

SHEN

神 精神

‘SPIRIT (S)’

In this section you will find (a) book review(s) coupled with a series of short essays about the term ‘shen’, often translated as ‘spirit’. The inspiration for this small project began when my friend Miguel Angel Cabrer Mir showed me the book ‘To Become A God’ by Michael Puett (2002) and told me I had to read it. A few months later I did. Puett is a Harvard scholar and in his book he traces the different religious traditions that developed and existed during the late Warring States to early Han dynasty period. In this text he highlights the different uses and meanings that the term ‘shen’ acquired or was given. As you will see in Chris Dhaenens thoughtful review, we think that Puett has done a fantastic job on this.

The importance of Puett’s book for us in the field of acupuncture and traditional East Asian Medicine (TEAM) is that the historical period that Puett covers is the period immediately before the appearance of the early medical texts, the Huang Di Nei Jing. Thus we can see some of the pre-medical influences on that text. For example, the ‘Nei Ye’ or ‘Inward Training’ of the fourth century BC that is found in the ‘Guan Zi’ [see Rickett 1998 and Roth 1999 for full translations of this text] is thought by a number of scholars to have been quite influential on the ‘Huang Di Nei Jing’ [Harper 1998, Rickett 1998]. Puett has extensive discussions of this text which are helpful for us, and, as you will see others have chosen to focus on it as well in the various essays below.

After convincing (without much difficulty I might add) Chris Dhaenens and Elizabeth Rochat de la Vallee to get involved in the project we developed the format you will find below. Chris’s review is done so as to highlight major traditions of meaning for the term ‘shen’. This lays an historical foundation for the next section. We then contacted a number of different people from different backgrounds, different trainings and perspectives and asked them a series of questions. The instructions we gave were:

*We ask that you answer the first question **and** at least one of the other three questions. We ask that you write no less than one paragraph and no more than two A4 sides (single spaced).*

1- what do you think ‘shen’ is? Or how would you define the concept of ‘shen’?

2- how does the ‘shen’ affect your practice?

3- what do you see as the role of ‘shen’ in TEAM?

4- What issues are important for you in trying to understand the concept of shen in the West, in China and/or Japan?

We asked more than twelve people to answer these questions and have received answers from nine. Several of the others that were asked expressed an interest in answering these questions but found themselves too short on time to be able to do so. Perhaps we will receive and publish their answers at a later date. Below you will find answers in various forms to these questions from the following nine people:

Charles (Chip) Chace – is a practitioner-scholar of acupuncture and Chinese medicine. He has been involved in the field for over twenty five years and works in Boulder Colorado. He is a co-author of ‘Channel Divergences’ (Blue Poppy Press) and has been involved in a number of translation projects including the ‘Zhen Jiu Jia Yi Jing’ – ‘Yellow Emperor’s Systematic Classic of Acupuncture and Moxibustion’

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Eric Brand is a Chinese medicine practitioner-scholar who has studied extensively in Taiwan and China. He has a passionate interest in translation of Chinese texts and has pursued this working especially with Nigel Wiseman. He has also worked as editor on publication projects in China, Taiwan and the US and is a co-author of the forthcoming 'Concise Chinese Materia Medica' (Paradigm Publications). Eric also does some teaching.

Bruce Ferguson is a veterinarian and practitioner-scholar of veterinary acupuncture and Chinese medicine. He studied with the International Veterinary Acupuncture Society (IVAS) and in China. He is president of the American Association of Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine (TCVM). Bruce has also trained and taught oriental martial and meditative arts for over 25 years. He also does some teaching for veterinary practitioners.

Miguel Angel Cabrer Mir is a practitioner-scholar of Tai Ji Quan, Yi Quan and acupuncture. He has studied extensively in Spain and China. Currently his primary Tai Ji Quan instructor lives in Canada, whom he visits annually. He lives in Barcelona, Spain where he has been teaching Tai Ji Quan and Yi Quan for years and maintains an acupuncture practice.

Lillian Bridges is a practitioner-scholar of Chinese medicine. She has emphasized and extensively studied the art of facial diagnosis, which directly assesses the shen of the patient. She has written the book 'Face Reading in Chinese Medicine' (Churchill Livingstone Publishers) and a forthcoming book 'Feng Shui for the Clinic'. She practices in Kirkland, Washington State. Lillian also does some teaching. She generously submitted two sections in answer to the questions she was sent.

Yair Maimon is a practitioner-scholar of acupuncture and Chinese medicine. He is a practitioner and senior instructor in Tel Aviv Israel and has been practicing acupuncture for more than twenty years. He studied in the UK, US and China. In his practice Yair especially pays attention to diagnosing the condition of the shen and teaches workshops on this.

Dianne Sommers is a practitioner-scholar who has practiced acupuncture for over twenty years. Currently she is practicing in Amsterdam and pursuing advanced studies in Sinology and philosophy, and is working on a Dutch translation of the 'Nei Ye'. Dianne also teaches acupuncture in Holland.

Clemens Prost is a medical doctor and practitioner-scholar of acupuncture. He has studied extensively in Germany and China. He is a senior instructor in acupuncture at the Arbeitsgemeinschaft für TCM (AGTCM) school in Berlin, Germany. He has had a Buddhist meditation practice for many years and, with special training in China, integrates this into his acupuncture practice.

Peter Firebrace is a practitioner-scholar of acupuncture. He has studied extensively with father Claude Larre and Elizabeth Rochat de la Vallee and is one of the editors of the Monkey Press that has focused on publishing their works. He lectures extensively on concepts like shen and their role in acupuncture, Chinese medicine. For those that know Peter, it is no surprise that he has answered the first question with a poem.

We think that you will find the clinical, historical, theoretical insights of this diverse group of contributors very useful in your search for understanding of this important concept in Chinese medicine. There are some short editorial comments from Elizabeth Rochat de la Vallee (^{ERV}) to clarify a number of points. Chris Dhaenes review of Puett's book not only places the concept of shen into Puett's historical and

concept in Chinese medicine. There are some short editorial comments from Elizabeth Rochat de la Vallee (^{ERV}) to clarify a number of points. Chris Dhaenes review of Puett's book not only places the concept of shen into Puett's historical and anthropological perspectives, but it contextualizes the discussions with some of Chris's own perspectives.

Why, you might wonder, have we chosen this focus on the concept 'shen'? As I have already written, such a concept has laid the field open to attaching meanings and ideas that are not part of the actual traditions of Chinese medicine and acupuncture due to problems such as wishful thinking, highly selective translation and interpretations [Birch, Felt 1999:103]. Why then this focus? Perhaps it is self evident if one looks at the first chapter of the 'Huang Di Nei Jing Ling Shu'. The 'Ling Shu' has sometimes been called the 'Needle Classic' for it lays out important principles in the art and practice of needling. In this first chapter, which means that this is important to the authors of the Ling Shu, it says something like:

'the basics of needle technique are easy to describe but difficult to achieve, the average (or inferior) {practitioner} pays attention to the form, the superior {practitioner} pays attention to the shen' which is supposed to be 'focused at the tip of the needle' while needling in order for the treatment to be effective. (my rough-literal translation)

In the first sentence, the importance of shen (whatever it is) in the practice of acupuncture could not have been more clearly stated.

It is our hope that the discussions below will trigger letters to the editor, further discussion and debate. We would like to include these responses and discussions in the next issue of the Almanac. We editors have our own thoughts and ideas about the materials below, perhaps you the reader do as well. If the muse grabs you please send us your thoughts.

Stephen Birch
Amsterdam, the Netherlands, April 2007.

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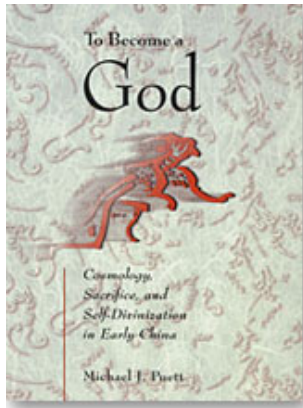
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The Review:

That man is able to think about himself is the big miracle of nature. Because he cannot grasp what his body is, let alone his spirit. And the least of all how the body can be united with the spirit. This is his major problem, and yet it is the essence of his being.

(Blaise Pascal)



Michael J. Puett's "To Become a God" represents a wonderful intellectual journey through the evolution of ideas in China during the "Axial Age". This is the age in which the major religious and philosophical traditions in the world took shape, roughly stretching from the sixteenth to the second century B.C. This era saw the genesis of Hinduism and Buddhism in India, Daoism and Confucianism in China, Monotheism in Israel and Philosophic Rationalism in Greece. As for China, this period is covering the Shang and the Zhou dynasties, the Warring States, the Qin and early Western Han dynasties.

