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THE QUEST FOR THE THREE TREASURES WITHIN

The Three Treasures is an important concept in Chinese medicine and other healing practices (Ch'iKung and Tai Ch'i), as well as in Feng Shui, Yi Jing and Four Pillars astrology. In Chinese medicine, the Three Treasures (Jing, Ch'i and Shen) are seen as subtle substances that play a significant role in the formation and maintenance of our bodily functions. Their balance is quite sensitive and the harmony between them can easily be disrupted; bad habits and constant exposure to stress can weaken them, even to the degree of causing severe damage to a person's health. On the other hand, our awareness and a persistent and focused effort may strengthen and harmonize our "Treasures", improving health gradually and stabilizing the emotions and mind.

BODY, MIND AND SPIRIT

Most often, the Three Treasures are translated as body, mind and spirit, even though these concepts have a more complex and subtle connotation in the Chinese language. Generally, Jing refers to the essence which has been obtained from one's ancestors; Ch'i to one's vitality and Shen to one's spirit.

When they are listed in order, Jing always comes first. This is because it represents the core basis for the manifestation of the other two treasures. Jing is a substance and is formed prior to the other two; basically at the very moment of conception, a newly-created being becomes an expression of pure Jing. After a while, Ch'i enters the fertilized egg, fills it with energy and brings life to it. Much later, the embryo develops Shen.

The ultimate goal of all oriental healing and self-development methods can be attribut-

ed to the development, harmonization and focusing of attention on Jing, Ch'i and Shen. On the profound and enduring path that entails acquiring a balance, coming across these three aspects of being is inevitable. Mastering the Three Treasures represents the highest degree of self-development in many Oriental healing arts.

精 JING

Jing is incredibly important substance; even in a very healthy body, it is present only in a very small amount. Without Jing, Ch'i and Shen would not be able to exhibit themselves. As the essence of our being, Jing existed before our body was even formed. In fact the character for Jing in the Chinese language means the 'essence' or 'semen' - the translation depending on the context. Jing represents the energy which is unique to each individual, and which is inherited from our ancestors and passed down by the parents at the time of conception. As a manifestation of inherited energy, Jing is often compared with human genetic potential.

Many things depend on our Jing: bone growth in children, the growth of our hair and teeth, normal mental development and



sexual maturity. Jing is also responsible for a balanced hormonal state, fertility and overall reproductive functioning. This essence conducts us in accordance with our heritage, providing us certain amount of energy throughout the life.

Jing is responsible for physical integrity, as well as for controlling our clarity of thought. In a way, Jing determines the quality of the other two treasures. As the specific energy which is stored in our kidneys, Jing helps with the process of adaptation to external stresses. When Jing energy in the kidneys is strong, it leads a person to a long and lively life, making a person vital and giving a youthful appearance. At the other hand, a loss of Jing reduces one's ability to adapt, speeding up physical and mental deterioration and contributing significantly to the shortening of a person's life.

There is no doubt that Jing is the source of life, for without Jing, there is no life. The amount of Jing we received at birth does not remain constant throughout our lives, but is depleted during the quite natural process of aging. Losing of Jing basically leads to aging and after our essence is consumed – our life naturally comes to the end (this coincides to the scientists' explanation that we are actually aging due to telomere consumption in our cells). Although an average human being cannot prevent their own aging process, there is still



the opportunity for us to preserve our Jing. Abuse of such things as drugs, narcotics, alcohol and tobacco contributes to the weakening of Jing, together with over-working, sleep deprivation, excessive emotions, poor nutrition, body trauma and injuries, chronic illness, excessive sexual activity... Heavy periods, pregnancy and birth can also weaken Jing, as well as prolonged exposure to stress.

The reduction of one's essence can be also detected by thinning and graying of the hair, reduced body moisture, diminished sensory and mental alertness, and weakening of the bones, teeth and connective tissue. However, we can find comfort in the fact that it is possible to influence the loss of Jing; Chinese medicine teaches us that Jing can be enhanced by proper nutrition, altering our lifestyle and adopting a moderate way of life. Practicing Ch'i Kung, applying acupuncture and consuming bone broth and/or other Jing tonics, can also help to a certain extent.

If there are already signs of aging and bodily weakening, the first measure for the maintenance of Jing should be an abstinence from sexual activities. The next one is ensuring an intake of foods that are beneficial to Jing, such as soup made from bones (chicken, beef, lamb; all organic if possible). Boiled animal kidneys (especially lamb and beef kidneys) also make good Jing tonics, while vegetarians can target their Jing through intake of micro-algae (chlorella, spirulina), wheat germ and Cordyceps Sinensis. Traditional Jing tonic made from deer antlers may not be nature-friendly but is still considered to be very beneficial, especially for children suffering from poor health.

Every living being is unique, due to the fact that Ch'i differs between individuals. Basically, the quality and quantity of our energy (Ch'i), depends on, amongst other things, the Ch'i that we have inherited from our ancestors (hereditary Ch'i), as well as on the Ch'i we acquire from daily food and the air (acquired Ch'i).

Ch'i is also known as 'energy', 'vital energy', 'primal energy' and 'life force'. The quality of Ch'i causes our bodies to be either healthy or unwell. Ideally, Ch'i should vigorously circulate around the body, to make it strong and healthy. When vibrant, Ch'i warms the body, bringing a sense of harmony and well-being.

At the very moment of the formation of Jing, Ch'i energy penetrates the body. Our body actually becomes functional only due to Ch'i, the current which brings our system to life and animates our existence. This invisible life force allows our bodies to live, move, think and perform all voluntary actions.

It is believed that Ch'i enters the body from the sky through the nose (Yang Gate) and that by circulating through the 12 meridians it nourishes the internal organs and maintains their function.

