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THE HEART, IN LING SHU CHAPTER 8, BEN SHEN

[In this .pdf file: The Emperor's Question. pp.14-26, 89].

CASCADE I
THE EMPEROR'S QUESTION

Huang Di asked Qi Bo this question:

In all needling, the method is above all
Not to miss the rooting in the Spirits.

Xue and mai, ying and qi, jing shen,
This is what the 5 zang store.

If a situation arises
Where, following overflowing and complete invasion,
They leave the zang,
Then the Essences are lost;
Both hun and po are carried away in an uncontrollable agitation,
Will and Purpose become confused and disordered,
Know-how and Reflection abandon us.

Where does this state come from?
Should one accuse Heaven? Is it the fault of Man?

And what does one call Virtue, Breaths, Life, Essences, shen, hun, po,
Heart, Purpose, Will, Thought, Know-how, Reflection?

An Instructive Discussion

凡刺之法先必本于神
黃帝問於歧伯曰

huang di wen yu qi bo ye
fan ci zhi fa xian bi ben yu shen

‘Huang Di asked Qi Bo this question:

In all needling, the method is above all
Not to miss the rooting in the Spirits’.

Elisabeth Rochat: The start of Chapter 8 is a question from Huang Di, the Emperor, to his minister about the way to needle, *ci zhi fa*, the method of needling.

Claude Larre: The ci character has the knife on the right side. It is not a knife, but it has the same effect of opening the skin. The other part has something to do with a thorn. So this character has something to do with thorns and the effect of pricking and entering the flesh. Zhi is the general character for linking, and fa is the method.

The sentence continues: *xian bi ben yu shen*. Bi is not to be confused with Heart. Bi is almost the same as the character for Heart with one additional slanting stroke. It means necessary, it is necessary, it has to be, and so on, and sometimes it just reflects that things are how they are, so it is difficult to put an additional English word, just be content with the necessity of it!

The character xian is not very interesting etymologically. We have to separate the issues, some characters are more important than others. Ben is the root. Yu means to go towards, it has no special etymology, and shen is the Spirits. It is necessary to go to the roots to reach the Spirits.

It means that it is not the localisation that is important. Of course, you have to know what you are doing, but you must keep in mind that you have to wait for the time and for the condition of the patient when these Spirits, which are animating all of the body, will receive your solicitation. They will receive it through the qi. The Spirits are never separated from the qi but you have to recall the Spirits through the qi. Moving the qi you will be able to change the condition of people's mind, and from the change that will be fixed in them, the flow of life will be corrected. There will be no more xie qi, perverse qi, but it will once again be zheng qi, the normal qi.

But to do that you will have to put your mind in phase with your patient's mind, and not mind in the meaning of intellectual mind, but mind in the more profound, more comprehensive meaning. This individual, after all, is a person, and you are a person, it's a personal exchange. Help is possible if you reach to the Spirits. If you do not reach the Spirits you may have a temporary good effect, but it will be destroyed soon after. But if you have moved life where it is built through the Spirits, then these changes will stay for as long as the condition is good for the Spirits to stay. So it is interesting to understand that some sort of metaphysics is necessary. That is the reason why I myself am engaged in this business, not to cure, but to understand whether or not the Chinese had some sort of understanding of life which encompasses the interplay of individuals. It is in a sphere which is not intellectual, it is some sort of spiritual life.

But is it the field of acupuncture or not? We are sure that according to the way of their own civilization, the Chinese were not restricting what they were doing to the qi aspect. They were going further, and that was the shen aspect. And that is the reason why we have to be comfortable with this, because it is from our knowledge of the Spirits that we are able to cure people for good.

此 血
五 脈
藏 營
之 氣
所 精
藏 神
也

xue mai ying qi jing shen
ci wu zang zhi suo cang ye

‘Xue and mai, ying and qi, jing shen,
This is what the 5 zang store’.

Elisabeth Rochat: The Emperor starts his question with an affirmation when he says that in every case when you needle you have to go to the root of the Spirits. This is something that he has received and already knows. Then he passes to another affirmation which is the following: xue mai, ying qi, jing shen are all stored in and through the five zang.