The initial objective of the book is to dissect and amplify the long lasting debate during this period on the relationship between humans and gods. It's not the first time a scholar ventures into this theme (See: A.C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao, Philosophical Argument in Ancient China*, and M. Granet, *La Pensée Chinoise*), but it is the first time it's done within such a broad anthropological and historical scope and so thoroughly cross-referenced with concurrent evolutions, especially to the Greek pantheon and rationalism. Furthermore Puett strongly participates in the debate and often goes beyond merely juxtaposing different views by taking firm positions himself and by introducing a plethora of secondary historical sources. Knowledgeable as he proves to be, it is only a guarantee for a solid socio- historical context and a rational anchor in the disputes.

Evidence collected from Shang oracle bones already reveals a dichotomy in the notion how humans and gods could possibly be related. On the one hand there were those who saw the human and divine realms as separate and agonistic and applied divination to determine the will of the gods and sacrifices to pacify them or extricate their benevolence. On the other hand there were those who saw the two realms as intertwined and claimed that human birthright included achievement of divinity and the resulting control of the cosmos. Puett claims and proves that this debate continued throughout the creation myths and classics of the Zhou, Warring States, Qin and early Han. Further, he shows that it deeply influenced the correlative, pattern-like cosmology as it was more or less consolidated in early Han. He further suggests this correlative thinking preserved its consistency just because it was permanently put to the test by opposite views, headstrong rulers and historical fate like wars, famine and calamities.

The survival of this correlative cosmology turns out to be quite interesting to us, TEAM-students, for several reasons:

Every philosophical or religious world view is, far more than generally accepted, somehow connected to the medical practices of the time. Simply because they deal with the experiences of suffering, disease and death that are shared by everyone. But, impregnated by correlative thinking, the ancient Chinese have undoubtedly generated the world view (usually identified with Daoism) which is most intimately interwoven with a medical system. Throughout all parallel spiritual developments they have preserved the body as the indispensable matrix for spiritual transformation. Suppressed in Judeo-Christian tradition, transcendently ignored in the over-

with a medical system. Throughout all parallel spiritual developments they have preserved the body as the indispensable matrix for spiritual transformation. Suppressed in Judeo-Christian tradition, transcendently ignored in the over-spiritualized Indian traditions and blatantly absent in post-Roman western philosophy, the Chinese body has survived rational materialism, ghost-in-the-machine-dualism and epistemology. (Some cynics even claim the body is completely absent in Western Medicine). For students interested in the divergent evolutions of the Greek anatomical and the Chinese energetic body, see: Shigehisa Kuriyama, *The Expressiveness of the Body* (New York, Zone Books 1999).

At the end of the historical period Puett covers, the body is no longer unequivocally considered a sacrificial instrument to gain power over the spirit world. Rather it is seen as an intricate, whirling web of possibilities wrapped around the axis of Shen, Qi and Jing. Some of the traditions of self-cultivation at the time poetically and pictorially infer the body does not only make the organisation of the different Qi's visible but it simply is the way the "organ-izing" of the Qi is happening. Many texts, compiled during the Warring States period, but especially the Nei Ye, sustain the pivotal role of the body as an embryonic field of potentialities and possibilities of Essence and Shen, with the Qi moving up and down and in and out. In the open, correlative cosmology then, the distance to the energetic body aligned along the Jing Luo, seems less distant, given this period immediately precedes the appearance of the Huang Di Nei Jing.

It is absolutely impossible, within these few pages, to do full credit to the spectrum, the nuance and the depth of argumentation Puett is displaying along this history of ideas. Students bearing interest in this mental exercise should read the book, but we will choose to make a virtue of necessity and confine ourselves to the topic of this section: the different meanings that have been attributed to "Shen" and the different ways in which "Shen" was experienced during this axial age. Why do we venture to make this rather brutal methodological stride (that Puett would certainly reject)? Because, anyone with TCM-guts, while moving forward in this book, will discover a fascinating parallelism between the familiar conceptual aspects of "Shen" and the way "Shen" is progressively experienced in time and history. It is precisely in this particular loop of time we witness the subtle nature of "Shen" unfolding in the subtle nature of its conceptual aspects.

As to the initial questions "What is Shen?", what is the definition of "Shen" :
The Zen answer would be "Shen is the question", and the easiest definition is that "Shen" is the absence of all definition, but to avoid the avalanche of tautologies such answers bring about, let's consult the early sources.
Where "Shen" is more or less identified with the Tai Yi, the Great One, the first and highest principle before yin and yang, it could be paraphrased as a fathomless, unmanifested singularity before space-time, as pure consciousness before it had touched an object or was reflected by a subject...
Then, literally 'upon a time', ...

Long ago, in the time before there existed Heaven and Earth, there was only figure without form. Obscure, dark, vast and deep – no one knows its gate. There were two spirits (Shen) born together; they aligned Heaven, they oriented Earth. So vast – no one knows its end or limit! So overflowing – no one knows where it stopped! Thereupon they divided and became yin and yang, separated and became the eight pillars. Hard and soft completed each other, and the myriad things were thereupon formed. The turbid qi became insects, and the refined qi became humans. (Huainanzi: Jingshen chapter, 7.1a)

Apparently, the two Shen caused this sterile balance to break, causing the break of creation, the prime movement, or one of the many cultural metaphors for genesis and cosmic drama.

In terms of Qi one could call it "the incipient Big Breath". In terms of science some analogies can no longer be considered trivial, e.g. the quantum break of original singularity in physics and the dramatic shift from the sterile RNA based life to effervescent DNA based life in biology.

analogies can no longer be considered trivial, e.g. the quantum break of original singularity in physics and the dramatic shift from the sterile RNA based life to effervescent DNA based life in biology.

“Shen” in duality and dialectic movement can be defined as ‘numinous’ rather than divine. (‘Numinous’ comes from the Latin ‘numen’ which means: divine approval by nodding the head, clearly suggesting a tilting of energy). Numinousness is revealed divinity, Shen cast into existence (from the latin: sistere ex,= to whirl to the outside..)
“Shen” can thus also be associated with ‘ignis’, the initial light, the spark that is firing motion, motivation and transformation through cyclic time. Speculative as it may be, this aspect becomes in a later phase interestingly associated with Yuan Qi.

In the human world of the Bronze age (mainly Shang period) the experience of Shen is marked by a strong anthropomorphization of the spirit(s) and a hazy demarcation line between humans, spirits and gods. The continuity between heaven and man is rooted in shamanistic ritual. Agriculture and domestication make man increasingly dependant on a fixed locus and reliable cycles. The divine powers are experienced as capricious, angry, indifferent and casting a blind fate on man. As a result divination and sacrifice serve the purpose of anchoring in the world through mollifying the spirits. Shen becomes deeply identified with the spirit(s) of nature.

In the late Shang and early Zhou dynasties these rituals turn more institutional and hierarchic. Heaven rules through the Kings’ heavenly mandate. This marks the beginning of a strong current of “institutionalising the laws of Heaven” for the purpose of social order and the unity of the kingdom. Sacrificial ritual further expands to the extent that the deceased become incorporated in the spirit realm to pacify the spirits of nature and to exert power on them through the mediation of the benevolent ancestral spirits. The Shang were literally ‘making’ their ancestors, and more powers were attributed to them the older they got.

It is another aspect of the continuity of “Shen” to be connected to one’s own blood as ancestral Qi (Yuan Qi).

Contrary to the the tragic discord between gods and man in the Greek universe, China, during the Shang and Zhou eras somehow managed to preserve the continuity between Heaven and man. Although never more diffuse, the hard times helped sustaining the web of correlative thought and the upcoming patterns of ordering the world. Puett states: “The Shang sacrificial system was an attempt to domesticate the highly agonistic forces and place them within a hierarchy manipulable for the sake of human interests.”

“Shen”, in this stage, starts to be incorporated in gods, spirits and human alike. It can be seen as the Corporeal Soul (Po) coming down, providing a structural skeleton for “Shen” to anchor as “JingShen” in the next phase.

Moving into the Warring States period, deeply influential texts like “Nei Ye” bring about a radically different approach of the spirit world. In short, the world turns to “elemental” and man turns to “essential”. Much like in Empedocles’ Greece the “Elements” (cardinal phase points with temperamental, humoral and energetic connotations) largely replace the spirits in the ordering pattern of the world. And man, instead of sacrificially pacifying the spirits, develops self cultivation techniques to pacify his own spirit, and gaining the power of the spirits.

Throughout the Warring States period numerous texts appear in which the potentially divine powers of humans are claimed. In these writings “the mandate of Heaven” is progressively identified with the self-cultivating potential of man. All of them, poetically or explicitly, refer to “Shen” as “JingShen”, and further suggest this fusion between Shen and Jing is the matrix and the drive of life. The experience of “Shen” is “JingShen”. Forged to each other at the deepest point of the vital breath the two ‘most refined forms of Qi’ align formation and contain in-formation.

‘Shen’ becomes perceptable, tangible and palpable in the material body, the matrix of Jing.