The Chinese character for Ch'i is perhaps the best illustration of its features; it shows the steam that rises from cooking rice in a bowl placed over fire. If the intensity of the cooking fire is appropriate to the amount of water and rice, the energy appears in the form of steam. When the fire is weak, steam is not created; when fire is overly strong, it makes the water evaporate, bringing the risk of burning not only the rice – but the pot as well!

The nature of Ch'i is moveable, and with its constant movement, it nourishes and protects the body. In the system of traditional Chinese medicine, Ch'i and the blood are linked; the spleen makes blood by extracting Ch'i from food. The nature of red blood cells is associated with nourishing Ying Ch'i (Yin quality), while the protective white blood cells are associated with Wei Ch'i (Yang Ch'i). In Chinese medicine, Ch'i tonics are usually blood tonics and they can help improve the overall functioning of the body. Many Ch'i tonics strengthen the bodily Ch'i by strengthening digestion, assimilation and respiration.

In Feng Shui, Ch'i travels the soil, forming landscape and affecting buildings and humans on the long term basis. In traditional Chinese medicine, it is well known that Ch'i travels beneath the skin's surface, in accordance to the daily cycles. Every energy path that Ch'i travels along corresponds to a particular organ, and as a result specific points can be pressed, sucked, heated or pierced by tiny needles, in order to control the function of the specific organ and balance the overall flow of energy. Ch'i-conductive food is usually warming and by its nature, Yang. A well known Ch'i

All Three Treasure are mutually dependent. Accordingly, the strength of our Shen depends on our Ch'i. When we have a lot of Ch'i, our Shen tends to be strong, and we have the ability to become great (so say the Chinese classics).

tonic in the West is Ginseng, the root which resembles the human form, and which, when aged, actually gains strength. Amongst the foods that stimulate the formation of Ch'i



and blood, meat and fish can be singled out, as well as congee, cinnamon, ginger, lyches and Chinese dates. In situations of Ch'i deficiency, it is wise to avoid cold drinks and intake of cold food in general, together with salads and fresh fruit.

**SHEN**

The third, but no less important Treasure resides in our heart.

Shen makes a very special treasure, because human beings do not get Shen by default. Although all beings have Jing and Ch'i, the fact that a being lives and breathes does not necessarily mean that it possesses Shen.

The most common explanation of Shen is that it is a human soul - or spirit; since the written Chinese character for Shen contains the idea of a bird, this Treasure is often referred to as the "bird that is free to fly wherever it wants". Ch'i masters say that Shen is able to evolve, by practicing moderate lifestyle and including certain spiritual practices in daily life (such as higher levels of Tai Ch'i Chuan and Ch'i Kung exercises). It is also said that spiritual practice cultivates Shen, as well as all kinds of creative expression. On the other hand, Shen is the only Treasure that can leave the human body at times of great stress and trauma, returning only after the re-establishment of favorable conditions.

It is well known in Chinese medicine that the status of Shen can be seen in the eyes of a

person, and then, to a lesser extent, in the quality of their hair and skin. When the Shen of a certain person is happy, this person radiates vitality and their eyes glow. Alternatively, when a person develops serious mental problems, this always involves a Shen disorder; the person usually tries to avoid eye contact, or their eyes have a wild look. Since Shen can be related to psychic disorders, mental disorders in Chinese medicine are always related to an obscure Shen state that causes a person's mind to appear like a sky covered by clouds.

It is unlikely that Shen will be strong without strong Jing and powerful Ch'i – a healthy mind in a healthy body. Therefore, it may be important to remember that Shen develops as a result of the combination of Jing and Ch'i. When all Three Treasures are strong and coherent, the mind is powerful, the spirit is strong, the emotions are under control - and the body is healthy and strong.

When cultivated, Shen helps provide peace of mind. Cultivated Shen can help lead a person through life, reflecting the higher nature of all human beings. However, Shen cannot be developed by talking about love, because Shen is not an emotion or a state of mind (although it masters the emotions and state of

mind). The strength of someone's Shen can be seen in their generosity and kindness, acceptance, forgiveness and tolerance. Some people describe the Shen aspect of a human being as "the seat of divine love that dwells in the heart of man." It is known that Shen can be developed by practicing compassion, non-judgment and non-discrimination.

Our Shen is the source of our wisdom, ability to review the aspects of a certain topic and to rise above making judgments and classifying things as either positive or negative. Shen is also the source of our motivation and relationship with the nature and spiritual realms. If our Shen is weak, there might be anxiety and mild depression; very weak Shen may open the door to deeper psychological problems.

The good news is that we can certainly aid our Shen's development, primarily by implementing a moderate lifestyle, working on ourselves and promoting contact with others, as well as by practicing exercises like Tai Ch'i and Ch'i Kung. Of course, we should not forget that there is always the option of utilizing traditional Chinese medicine in the form of acupuncture and herbal formulas ("Shen tonics").

DO WHAT YOU CAN TO KEEP YOUR TREASURES STRONG

Despite the fact that individual life will always be the greatest mystery for us, we can still act towards improving our Three Treasures. Since everything begins with Jing, for without Jing, there is no life and living. In order to maintain our Jing, we should lead a moderate life and implement proper nutrition and exercise.

Strengthening Jing and Ch'i is a life-time process, and these efforts require patience and persistence, especially if substantial improvements are needed. However, from time to time, especially as the years go by, we should seek the help of acupuncture and herbal medicines, in order to increase the amount of Ch'i and improve its flow. Finally Shen can be strengthened by practicing compassion, non-judgment and non-discrimination. An old saying reminds us that "When Jing and Ch'i are strong, the emotions are under control; the body is healthy; and the spirit is strong and bright ..."