So we have a very clear first construction: a rooting in the Spirits. And we know that these Spirits can embrace all that exists. Immediately following this we have the vitality functioning through these six terms, and their storing, keeping preciously, thesaurisation by the five zang.

These six terms represent three couples of two. It is easy to see that jing shen, Essences and Spirits, form a couple, and you can see that xue mai is another couple which is frequently seen in the Nei Jing. And the couple ying, nutrition, and qi, Breaths, is another couple which represents vitality. In each couple there is a yin and a yang aspect. The Blood, xue, is the yin aspect and the mai or mo is the yang aspect. It is the same for the second couple, the nutrition, ying, is a deeper more nourishing aspect in contrast with the qi, especially if we take qi as the defensive qi, or wei qi. And finally our last couple jing shen, the Essences give a substance which is yin, in relationship to the shen.

Question: Can I ask about the shen because sometimes it is described as neither yin nor yang but encompasses both, and sometimes it is seen as very yang.

Claude Larre: Yin and yang are not to be used absolutely. They have to be used contextually. The context is that there are three couples, one matching xue and mai, one other matching ying and qi and thirdly jing and shen, which refers to Man. You may feel that jing shen is more yang - but it is impossible that this yang dynamism would not be resting on some yin power, which is the Essences. So, even if the jing shen gives you the impression that the yang is dominating, you are just looking at the yang aspect of the jing shen. It is sure that yin yang may play as an expression in our minds more freely than any other because it is the highest combination.

Elisabeth Rochat: If we look at the first couple, xue mai, we see that there is a movement of pushing and circulation. The richness of life is represented by the Blood, and we will see that the Blood is full of the jing, Essences, and shen, the Spirits, because Blood holds the Spirits. There is this movement of animation, of pushing forwards, which is represented by the mai or mo, whose power is, at the same time, to push forward and to keep within limits.

In the second couple, ying qi, we find 1: all the power of nutrition, ying, the maintenance of life by alimentation and 2: all the Breaths, qi, that permit the circulation and defence of the body. There is something that spreads everywhere rhythmically in the qi.

And in the last couple, jing shen, we have the most subtle, most refined expression of this vitality, with the composition and harmonious recomposition, of everything that composes my being, which is the jing, Essences, which serves as a support for the action of the Spirits. Their action is just to be,

and to be present. Afterwards there will follow this brilliance, this radiance that Father Larre talked about.

If we look again at these characters, we see that Blood is linked with the Liver, and the mai or mo with the Heart. It is exactly this that is stated right at the end of Chapter 8 of the Ling Shu. Everything that involves nutrition, ying, is linked with the Spleen, the Breaths, qi, are linked with the Lung, and the Essences, jing, are those of the Kidneys. Then there are just the Spirits, and of course we know that the Spirits reside in the Heart. And we have, as so often in the Nei Jing, a double presence which can be linked with either the Kidneys or the Heart. Here it is the double presence of the Heart which will enlighten us on the two aspects of the Heart.

If we look now at the names of the meridians which are attributed to these various organs, we see that in the middle couple, ying qi, we have the two sides of tai yin, and in the third couple, jing shen, we have the two sides of shao yin. So you wonder if at the beginning, xue mai, we are not faced with the two sides of jue yin? Almost certainly - since we know that the Heart has a double meridian, and that the Heart has a double presentation.

The Heart is either a void which allows the Spirits to dwell within or else it is that activity which allows the Spirits to circulate, and the Heart to exercise its authority (Heart as Governor or Master). It exercises its authority especially on all the network of animation, mai, through which the Blood particularly is passed through. We'll come back to the different links of the Blood with the Heart, Liver, Spleen and so on. We'll just say that through this network for animation, which is the mai or the mo, through this we can see the Breaths and the Blood circulate.

But you can also say as it is said in Ling Shu Chapter 8 that the mo are the dwelling place of the Spirits, just as it is said that the Heart is the dwelling place for the Spirits. The Heart itself is a void or quietness for the Spirits. Another aspect of the Heart is the presence everywhere in the body of the effect of the Spirits through the Blood or the Breaths, the aspect is that of circulating, of sending out, and of reaching everywhere.

This is just a first insight into this aspect of the Heart as a void which we will develop tomorrow. But it's fundamental to understanding how these six terms are arranged even in such an ordinary or commonly used series as this.