Or, Shen needs the body to manifest and the body needs Shen to be manifest

As a result it is impossible to ask the question ‘What is Shen?’ without asking the question ‘What is Jing?’ It is worthwhile to ask this question since everything

As a result it is impossible to ask the question ‘What is Shen?’ without asking the question ‘What is Jing? It is worthwhile to ask this question since everything physiologically associated with Shen (Consciousness, yuan Qi, movement and heat, light and light-elements like phosphor and sulphur, information like DNA, electro-chemical impulses, messenger molecules, etc..) have their basis and their receptors in everything that is associated with Jing (all extra-fu, Jin Ye, membrane lipids, RES, etc...).

Self cultivation and the acquisition of meaning are dependent on wise management of Jing, quantitatively and qualitatively, as it deploys in time. Jing has to be generated, protected and conserved. It has to be anchored and transformed. It has to be liberated and transcended. Self cultivation in the Warring States period comes down to the Shen-full transformation of Jing.

When Shen follows the Essential Qi that is like water, the mind is contained and collected...

Essence (Jing) allows the Shen to concentrate.

Nei Ye, refers quite a lot to the unique place of humans to experience stillness, to quiet the ‘Shen’ and to stabilize the mind, not only as a goal in itself, but as the basis for transformation, since the Shen that unifies and the Shen that transforms cannot be different from each other.

*Those who can transform even a single thing, call them ‘numinous’;
Those who can alter even a single situation, call them “wise”
But to transform without expending vital energy; to alter without expending wisdom:
Only exemplary persons who hold fast to the One are able to do this.
Hold fast to the One; do not lose it,
And you will be able to master the myriad things,
And are not acted upon by them,
Because they grasp the guiding principle of the One. (IX, Roth p. 62)*

As to the further claims concerning the divine power of humans in the 4th and 3rd century of Warring States, the fairly radical message from the ‘Nei Ye’ did not put an end to the debate but changed its course: Confucius and Mencius subscribe to the birthright of man to transform his Essence, but in their approach ethics become tightly related to the deployment of Essence. For Confucius Heaven also has a normative role and with Mencius he believes that it is the source of all moral patterns humans should follow. Mencius, naturally, wants to ritualize and institutionalize this principle. Puett brilliantly shows the inconsistency behind their position especially when confronted with the “Spirit of Zhuangzi”. According to the Zhuangzi the “Spirit man” does not even attempt to control things or exert power. The divine (Shen) man is unaffected by things like life and death, knowledge or power, does not judge or interfere. He just allows the Shen and the Jing to dwell within himself, to let things be as they naturally ought... Even more radical than the Nei Ye, the Zhuangzi outlines the most naked, uncompromising and amoral interpretation of Shen. Transformation of Essence is generated spontaneously, barely related to intention or individual choice. “To be like this, naturally” (Zi Ran) and absence of a personal will (an aspect of Wu Wei) are, of course, strongly reminiscent of the Laozi. The disarming logical consequences of “Modeling on the Way” as in Zhuangzi and Laozi, apparently implied much more loss of spiritual identity than humans as (aspirant) spirits were prepared to face and thus marked another turning point in the interpretation of ‘Shen’.

The descent of the One and the identification of Shen with the “Watercourse Way”, indeed marks the transition from involution to evolution, from exhaling to inhaling the big breath. Humans increasingly adopt the ‘responsibility of self-cultivation’ along with the ‘freedom of self-cultivation’. Less and less they project the divine in gods and spirits, although the debates subside livelier than ever. Puett tirelessly keeps on sketching this evolution in such detail that any attempt to summarize is doomed to fail, but some tendencies can somehow be extracted from the abundance of polemicizing historical sources. From texts referred to in the late Warring States period (‘Huainanzi’, ‘Taiyi Sheng Shui’ and parts of the ‘Lushi Chunqiu’) one can see emerging a pattern of the cosmos in which man is presented as simultaneously the instrument and the goal of heaven. The ‘Lushi Chunqiu’ says: Heaven established the

period (‘Huainanzi’, ‘Taiyi Sheng Shui’ and parts of the ‘Lushi Chunqiu’) one can see emerging a pattern of the cosmos in which man is presented as simultaneously the instrument and the goal of heaven. The ‘Lushi Chunqiu’ says: Heaven established the cosmos for man...Humans, as descendants of the One, assume the role of anchoring and aligning the Spirit (Shen) according to the Great One. This precipitates in an anthropomorphic correlative cosmology in which the spontaneous arrangement in patterns (like five phases etc.) concur with man’s aspirations to “lift the Spirit”, or to be the material /sacrificial carrier for the ascending Shen. (Rectify the form and assist the power. (the ‘Xinshu’ chapter of the ‘Guanzi’). The sage regulates things...things do not regulate him (ibidem). The spin off is a series of texts, Puett refers to as “Ascension literature”. These texts (‘Shiwen’, etc.) essentially highlight the spiritual struggle of man in reconciling biogenesis and cosmogenesis while following the the double helix of the Shen ascending. This involved spiritual techniques like balancing the Hun and the Po, awareness of the different Qi, following the breaths, concentrating the mind, evaporating fear and overcoming death. Among the many obstacles on this path one is typical for the period and for the spiritual universe of ancient China altogether: The Zhuangzi’s interpretation of ascension; the highest form of transcendence is a spontaneous connection with the patterns of the universe. The negative aspects of this friction are reflected in the theomorphic claims of the Qin emperors who, in their self declared divinity, turned again to the folkloristic practices of divination and ritual sacrifice. The positive aspect was a cross-pollinating debate with those divination systems that claimed to describe the spontaneous ordering principles of the cosmos (especially the ‘Yi Jing’, Book of Changes). All in all, the spirit rising upward and the central pivotal role of the Earth as the pattern of organisation and balance, are strongly reminiscent of the spirit of Hun and the spirit of Yi, as later referred to in the medical classics. By the time of the Western Han the Chinese have developed a correlative cosmology where the heavenly realms are mirrored in the earthly layers, remarkably void of the spiritual hierarchies that constitutes the hybrid of western spiritual thinking. Also the projection of God as an external spirit, from whom man is tragically separated is a lot less pronounced, especially compared to the Judeo-Christian concept of “the famous One who made us after we made Him”.

The Chinese cosmos comes as a spirally layered auto-poetic universe where the Qi is whirling through the ethereal levels of Shen, Po, Zhi (Jing), Hun and Yi, through the macroscopic levels of cyclic time and its elements (Fire, Metal, Water, Wood and Earth) and through the microcosm of the body in the catalytic cycle of the temperaments, the humours and the organs. In this pattern ‘Shen’ is that what connects...

Puett managed to catch all these currents, undercurrents and “random parameters of correlative thought’ in an overall picture, one that lies at the roots of Chinese medicine. Very well done!

The heavenly realms mirrored in the earthly layers

Chris Dhaenens
Melle, Belgium, April 2007

The Essays:

1- Charles Chace

Shen can mean a lot of things. Some authors talk about it in terms of the sparkle in one’s eyes, or their ‘spiritedness. The *Nei Jing* defines *shen* in wide variety of ways. *Shen* may refer to gods and deities (SW [Su Wen] 11). Mere mortals engaged in the highest levels of medical practice (SW 74) (LS [Ling Shu] 4) are referred to as *shen*. It may refer to natural laws (SW 66). *Shen* may simply refer to the correct *qi* (LS 3).

Shen may refer to gods and deities (SW [Su Wen] 11). Mere mortals engaged in the highest levels of medical practice (SW 74) (LS [Ling Shu] 4) are referred to as *shen*. It may refer to natural laws (SW 66). *Shen* may simply refer to the correct qi (LS 3), the qi and blood (SW 32), the essence qi of water and grains, (LS 32), or channel qi (SW 27). Pulses should have *shen* and it is stored in the heart (SW 62). *Shen* may refer to the mind or consciousness (SW 54). Finally, *Shen* may refer to something like the life force (神明活動) (LS 8),^{ERV} and by extension, the subtle and profound phenomena that occurs with the arrival of qi during needling (SW 26).”

Taken on their own, most of these definitions are rather divorced from my clinical practice. For instance, I don’t find it especially helpful to think of the qi and blood as *shen* because that just muddles the concepts of qi and blood while adding little to my understanding. Then too, I haven’t had the opportunity to treat many gods or deities

The pivotal use of the word *shen* for me is as a label for my experience the most primitive expression of some fundamental life force. Its that primordial urge at the root of everything that is alive. What sounds like the most arcane of the definitions described above, is for me the most tangible. It’s something I feel when I am in close proximity to a person. Most notably, I get a sense of the quality of that life force, that *shen*, when I touch a person. *Shen* is my label for that subtle wholistic shift that occurs with the arrival of qi. For me, *shen* is palpable, it’s systemic, and when I feel it through my hands it does feel pretty miraculous. From this place then, from the perspective as a palpable experience, its easier for me to understand how *shen* might be described as being synonymous with qi, blood, correct qi, the essence qi of water and grains, the channel qi or any other bodily function. Even so, I wouldn’t describe *shen* as these media so much as I would *shen* as expressing itself *through* them. Like qi, we tend not to see *shen* itself, only its effects.

