonal transitions in the Five-element cycle, what we do to strengthen our Heart and Small Intestine function now will nourish and strengthen this next organ system.

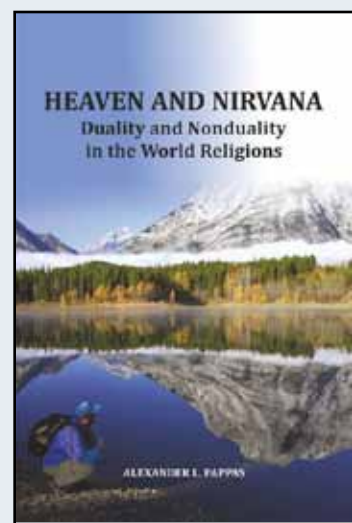


Kerry Loeb, after 40 years in the Bay Area, became a digital nomad expatriate living in the central highlands of Mexico. He created the Macrobiotic Shiatsu Resource Center in the San Francisco Bay Area in the late 1980s while he was doing three simultaneous 7-year apprenticeships with Shizuko Yamamoto, Patrick McCarty, and Edward Spencer. He was a macrobiotic counselor for 20 years before exploring other pursuits. He recently created an online, pre-recorded, deep-dive, Do-In program as he found that teaching this method for 25 years and practicing regularly on himself for 35 years has had a huge impact on his health and many others. [You can learn more about and sign up for the program here.](#)

Note: To help you jump-start your health, Kerry is offering 20% off his DO-IN program until July 1st (normally \$99 now just \$79). Use coupon code kloebht2021. [Just click here to learn more and sign up.](#) 20% of your purchase will go to support Ohsawa Macrobiotics.

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