The chapter goes on to say that all these six are stored in the five zang, which in the presence of vitality are coupled in a yin yang relationship, at different levels of perception, if you like. All these couples are an expression of a vitality which is itself an expression of yin yang. All this is in a permanently changing movement, and it is because of this that the zang appear. The zang are governed by the number 5, not 6. The five zang represent the five different movements whose changes and interpenetration permits life to take place. It is through these five movements that life takes place. And it is through the void that the movement is expressed.

So there can only be five centres of attraction, five poles within the body, and there can only be five zang, even if they are sometimes counted as six or nine or twelve. We are looking at the fundamental constitution of life, and there can only be five. All life takes place between five and six. Five is for the animation, the communication, the compenetration of these different movements. Six is for the maintenance and the animation of life, everything that ensures that life can carry on, that life can be

made, re-made and maintained. There are other lists of six terms in the Ling Shu where we can see the same thing, and if we analyse and differentiate we always have to remember that it is the totality of them that makes the whole being. The role of the Spirits, relying on the jing, the Essences, is perhaps to guarantee this unity of life at every moment, this unity that can be divided up into all these different terms.

You can carry on looking at many different combinations between these six. For example you can look at the sheng cycle, the cycle of production, from Liver (xue, Blood) to Heart (mai), Heart to Spleen (ying, nutrition), Spleen to Lung (qi, Breaths), and Lung to Kidney (jing, Essences). And after the Kidney to the void centre of the Spirits (shen).

Claude Larre: I'd just like to say something about the question *ci zhi fa*, the ways for needling. It means that you are concerned with the mo and the Blood. You are concerned with the qi of the patient, and the ying, which is not only nourishing but is building and re-building that person, because ying has the meaning of to build. And on the face of the patient you feel that they have much jing shen or little jing shen. I just want to stress that it is with reference to the needling process that those general statements are made. So why do they start with xue mo? Perhaps because it is question of *ci zhi fa*. And why do they come here? Perhaps because it is a question of whether or not there is enough ying qi in that person. And why is this? Because in contrast to the ying qi, you should pay attention to the jing shen of that person. And even if we are giving an explanation of the characters in a broad general application to understand the relationship between the six, we must remain in that frame of needling.

Elisabeth Rochat: There is a lot to be gained for diagnosis in this; diagnosis from the state of Blood and the mai. This can be felt on the pulse, and can be seen in the complexion in all the small capillaries, etc. Then the second level of the deep nutrition and animation: this is at a deeper level than the first, with all these symptoms connected with nutrition or digestion or with the qi, or the maintaining functions of the body, the movements and rhythms, seeing if it is all going well. Then you arrive at the last level of diagnosis which is the sum of everything that has gone before, plus the brightness of the eyes, and all the intangible aspects which are not covered by the previous four. There is a way of looking at the complexion of a person, their face, which tells you about the state of the Blood, the circulation, the nutrition, etc. But there is in addition to this something that doesn't belong to that realm and which is at the level of jing shen. For the true art of needling you have to go right down to this deeper level, and it is not by chance that this series ends with the shen, the Spirits. It moves from the visible down to the invisible.

Claude Larre: I want to link what has been said by Elisabeth to what I suggested at the beginning of the lecture. If you want to understand where it goes we have to jump to the end and say that shen is the last character in that series. It is because the title is ben shen, that the shen cannot be without the Essences in man, and maybe in the universe. If the universe is perfect there are not only Spirits. There must be something corresponding, even in the sun or in the moon or I don't know where. The vital forces invade everywhere and we are the result of that. What is made of moon and sun in ourselves is seen through the jing shen. There must be some Essences of the sun and some Essences of the moon, and Fire and Water and all that. Fire not being the Fire of the Kidney, but the Fire of

everything which might be in Fire. And then having this jing shen of the universe in ourselves - we are closer than anything on Earth to the forces of the universe. It is in the jing shen of man that the best image of the universe - of force and brightness and joy and all that - is given. But this has to rely on the four terms, the xue mo, and the ying qi. It is impossible not to pay attention to each of the characters individually, but it is also impossible not to see them as couples!