Charles Chace
Boulder, Colorado

ERV: this quote appears to come from a modern Chinese commentary on Ling Shu 8.

2- Eric Brand

1- what do you think ‘shen’ is? Or how would you define the concept of ‘shen’?

Shen is a concept that is elusive to a single definition. Like many Chinese words, its meaning varies depending on context and the characters that it is combined with.

Generally translated as “spirit,” *shen* has many different contexts of use in Chinese medicine. The two most prevalent concepts relating to *shen* in day-to-day Chinese medical practice revolve around *shen* in the sense of general vitality, and *shen* in the sense of the spirit that is stored and governed by the heart. However, the use of the word *shen* in Chinese medicine extends beyond these two primary meanings, and a brief survey of definitions from Chinese medical dictionaries helps to elucidate these wider meanings.

Arguably the widest meaning of the word *shen* is seen in one of Chinese medicine’s most foundational texts, the *Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen* (“Yellow Emperor’s Inner Canon, Simple Questions”). Here, the text states: “...that which cannot be fathomed [in terms of] yin and yang is spirit” (阴阳不测谓之神).^{ERV-1} Chinese medical dictionaries interpret this statement by suggesting that one meaning of the word *shen* is related to the manifestations and natural laws regarding substance, movement, and change in the natural world.^[1] This is a very broad range of use and there is an inherent ambiguity of meaning present in the original statement; thus, such statements are challenging to translate and provide little ground for drawing firm conclusions.

A far more common and straightforward meaning is reflected in the use of the word *shen* to refer to the outward manifestations of life and activity in the human body. In this context, *shen* is used to describe the complexion, the “spirit” in the eyes, language use and responsiveness, and activity and posture. Here, *shen* is similar to a sense of vitality or general animation, and its presence or absence is important in prognosis. It is worth noting that some Chinese texts define *shen* simply as *jing shen*, literally

use and responsiveness, and activity and posture. Here, *shen* is similar to a sense of vitality or general animation, and its presence or absence is important in prognosis. It is worth noting that some Chinese texts define *shen* simply as *jing shen*, literally “essence-spirit.” *Jing shen* is used as a general word in the Chinese language that means energy, vigor, vitality; to have good *jing shen* is to be full of life. Note that because essence (*jing*) is the material foundation of *shen*, the *shen* is affected by changes in bowel and visceral function or other conditions of exuberance and debility that disrupt normal physiology.

Yet another meaning of the word *shen* relates to its broader use as a governing force over all other physiologic and mental activity. The heart stores the *shen*, and the *shen* ultimately presides over all other activity in the human body.

Still another use of the word *shen* can be seen in the context of vessel qi. When discussing pulse diagnosis, we speak of stomach, spirit (*shen*), and root. Here, these three factors are used as general prognostic indicators, since the three together form the basic features of a healthy pulse. Stomach qi is evident when the pulse is smooth, harmonious, and regular, while spirit is seen in the pulse by its suppleness and strength. Root is said to be present when the pulse can be felt at all three positions, particularly at the deep level.^[2]

The final major use of the word *shen* relates to thought and consciousness. The heart in Chinese medicine is the principle organ related to mental activity and it presides over the emotions. The heart governs the spirit-mind, and under normal physiologic conditions the mind is clear, vital, and responsive to the outside world. When there is pathology, the result is insomnia, forgetfulness, heart palpitations, or other signs of disturbance of the heart spirit.

Despite my above summary of five meanings of *shen* as found in Chinese medical dictionaries, the word goes on and on in contexts beyond Chinese medicine. For example, the deities and immortalized figures seen in temples are all *shen*, though in English we refer to them as gods. The traditional supernatural protectors responsible for patrolling the neighborhood are also *shen*. The most famous of the lower-level supernatural police are the type of *shen* known as *tu ti gong*, and their shrines are found even within major metropolitan areas like Taipei. Nonetheless, to my knowledge the *tu ti gong* and their pantheon of associates remain largely uninvolved in the affairs of medicine.

4- What issues are important for you in trying to understand the concept of *shen* in the West, in China and/or Japan?

Personally, the greatest challenge I see with the concept of *shen* is its wide range of use and lack of definitive clarity. Because it lacks a narrow and highly specific meaning, there is a tendency for Western practitioners to ascribe all things perceived as “spiritual” as pertaining to the notion of “spirit” as discussed in Chinese medicine. In my experience, the use of the word *shen* is primarily associated with a general sense of life and vitality rather than something “spiritual” per se.^{ERV-2} Chinese medicine has no particular spiritual agenda and lacks a definitive separation of the mind and body, so it cannot fairly be considered to be either “spiritual” or “non-spiritual.” The fact that Chinese medicine is highly pragmatic and clinically focused can be disillusioning to practitioners that are seeking answers to their own ineffable spiritual quest, and there is a tendency for the notion of spirit in Chinese medicine to pick up a wide variety of baggage based upon whatever expectations a practitioner projects unto it.

Since I spend a great deal of my time in Chinese society and primarily read books in Chinese, the most important issues to me regarding *shen* are fine details in clarity and understanding. I feel that some of the elements of *shen* are a bit nebulous and elusive to definition, and I try to gain clarity and fill the holes in my own conceptual understanding by seeking advice from senior practitioners as well as textbooks, dictionaries, and classical works. However, my own personal quest to understand the subtle nuances of *shen* takes a backseat when I am teaching classes at a school in California. In the latter context, the major issues I see are issues of basic concept

dictionaries, and classical works. However, my own personal quest to understand the subtle nuances of *shen* takes a backseat when I am teaching classes at a school in California. In the latter context, the major issues I see are issues of basic concept transmission rather than analysis of subtle academic nuances. I think that the key issues regarding *shen* jump to the forefront when I am in California- the most important thing to clarify is no longer the interpretation of a *Nei Jing* statement, but rather a big picture focus on the differences between similar notions such as spirit (*shen*), mind (*zhi*), thought (*yi*), *hun*, *po*, etc. These can be some pretty heavy and nebulous concepts, and chances are that we will need our entire community to come together to research these topics through many articles such as this one before we can be truly confident that these concepts have been adequately transmitted into the English language.

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[1] Li Zhen Ji et al. *Zhong Yi Yao Chang Yong Ming Ci Shu Yu Ci Dian* (“Terminology Dictionary of Commonly Used Terms in Chinese Medicine”). Beijing: Chinese Press of Traditional Chinese Medicine (*Zhong Guo Zhong Yi Yao Chu Ban She*); 2001. 李振吉主编. 中医药常用名词术语辞典. 北京:中国; 2001. This text was a major resource for this article, and I am deeply indebted to Prof. Wang Kui of the World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies (Beijing) for introducing me to this work.

[2] Wiseman N, Feng Y. *A Practical Dictionary of Chinese Medicine*. Brookline, MA: Paradigm Publications; 1998. The true credit for much of this work goes to Nigel Wiseman and Feng Ye, both for their inspirational words and for the wealth of knowledge preserved through their texts. Their foundational work has made the Chinese literature accessible for me and countless others, and their tireless effort to preserve concepts has helped to make this entire discussion possible in the English-speaking world.

Eric Brand
San Diego, California

ERV-1: This passage can also be found in the Xici or Great Commentary of the Yi Jing.
ERV-2: This reflects a modern Chinese perspective.

3- Bruce Ferguson

1- what do you think ‘shen’ is? Or how would you define the concept of ‘shen’?

I agree with completely with Maciocia:

First, it is the activity of thinking, consciousness, insight and memory; therefore it refers to the functions of the Western “Mind”.

Second, Shen indicates the complex of all five mental-spiritual aspects of a living being: the Mind, the Ethereal Soul (Hun), the Corporeal Soul (Po), the Intellect (Yi) and the Will-power (Zhi).

Lastly, Shen is the poorly definable and subtle quality of “life” or “glitter” which can be observed in a healthy being.

2- how does the ‘shen’ affect your practice?

-Two ways: Gives predictive power for response to treatment. Poor shen, generally poor response. Good shen, generally good response. Second, changes in shen implicate the TCVM Heart/Xin in the disharmony.¹ Commonly will find Heart Qi, Yin and/or Blood Deficiency as root or Ben.

3- what do you see as the role of ‘shen’ in TEAM?

-As above, and when diagnosis is made, treatment is then possible with acupuncture (e.g. HT 7, PC 6, CV 17, Anshen), Herbs (e.g. Tian Wan Bu Xin Tang for Heart Yin/Blood deficiency) or TCVM Food Therapy (e.g. longan).

-As above, and when diagnosis is made, treatment is then possible with acupuncture (e.g. HT 7, PC 6, CV 17, Anshen), Herbs (e.g. Tian Wan Bu Xin Tang for Heart Yin/Blood deficiency) or TCVM Food Therapy (e.g. longan).

4- What issues are important for you in trying to understand the concept of shen in the West, in China and/or Japan?

-None, it is self-evident.

Bruce Ferguson
Murdoch, Western Australia

1: SB editor – TCVM is Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine. It should be remembered that Dr Ferguson is a veterinarian.

4- Miguel Angel Cabrer Mir

Shen , Tai ji quan and Acupuncture

The meaning of Shen has different interpretations in the history of Chinese thought. The purpose of this article is to investigate different references to Shen in the classic texts of Tai Ji Quan and show how these ideas relate to the practice of acupuncture. Physical posture, state of mind and a sense of touch are all encompassed in the concept of Shen and are equally essential in the arts of Tai Ji Quan and Acupuncture.

In various texts from the 3rd and 4th centuries BC, an era when the concept of Shen experienced a transformation, we can find many references to these three aforementioned aspects.

Prior to this era, Shen was seen as a separate entity to which offerings were made in the belief that this would influence the outcome of certain aspects of human society (agriculture, illness, war faring)

In the 3rd and 4th century BC texts of the Neiye, Zhuangzi and 2nd century BC text the Huainanzi, Shen becomes a quality which anyone can attain with dedicated practice : a quality of consciousness which enables us to perceive constant change and transformation.

“yin changes into yang and yang changes into yin” Yi Jing^{ERV-1}

An important element in this continuous transformation is the pivot, Ji.
In the Yi Jing access to the pivot or incipient movement is related to the quality of Shen.

The following quote suggests a direct link between the understanding of Ji (the pivot) and the spiritual Shen

The Master said, “ To understand the Ji, is this not a matter of the numinous!”
Xici Zhuan (from I Ching: R.J. Lynn)

The Master said, “ He who knows the way of alternations and transformations understands what it is the spirits (Shen) do.”
Xici Zhuan (from To becomes a God: Michael. J Puett)

The literature of Tai Ji Quan also talks of “ comprehending the pivot” (Deji). In the practice of Tai Ji Quan this incipient movement is the ability to sense the movement of the other person before it happens. In acupuncture this applies to sensing the precise moment when and where to realise the puncture.

The physical aspect: posture

How can we attain the quality of Shen and comprehend incipience (Ji) through practical physical training?

~~the physical aspect posture~~

How can we attain the quality of Shen and comprehend incipience (Ji) through practical physical training?

“If the spirit of vitality (Jing Shen) can be raised then there will be no apprehension, dullness or heaviness. This is what is meant by suspending the crown of the head.”

The Mental Elucidation of the Thirteen Postures – Wu Yuxiang

Postural alignment is necessary to permit the installation of Jing Shen. The experience of a body with Jing Shen is quite the opposite of dullness or heaviness. For this reason the practice of Tai Ji Quan emphasises the natural pursuit of a relaxed posture (sung). This is an alert relaxation where the body is prepared for action. Some Tai Ji Quan masters have used the image of a cat observing a mouse hole to describe this state of being prepared for action but without tension in the waiting. In the Neiye we also find references to physical posture as an important element of the practice.

“ If you can be aligned and be tranquil
Only then can you be stable (Cap VIII)

When your body is not aligned
The inner power will not come” (Cap XI) Original Tao - Neiye - Harold D.Roth

The Mental Aspect: state of mind

“Throughout the whole body, the intent (Yi) is on the spirit of vitality (Jing Shen) not on the Qi. If it is on the Qi, then there will be stagnation.”

The Tai ji quan Treatise – Wang Zongyue

Here are two important concepts in the practice of Tai Ji Quan and Acupuncture, Qi and Yi.

Yi is a mental activity. The result of this activity will vary greatly depending on whether the mind is calm and relaxed or disturbed by desires and emotions.

A still mind has the power to reflect and flow like water. If we hold the Yi in the Qi we lose this quality, the mind, like the water, stagnates and cannot reflect with clarity.

“When water is still, it reflects one’s beard and moustache clearly

Its level-ness corresponds to the carpenter’s level and the great craftsman takes his standard from it. If water, when it is still, is so clear, then how much more the quintessential spirit (Jing Shen).

The mind / heart of the sage is clear. It is the Jian-mirror of heaven and earth and the Jing mirror of the myriad of living things...”

(V Zhong 13 Tian Dao,p457)^{ERV-2} The Way of Water - Sara Allan

The Aspect of Contact: sense of touch

“From comprehending energy (Dongjin) you will attain by degrees spiritual illumination (Shen Ming)”

The Tai ji quan Treatise – Wang Zongyue -

This paragraph is directly related to the practice of Tui Shou (listening with the hands) It is the practice of touch and the way in which we maintain contact with the other person. It is of vital importance.

Before we can understand energy we need to know how to listen (Ting) putting into practice all the previously mentioned qualities (relaxed body, still mind)

There is a phrase used to describe the practice of Tuishou which defines how we may maintain this contact:

“adhere, connect, stick, follow, without letting go or resisting”

The Song of Pushing hands – Wang Zongyue

It is curious how the two qualities which directly refer to the way of connecting with the other person, adhere and stick, include the character “Zhan” which has

It is curious how the two qualities which directly refer to the way of connecting with the other person, adhere and stick, include the character “Zhan” which has connotations relating to divination.

On a certain level there is a link between divination and the way of listening, which comes from a still mind and relaxed body.

We can also relate this quality of touch to the practice of acupuncture. How we carry out the puncture, where we find the point of puncture, the moment in which we remove the needle...where does all this stem from?

We have the choice. Either we can be guided by the theory of where to find the points from acupuncture charts, or we can be guided by this sense of touch and listen to what we perceive in the moment.

The qualities of Shen encompass the totality of our physical and mental being, and at the same time our way of maintaining contact with the world around us.

A natural posture, which allows us to relax and keep the mind at peace, enables us to create a space of stillness, Shen.

From this stillness we achieve a more subtle quality of consciousness, which permits us to perceive the incipient movements of constant change and transformation (Ji), which can bring us to a greater depth of understanding and practice in the arts of Tai Ji Quan and Acupuncture.

TERMS

adhere and stick 沾黏 zhan 占

Deji: 得機

Jing shen 精神

Shen Ming 神明

Yi 意

Song 鬆

Dong jin 懂勁

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Miguel Angel Cabrer Mir
Barcelona, Spain

ERV-1: from a commentary on the Yi Jing.

ERV-2: This is a quotation from Zhuangzi, chapter 13, Tiandao.

5- Lillian Bridges

1. Shen, in my opinion, is one of the most important aspects in Facial Diagnosis and Chinese Medical Diagnosis. Of course, there are many references to Shen in the Nei Jing and other ancient texts. Shen was taught to me as being the light in the eyes and skin that shows the nature of an individual's spirit. This light was best when it was luminous and the quality was once described as the eyes being "backlit" and the skin as "glowing". Shen can also be described as the connection to the Cosmological Qi or the embodiment of gathered ling from the heavens that gives people their individual spirit. Shen is a motivating energy that resides in the heart and brain as a higher (transcendent) level of fire energy. Shen can be felt as well as seen and this can be called "intuition", but to me describes transmission of energy between two people.

Shen is also the way that people transmit emotions nonverbally as the light in the eyes change with each emotion. Further research has shown me that you cannot control the light in the eyes (unlike body language), and changes in the quality of light are determined by the autonomic nervous system functioning.

Therefore, reading Shen is an excellent way of determining whether or not someone is telling the truth or if they are lying. This of course, is a very valuable use of Shen. Shen disturbances indicate an imbalance in the emotions and/or the brain functioning (or mental illness) and can be quite easily seen in the eyes.

2. I use Shen reading on a regular basis and consider it one of my most important diagnostic tools. I evaluate a client's Shen upon their arrival for a consultation and monitor it during the session. I expect that a client's Shen will clear and get brighter by the time they leave or I have not done my job well! I teach about Shen, Shen Reading and Shen Disturbances all over the world to acupuncturists as I consider it a vital for diagnosis, evaluation and treatment. Furthermore, Shen Management is something I believe strongly in as I work with the psychological and emotional underlay of disease. For example, many diseases have trapped fire as an underlying cause and this trapped fire (pain) is often old emotional issues and wounds that are unresolved and manifest as physical ailments and illnesses. Old traumas are easily seen as the markings of the Facial Map (discovered as the first page of the oldest manuscript in Chinese Medicine ever found by Dr. Paul Unschuld). Therefore, I tie Shen as a sign or guide to the use of Jing {essence} (and the will to live) that is affected by human suffering.
3. I believe that Shen should be taught more and be given more importance in Traditional East Asian Medicine. Because it often is viewed as being one of the more "esoteric" aspects of Chinese Medicine and because so many schools are using Western models of education and research, Shen is viewed with some reservations. However, I cannot stress enough that the ability to read Shen is the equivalent of Psychiatry or Psychology in Western Medicine as the qualities of Shen give direct access to the mind and emotions of patients. Using Shen as a diagnostic tool would significantly increase the understanding of a practitioner, facilitate more compassion (as Shen is felt and could be called bedside manner) and would enhance the healing process.

understanding of a practitioner, facilitate more compassion (as Shen is felt and could be called bedside manner) and would enhance the healing process.