Elisabeth Rochat: Just keep in mind these three divisions - the jue yin, tai yin and shao yin, and the relationship of these six terms. Just bear these in mind, but we are not going to develop this. This particular presentation is not long enough to give a theory about jue yin, tai yin and shao yin, but it is just one element to keep in your mind in order to have a better comprehension of what jue yin, tai yin and shao yin are.

至
其
淫
泆
離
藏
則
精
失

zhi qi yin yi li zang ze jing shi

**'If a situation arises
Where, following overflowing and complete invasion,
They leave the zang,
Then the Essences are lost;'**

When we come to the state of affairs where under the impact of shaking and diverting something from an attack of perversity, everything is full of perverse qi and the zheng qi in turn becomes the xie qi - when we reach that condition, then something separates itself from the zang. There is no longer thesaurisation of the Essences, *ze jing shi*, and the Essences are lost.

魂
魄
飛
揚

hun po fei yang

'Both hun and po are carried away in an uncontrollable agitation,'

The hun and the po are going with the wind, flying and dispersing in all directions.

志
意
恍
亂

zhi yi huang luan

‘Will and Purpose become confused and disordered,’

In myself, the zhi which is will power, and the yi which gives the will power a frame to adjust to circumstances, to make a project, to go somewhere - a combination of the Kidney Spirits and the Spleen Spirits, the zhi and the yi - are troubled, confused and in disorder.

This means that there is no more strength and no more perception of what to do. When we do not know what to do, when we are confused it is the zhi and the yi that are not up to dealing with a specific situation. And that comes from this first deviation. When everything is normal it is okay, but when there is separation by the xie qi of my equilibrium then it starts with the zang. They are not kept by the shen and they are not keeping the Essences.

智
慮
去
身
者

zhi lü qu shen zhe

‘Know-how and Reflection abandon us’.

Then we come from the ultimate to the other more visible troubles. The trouble we know very well ourselves is that we are so weak without Essences that when we want to do something we don't see what it is we should do, and we don't feel that we have the energy to do it.

The combination of the energy with the purpose or the purpose with the energy is not made, and if it is not made, the mind is troubled. When I say the mind, very often the way to explain it is that the condition of the mind is troubled: *zhi lü qu shen zhe*.

何因而然乎天之
罪與人之過乎

he yin er ran hu tian zhi
zui yu ren zhi guo hu

**'Where does this state come from?
Should one accuse Heaven? Is it the fault of Man?'**

And this ability to act, this way that the mind is able to organise in order to achieve something, is no longer there. I am no longer myself - I don't feel myself. I am not only confused, I have no means to do whatever I would like to do - I am very depressed: *he yin er ran hu*. Where is the cause of it? *Tian zhi zui yu*. Is it that Heaven, which has to be called for, is responsible?

Is it Heaven, or is it Man (or myself)? If it is something which escapes my responsibility or is beyond my range, then it is Heaven. Or is it that everything is correct in Heaven and I am not able to do what Heaven is presenting? Where is the fault? I am talking of responsibility, this character *zui*. It means it is your fault, that you are responsible. Is Heaven responsible for that very poor state of affairs, or is it that you have been going astray? I don't say that you are responsible, but the fact is that you have been going too far in one way or another. Then when disharmony is your fault, fault is seen as excess, which is not said of Heaven. And that is typical of the Chinese classical text. We usually say "Is it Heaven or myself who is responsible for that?" but they make a distinction.

何謂德氣生
精神魂魄
心意志思智慮
請問其故

he wei de qi sheng
jing shen hun po
xin yi zhi si zhi lü
qing wen qi gu

**And what does one call Virtue, Breaths,
Life, Essences, shen, hun, po,
Heart, Purpose, Will, Thought,
Know-how, Reflection?**

Elisabeth Rochat: Since this is not sufficient for a question, Huang Di, who is just as keen to learn as Western acupuncturists, asks what is understood by Virtue, Breaths, Life, Essences, Spirits, hun, po, the Heart, the first formation of thought, the will or the direction that's given, the thought that reflects and builds itself, the wisdom that is know-how or the ability to do things, and the possibility of conceiving or imagining things. And he asks respectfully that he can be taught all of this!