4. Although I believe I have a good understanding of Shen, there is always more to learn! I would enjoy seeing some research about it and would certainly find it valuable to learn about how other practitioners understand Shen and use it.

Shen Management

Most of the focus of Chinese medicine in modern times has been to treat disease. And although acupuncturists are much better at preventative medicine than most Western physicians, there is an aspect of prevention and treatment that is often overlooked - Shen Management. The Neijing states, "Overindulgence in the five emotions – happiness, anger, sadness, worry or fear, and fright – can create imbalances. Emotions can injure the qi... Failing to regulate one's emotions can be likened to summer and winter failing to regulate each other, threatening life itself." (Ni, Maoshing Ph.D. The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine, Shambhala, Boston 1995, pg. 19)

In the past, it was quite common for people to repress their emotions. This was part of the social norm. According to the principles of Chinese medicine, this underuse or overregulation of emotions also contributed to many diseases and illnesses. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that psychotherapy became such an important profession in the Western world. It was necessary and helpful for people to uncover long buried traumas and hurts. Numerous treatments were developed to help people learn to express themselves. As psychology became more mainstream, it was believed that people seeking psychological health needed to learn to express themselves.

There is no question that freedom of expression is a valuable thing and that releasing emotions is healthy. Unfortunately, much of the quality of expression has intensified so that the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction. There is now an outpouring of emotion that can be seen on a daily basis. It is quite common for people in severe grief to be shown on television sobbing and wailing at the loss of a loved one. This metal emotion was once expressed only in private situations. The deeply personal has become a public spectacle. Anger is currently one of the most socially acceptable emotions and is seen and expressed in numerous ways even directed at strangers who happen to be in the way. Parents worry so much about their children's safety that an entire industry has been created to childproof home environments. Excessive excitement artificially generated by reality television contests, game shows and talk shows create frenzy in the viewers. And recent catastrophes both manmade and geological are of a magnitude not seen in generations, unleashing tremendous amounts of fear around the world.

Emotions are both necessary and even helpful to living except when overused, but the Ancients cautioned heavily against overindulgence in the five emotions.

Although extreme expression is temporarily cathartic, if continued, it ultimately leads to diseases of jing and qi deficiency that shortens the lifespan. It helps create chronic and debilitating illnesses that are occurring at younger and younger ages and also encourages accidents and injuries. Practitioners can monitor excessive use or underuse of emotions by evaluating the Shen of their patient's eyes and facial coloration.

Deficient qi is seen as a dullness or shallowness of light in the eyes. If the Shen of the eyes is murky, the patient is in the midst of emotional turmoil. In contrast, someone who is healthy and vital shows signs of strong qi, which is seen as a light brightness or glow in the eyes. One of the most confusing aspects about Shen is how temporary it is and how easily it fluctuates. Shen is activated by the autonomic nervous system and is impossible to conceal except by covering the eyes. Chronic Shen disturbance indicates mental imbalance or mental illness. If the eyes are consistently very dull, this is an indication of repressed brain activity, which includes severe depression or illness that creates anhedonia. If however, the light of the eyes is too bright, this could indicate fever if temporary. If this excessive brightness

consistently very dull, this is an indication of repressed brain activity, which includes severe depression or illness that creates anhedonia. If however, the light of the eyes is too bright, this could indicate fever if temporary. If this excessive brightness continues for any length of time, it is a clear sign of mania. Continuous confusion in the eyes can be a sign of mental deficiency and is symptom in a disease like Alzheimers. Craftiness is a sign of paranoia and a glazed look is a sign of substance abuse or when severe, indicates psychosis.

But most Shen changes are rapid and for practitioners, it is advantageous to learn how to read even momentary changes in the eyes that indicate flashes of emotion. Recognizing these changes can help guide the course of conversations and help determine treatments. Fear shows as a sudden startle response and then a rapid lowering of qi so that the Shen gets muddled. Anger is seen as an intense focusing of qi in the eyes and creates hardness in the Shen. Excitement at first creates an attractive sparkle, but this light is transitory and soon fizzles. It is easily seen as scattered qi. Worry causes the Shen to vibrate and even the eyeballs themselves will either move back and forth, up and down or around and is often accompanied by a similar head movement. Grief causes the qi to dissipate and there is a lifelessness and darkness to the Shen. When an emotion is felt for any length of time it will be held in the body - not just in the organ responsible for its' transmission, but also in whatever organs are weakest. Then, it shows on the face as skin coloration.

Lustrous colors of the face indicate that a patient is healthy. Any of the five element colors is acceptable as long as it appears as if the color has been wrapped in white cloth meaning it has lightness on top. For example, the most beautiful skin color is described as white cloth covering cinnabar. Another ancient analogy of healthy skin color is when it has the appearance of a ripe peach. But when a patient is unhealthy, the various colors show up on specific parts of the face indicating the organ involved. The five basic colors show whether a certain organ has been compromised by overuse or underuse physically and/or emotionally. Stagnation is seen as darkness, inflammation is redness, frozen or immobilized qi shows up as whiteness, toxicity is green and putrefication is a yellow or sallow coloration. These colors, of course, can be seen in combination. When the color covers the entire face, the illness is considered very deep and dangerous.

The increasing amount of disease and illness already occurring and potentially threatened reveals the need for more even more prevention. Renewing the practice of Shen Management is therefore wise. This means that individuals need to take responsibility for their emotions and learn to regulate their expression in appropriate and moderate ways. Although certain times and circumstances in life require expression, other times require observation and contemplation. One of the most valuable techniques that can be practiced is "Compassionate Detachment". By feeling compassion, you remain involved but do not take on other's suffering as your own. You remove yourself slightly if it is not about you and yet still care. However, the desperate and pervasive need for attention is fueling the emotional drama. People claim they want peace, but peace is not possible as long as emotions are flaring.

For health practitioners, you owe it to your patients to manage your own Shen and teach this ability. Work on your issues and clear your mind. Healing can be amplified when you come from a place of inner quietude and love. The quality of Shen that appears from this state of being is beautifully soft and translucent like clear pools of water. The eyes glow with the light of an illuminated mind. As Chinese Medicine has always been concerned with balance, managing Shen is one way to achieve some much needed equilibrium in our increasingly chaotic world.

Lillian Bridges
Kirkland, Washington

6- Yair Maimon

1- what do you think 'Shen' is? Or how would you define the concept of 'Shen'?

Shen is to do with any thing which is greater than the way we normally perceive life. It is the true inspiration, the unity which lies beyond our perception of reality. Reality to us is on the level of two the yin and yang the manifestation of life on earth. But the outmost power which lies beyond matter, life and death is the Shen. It represents the oneness, the power of heaven.

There are 5 aspects of Shen in-me. And in order to understand them one needs to cross the boundaries of earth and men, space and time and be moved by heaven:

- ① IN-tuition
- ② IN-spiration
- ③ IN-tention
- ④ IN-spection
- ⑤ Inter-action

Intuition- represents a true moment when the heart is empty and we are moved to do the right thing at the right time.

Inspiration- is when we grasp the very core of something and we are connected to the source; the fountain of life, the place where our spirit feel it is at home connected to a greater source of life. It is a gentle peaceful place full of love and possibilities

Intention- when we act from this very place of inspiration and share our wealth with others.

Inspection- to see the true Shen of anything we look at and in the same time to note the mutual interplay of life.

Interaction- to be present and sense the Shen of every thing surrounding you, a rare moment that happens in true love, true inspiration and in the clinic when we treat someone.

2- how does the 'Shen' affect your practice?

"The great acupuncturist is an artist and a wise person with a generous heart ... his hand is guided to the "places" of the body where the spirit is rooted the acupuncturist will himself be guided by his own spirit. He calls heaven and earth to the points where their meeting give birth to life..." (Rooted in the spirit p-81)

This quote is the northern star that guides me in the practice so nicely written by Larre and Rochat de la Vallee.

There is nothing greater than to guide a patient to his true inspiration to the place where there are no fears. Where he can clearly see his own path in life, what is probably called in Chinese philosophy the Dao. A place of effortless health and peace. When I practice, this is what I try to see in my patient and this is where I try to guide the Qi. Although it hard to avoid the suffering and the pain which the patient is coming with I believe that by addressing and clearly recognizing his Shen is the true and deep work of an acupuncturist. Actually patients bring to the treatment their very pain, which they want to get rid of but in the same time their spirit is there, this spirit which is anchored in the heart. This spirit- Shen is the true reason why they came to treatment.

3- What do you see as the role of 'shen' in TEAM?

It is like music in orchestra. Each person has his own tune and together they make

5- What do you see as the role of *shen* in TEAM?

It is like music in orchestra. Each person has his own tune and together they make something harmonious. Once I heard a music created by a group of Buddhist monks from a monastery in Tibet. Each sat there for a few moments and then put out his own tune; together they gave this amazing harmonious tune. Later I was told that they were recorded for an album they were recorded on their own. Each one was recorded separately and each one kept his very original tune. They had exactly the same tune when they were alone and when they were in group nothing affected this fine tuning.

When a team allows each individual to be himself, this means that respect, love and deep tranquility are felt, then a harmonious inspirational work is carried on.

4- What issues are important for you in trying to understand the concept of *shen* in the West, in China and/or Japan?

To have detailed information on conception, birth and death as viewed in Ancient China.

Yair Maimon
Tel Aviv, Israel

7- Dianne Sommers

A personal interpretation of the spirit or *shen*

From the moment I started studying Chinese Medicine and encountered their idea of the spirit or *shen*, I have been struggling with its interpretation. Teachers explained it to me in various ways, books pointed out that in different times there were different explanations, so what it really was, could only be my personal distillation out of these diverse ideas. When pondering over this concept, I deal with the tenuous distinctions between mind and body and between energy and matter, terrains that also provoked great debate in the history of Western philosophy. Although these distinctions were never made in the early Chinese literature, we commonly think in these concepts and use this terminology to express our thoughts. Where *qi* is the universal energy and matter that makes up all physical and psychological phenomena, *shen* is formed by a concept that encompasses our ideas of mind and body. Translations for the term are plenty – *numen*, spirit, God, soul -, but none of these terms can fully grasp the Chinese meaning. So how is it possible to get a better idea of what they are talking about? Sources that provided me hints and clues toward a better understanding came from ancient books but especially from the *Nei ye* chapter of a late fourth century BC philosophical text called *Guanzi*.

The *Nei ye* chapter points out how we can cultivate ourselves and fully develop our human capacities. By showing how the processes in us are functioning, by making understand the workings of our inner system, the Chinese text gives a tool for a better comprehension of ourselves. The goal is to develop into a more powerful being, in such a way that nothing in the world can unsettle your life. Humans capable of doing this, have developed their body and inner self. In classical texts these people are called *sheng ren* or holy ones. But how is this development possible and what is the role of the spirit in it? The *Nei ye* describes how we can grasp this 'essence', which is defined as the principle that generates everything, and how we can keep it in our lives.^{ERV} It is everywhere around us, and if you can grasp this essence or *shen* and store it in your breast, you will be called a holy one:

The essence: through it all things are formed and generated
Down here it generates the five grains
Up there it forms the constellation of stars

The essence, through it all things are formed and generated
Down here it generates the five grains
Up there it forms the constellation of stars
When it moves between heaven and earth
We call it ghosts and spirits
But who stores it in his breast
We call a holy one

This vital energy of the spirit cannot be forced to enter, but with the inherent power or *de*, the force within by which the true nature of life can be expressed, it is possible to make it come to rest in you. It does not simply come whenever we call it, we can only welcome it with our intention. In the classical text this is called 'to perfect the Power':

Therefore this vital force
Cannot be stopped with violence
But with the Power you can give it peace
You cannot call it with your voice
But you can welcome it with your intention
Hold it respectfully and do not lose it
This is called 'to perfect the Power'

When the Power comes to perfection, the heart is filled and gets its correct form. This is called the Way or *dao*. Confusion of the senses should be avoided, because they lead us off the Way. Only in stillness can the Way be followed and will the spirit come towards you. The spirit is a free energy and has no fixed place, but it will reside in the heart when this heart is calm and peaceful. This spirit has great capacities, but its presence in us is not self-evident: its shelter (the heart) must be kept clean in a respectful way. This means that desire and emotions should not get a chance to confuse the heart in order for the essence to come naturally:

Nobody knows the limits of the spirit
But it is radiant in its knowledge of the ten thousand things
'Grasping the middle way' is what we call:
Keeping the middle way without deviation
Do not let things confuse your senses
Do not let your senses confuse your heart
There is a spirit by nature in us
It comes and goes
No one is capable of grasping this totally
Lose it, and certainly disorder will arise
Grasp it, and certainly order will arise
Keep its shelter clean with respect
And the essence will come by itself

If you turn in upon yourself and if you still your thoughts, the spirit will stabilize itself. It acts there as a basis for numerous possibilities and a source of infinite creativity. The question is, are we capable of doing this? Are we able to store this spirit in our breast? The message of the *Nei ye* is that you have to search for it by yourself, because there is no other way than through your inner self. Reflection on this inner self is the credo that the text emphasises:

By concentration of your vital essence as the spirit uses to do
The ten thousand things will be completely stored inside you
Can you effect such a concentration?
Can you unify like this?
Can you know the future without divination?
Can you hold, do you know when to stop?
Can you find it in yourself, without searching for it in others?
Think about this! Think about this!
And think about this again!

The Way is without emotions that disturb the heart, and is going smoothly with the flow of things. By keeping this regularity and balance in our life, the spirit stays in his favorite shelter, the heart. Only when this place is kept clean, without emotions and

The Way is without emotions that disturb the heart, and is going smoothly with the flow of things. By keeping this regularity and balance in our life, the spirit stays in his favourite shelter –the heart-. Only when this place is kept ‘clean’, without waste and garbage, is it possible to keep the spirit stored in the breast. Then you will not be tempted by your thoughts, the body will be peaceful and we can keep our balance:

Make your heart big and give it space
Relax your vital energy and spread it out
Your body will be at peace and not be disturbed
You can stick to the One, undisturbed by ten thousand small things
Seeing advantage, without being tempted
Seeing disadvantage, without being afraid
Relaxed and at peace, but with compassion
Finding joy only in yourself
This is what we call ‘making vital energy into clouds’
Because your intentions and movements resemble those of heaven

Through this text I did not learn what spirit *is* (because I still don’t know that), but did learn how I can approach the idea of the spirit. That it is not about the precise definition, but about how to make contact with what this spirit is and means. Or even better: how spirit can come to me, contact *me* and touch my inner self. That which ‘touches’ us, is what life is about. Understanding these inner workings is being aware of the connectedness of the spirit with my body, to make sure there is a place where it will be welcomed and heard. Stillness, without all kinds of distraction and interference, is an important key and makes it possible to listen to what it has to say to me.

Dianne Sommers
Amsterdam, the Netherlands

ERV: It should be noted that in the NeiYe the terms shen (spirit) and jing (essence) are often used interchangeably.

8- Clemens Prost

Questions to the Shen

1. *The Shen or the mind is the underlying fundamental principle of our feeling, intention and thinking.*

The qualities of the Shen are clearness and cognitive faculties.

That means, it is not important which emotion someone has, what he wants and what he feels. It is important how he can feel, how he can want and how he can think, the self-awareness for someone’s feeling, intention and thinking.

Through the ability to become aware to our feeling, intention and thinking, we get the ability to create or change consciously the underlying fundamental principle of our feeling, intention and thinking.

2. TEAM (traditional East Asian Medicine) is a holistic method, to understand and treat persons. The use and understanding of the term holistic is quite different in TEAM.

One understanding of the term holistic is to use the concept of the San Bao (3 treasures). The 3 treasures (Jing, Qi, Shen) are 3 levels of human being, or 3 levels of human manifestation.

Jing is the material level, Qi is the energetic level and Shen is the mental/spiritual level. The mental/spiritual level organizes, determines and creates the energetic level.

Jing is the material level, Qi is the energetic level and Shen is the mental/spiritual level. The mental/spiritual level organizes, determines and creates the energetic level. The energetic level organizes, determines and creates the material level.

For the treatment it means, if the patient has xue xu/blood deficiency, there are 3 levels, on which you can treat:

- On the material level, the jing level, you can substitute blood, or substances which the body needs to create new blood.
- On the energetic level, the qi level, you can tonify or regulate the Qi and so the body can rebuild new blood.
- On the mental/spiritual level, the level of the shen, you can support consciousness and clearness, so that the energetic level and the material level can create new blood.

In practice it means: If the patient comes to me, I can decide on which level or levels I like to treat the patient.

If I am successful to support the patient in his conscious perception of his feeling, intention and thinking, he is able to change his behavior and his habits.

My experience is that only to help the patient to be more aware to his feeling, intention and thinking is the most intensive impulse, to help him to create a fundamental modification in his life.

In my work I try to reach the shen of the patient by talking, with qi gong or meditation exercises and mainly with acupuncture by using special needle-techniques. Important is that each acupuncture point has the potential to support the shen.

Clemens Prost
Berlin, Germany

9- Peter Firebrace

Shen

*Is there something bright as sunlight so clear and so clean
Something always peaceful always tranquil and serene?
Does it come from the timeless or from a time long ago?
Where exactly did the spirits of my ancestors go?
I've heard of the shen though I've never seen it
But then I was pre-natal once though I don't remember being it
Shen is that something that can't be defined
Like you can't make a circle with only straight lines
They say it's not yang and they say it's not yin
Though it shines from the eyes and it's felt deep within
You can't drown it in water you can't burn it in fire
It'll always be with you even when you're down to the wire
You know that it's close when everything's brighter
You feel free and easy uplifted and lighter
You know that you've lost it when the world turns grey
When life's storms and rain clouds hide the sun away
You know that you're close when you feel life's full of space
You're not just chained down and stuck between a rock and a hard place
The shen's in the blood the shen's in the heart
It'll be with you at the end as it was at the start
It's blocked by phlegm it's scattered by fright*

*The shen's in the blood the shen's in the heart
It'll be with you at the end as it was at the start
It's blocked by phlegm it's scattered by fright
It's dispersed by heat but in peaceful calm it grows bright
Jing can be seen in sperm and ova
Qi we breathe in and out every day
Shen can't be seen can't be felt can't be heard
But without it we'd never find the way
Jing qi shen dao they're the heart of now
The essence of life known unknown
There's a space without a place beyond time's ceaseless race
Beyond left and right beyond flesh blood and bone
Find it you're at rest and deeply refreshed
Lose it and you no longer feel at home
It's inaudible invisible unreachable unteachable
An inexhaustible source of radiance in an ever-present zone*

How does the *shen* affect your practice?

Having wrestled for some years with trying to understand the *shen* (神) from Chinese classical sources (Chinese medical, Daoist philosophical and Neidan (内丹) alchemical texts), I have realised that the problem is of equivalent complexity to trying to define God - with all the provision that it/he/she/they may not exist at all! From the *shen*'s earliest origins as spirits of the ancestors then spirits of heaven (in contrast to the *gui* (鬼) spirits of earth), through being gods, genies and divinities, to being powers beyond yinyang (as in the Yijing)^{ERV} and therefore beyond rational comprehension, to being the manifestation of spirit in man (as in Zhuangzi), the *shen* are expressed through such key phrases as *jingshen* (精神), the perfect balance of water and fire, heart and kidney in harmonious free communication, an expression of health and vitality itself or in *shenming* (神明), the radiant illumination that gives perceptive intelligence, clarity of thought and conscious awareness, manifesting as brightness of mind and warm generosity of spirit. The *shen*'s indisputable links with the transcendent place it in the realm of philosophy and religion, while the medical perspective's placing of the *shen* in the heart, in the blood, in the brain make it eminently immanent, so we are left speechless (as perhaps we should be, in true Daoist fashion!) before something indefinable which we do not know even whether it is singular or plural, let alone treatable or untreatable. Yet it consistently appears as the most subtle and precious of the three treasures (*san bao* 三寶) and we are urged to go to the root of the *shen* (*ben shen* 本神) for full and effective treatment of illness (Benshen, Lingshu chapter 2). Without it there is sadness or madness, with it serenity and peace. It therefore appears as the crux of health itself.

It is crucial in my acupuncture practice - for myself as a practitioner and for the patients themselves. In abstract terms I might define it as a link with the limitless that will show in the traditional brightness of the eyes, an inner content not related to circumstance, an understanding and awareness that is full of brightness and spontaneity, an openness of the heart without pretension, an atmosphere of clarity and warmth. How to restore it when lost? Restore the balance of yinyang, of taking in and giving out, of blood and qi that will nourish and move each other in perpetually circulating abundance. Bring harmony to the emotions, to the stability and serenity of the heart, rooted and anchored in the kidneys and the *shen* will return.

I have always found it interesting that '*shen* points', that is acupuncture points with the character *shen* (神) in their names, are clustered in four main areas of the body - at the navel, heart, head and wrist. At the navel, itself known in ancient times as *ming men* (命門) the Gate of Destiny, we find Ren 8 *shen que* (神闕) the Watchtower of the Shen, just above the lower *dan tian* (下丹田), on the border between the middle and lower *jiao* and therefore perfectly placed to tonify the kidneys and spleen in cold deficient exhaustion. Here we have our own personal 'ancient' link to the ancestors through the umbilical cord in our pre-natal days, fed by the blood of the mother.

Around the heart, in most traditions the middle *dan tian* (中丹田), we find a whole cluster of *shen* points. On the back, Du 11 *shen dao* (神道) Way of the Shen, so helpful in all kinds of depressive or manic states and Bl 44 *shen tang* (神堂), Hall of the Shen, useful in calming the heart, relaxing and opening the chest. At the sides, Gb 23 *zhe jin* (軛筋) Flank Muscles and Gb 24 *ri yue* (日月) Sun and Moon both refer to the *shen* in their common alternative name *shen guang* (神光) Light of the Shen. Both points help to free from stagnant liver qi causing sadness and sighing, Gb 24, as *mu* point of the gallbladder, particularly moving the situation forward and clarifying with its incisive decision-making power. On the front, Kid 23 *shen feng* (神封) Sealing in the Shen and Kid 25 *shen cang* (神藏) Storing the Shen (so restoring it) help to balance fire and water as the kidney meridian enters the heart area, calming, opening the chest and relieving oppressive anxiety. It is also interesting to note that Ren 15 *jiu wei* (鳩尾) Dove Tail, which has *shen fu* (神府) Storehouse of the Shen as

restoring it) help to balance fire and water as the kidney meridian enters the heart area, calming, opening the chest and relieving oppressive anxiety. It is also interesting to note that Ren 15 *jiu wei* (鳩尾) Dove Tail, which has *shen fu* (神府) Storehouse of the Shen as alternative name, has excellent calming, stabilising effects in panic, anxiety, mental instability and tightness of the chest.

On the head, above the eyes (described in ancient texts as *shen zhu* (神珠) pearls of the *shen*, where we can see the *shen ming* (神明) shine) and affecting the brain (*yuan shen zhi fu*, 元神之府, the storehouse of the original *shen*), we have Du 24 *shen ting* (神庭) Courtyard of the Shen, where the *tai yang* bladder and *yang ming* stomach meridians bring their strong yang influence and where the internal wind of epilepsy and wild mania can be calmed and cleared. Next to it Du 23 *shang xing* (上星) Upper Star has as alternative name *shen tang* (神堂) Shen Hall and also *gui tang* (鬼堂) Demon Hall as well as *ming tang* (明堂) Bright Hall and is one of Sunsi miao's 13 *gui* (鬼) points for the treatment of possession. Here with the background of blocked sinus and thick phlegm congestion in the head, the patient is dull and apathetic and dispersing the point restores the brightness of the *shen*. Gb 13 *ben shen* (本神) Root of the Shen, which reunites with the *yang wei mai*, can clear the wind of madness or epilepsy while restoring peace to the brain. With these *shen* points on the head we are not far from *yin tang* (印堂) Seal Hall and the calm detached serenity of the upper *dan tian* (上丹田).

At the wrist we find Ht 7 *shen men* (神門) Shen Gate or Door, *yuan* (原) source point of the heart, though in some early texts such as Lingshu chapter 1 and Nanjing chapter 66 P 7 *da ling* (大陵) Big Mound is used instead. Perhaps everyone's favourite *shen* point, here we can open the door to let the *shen* back in or close the door to keep the *shen* safe inside. A door is a space in between. Ht 7 *shen men* opens that space to restore free communication and a calm focus and concentration in fearful anxiety, memory loss, madness with sadness or laughter, the bi-polar roller-coaster of emotional highs and lows.

As a final note, *shen* has great importance in the classic sexual texts, such as He Yin Yang (合陰陽) Uniting Yin and Yang. The clitoris is called *shen tian* (神田) the field of the *shen* or perhaps to the *shen*. Orgasm is described as *shen feng* (神風) the wind of the *shen* or again perhaps the wind that takes you to the realm of the *shen*. When man and woman fuse together in making love, there is no yin, no yang, each has gone beyond to be achieved and fulfilled in the other, returning to the regenerate transcendent source of yinyang, the *shen*.

In conclusion we may be unable to define *shen*, we may be uncertain as to its/their exact whereabouts, but we know when we are connected or disconnected. Treatment is one way to reconnect to the *shen*, allowing the *shen ming* (神明) to shine once again and full health to be restored.

Peter Firebrace 26.3.07

ERV: note that this is found in the Xici or Great Commentary on the Yi Jing.