

Portals to Tao

Using the outer shu points for emotional transformation

by John Kirkwood

The acupoints which lie along the outer Bladder line at the same level as the back-shu points — which I refer to as the outer shu points — are well known in the Five Element tradition for their influence on the psycho-emotional correspondences of the Elements. These same points are also used to address the spiritual level of the person being treated. The outer shu points of the yin organs influence the five spirits — *po*, *shen*, *hun*, *yi* and *zhi* — which are embedded in the names of the points.

Point	Chinese name	English name	Yin Organ	Emotion	Element
BL 42	Pohu	Soul Door	Lung	Grief	Metal
BL 43	Gaohuangshu	Vital Region Shu	Heart Protector	Joy	Fire
BL 44	Shentang	Spirit Hall	Heart	Joy	Fire
BL 47	Hunmen	Ethereal Soul Gate	Liver	Anger	Wood
BL 49	Yishe	Abode of Thought	Spleen	Sympathy	Earth
BL 52	Zhishi	Residence of Will	Kidney	Fear	Water

Table 1: Outer shu points and their correspondences

These outer shu points therefore address both psychological, emotional and spiritual aspects of our being. This gives rise to several questions. What is the difference between these two levels of our nature? Are they related or connected? If so, how?

In order to answer these questions, we must first explore the nature of emotion and the nature of spirit.

What is an emotion? Emotions have strong physiological effects. For example, anger can make us hot, energy rising up the body and generating movement of some kind. On the other hand, fear can make us feel cold, frozen, paralysed or shaking like a leaf.

But these physiological effects derive from the mind. We feel angry because we believe that we or someone close to us has been wronged; we feel fear because we believe our survival is threatened. Emotions arise out of beliefs, memories and patterns of behaviour that originate in the mind.

We could go further to say that emotions are reactions of the ego-self that is rejecting our current experience. If we were totally accepting of everything that is happening at any given moment, we would have no emotional reactions.

What is spirit? While answers will vary widely according to a person's religious or spiritual beliefs, it is generally understood to be something that is not the body, not the emotions, and not the mind. It is the part of us that is touched by nature, beauty and the wonder of the universe.

From the Taoist perspective the overall spirit of the *shen* is subdivided into the five spirits, each relating to one of the Five Elements and each having a different role to play in life and death. Upon death, the *zhi*, *hun*, *shen* and *yi* return to the void from which they emerged while the *po* disintegrates and becomes part of the earth.

The ancient Chinese sages believed that spirit and body are nothing but two different states of condensation and aggregation of qi.¹ Whichever way you view spirit, it is something that is of a different level or order from emotions.

When we hold the outer shu points of the yin organs, we can support the process of letting go of egoic emotional reactions and support the acceptance of our situation. When there is no reactivity, we have access to the essential states which the emotions are masking and from which they are distancing us. We could say that the outer shu points are portals to understanding the spiritual lessons that the Five Elements have to teach us.

Element	Outer shu point	Spiritual Issue ²
Water	BL 52	Returning to original nature
Wood	BL 47	Finding true path
Fire	BL 43 & 44	Knowing true self
Earth	BL 49	Cultivating true purpose
Metal	BL 42	Recognising the preciousness of now

Table 2: Spiritual issues of the Five Elements

Zhihsi ≈ Residence of the Will

Zhihsi (BL 52, Residence of the Will) is the outer shu point of Kidney. *Zhi* is the spirit of the Water Element which resides in the Kidneys. *Zhi* is often translated as will but has also been taken to mean ambition, purpose, determination, knowledge, mind and memory.³ Fear that is unresolved and internalised is stored in the Kidneys. While fear is an evolutionary necessity, one that has ensured the survival of our species, it can deplete and exhaust the Kidneys to the point where there is no will to recover.

Zhihsi is called for when fear is holding someone back from carrying out their ambitions, or to contain the restless ruthlessness of unbound aspiration. It can regenerate the body, mind and spirit of someone who has a weak hold on life with no drive, energy or determination. Where there is an excess or deficiency of will, this point can be a portal to discovering that *zhi* — the will — does not arise from our small ego-self, but from the universal will, the original impulse of the Tao, our original nature.

1 Maciocia, G, (2009) *The Psyche in Chinese Medicine* Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, p.4

2 Dechar, LE (2006) *Five Spirits* Lantern, New York NY; Kirkwood, J (2016) *The Way of the Five Seasons* Singing Dragon, London

3 Jarrett, LS (1998) *Nourishing Destiny* Spirit Path Press, Stockbridge MA, p. 57

Hunmen ≈ Gate of the Ethereal Soul

Hunmen (BL 47, Gate of the Ethereal Soul) is the outer shu point of Liver. The emotion of anger, when it is internalised, injures the Liver and its spirit the *hun*. *Hun* is the ethereal soul and closest to the Western concept of soul. It occupies the realm of the clouds, the space between heaven and earth, from which vantage it imagines and envisions direction and possibility in one's life. Anger and frustration are egoic responses to perceived obstacles, thwarts and injustices in the pursuit of these dreams. Long term, these responses can engender resentment, seething anger, depression, loss of vision and purpose, or collapse in the face of life's difficulties.

Hunmen supports us in resolving these blocks around anger and allows us to see that our plans for life are not owned by the small self, that it is not really we who are doing anything in life, but that we are the arms and legs of the Tao.

Gaohuangshu ≈ Vital Region Shu

Gaohuangshu (BL 43, Vital Region Shu) is the outer shu point of the Heart Protector which supports and protects the Heart and the *shen*. The function of the Heart Protector is to shield the Heart from attacks, so it tends to suffer from the inevitable wounds that human life is heir to. Feelings of hurt, betrayal, trauma, abuse both physical and emotional, broken relationships and loss of love all impact upon the Heart Protector. These sufferings that are the human lot are at the same time a call to inner spiritual work. Suffering engenders compassion which is balm to the heart and the soul.

Gaohuangshu supports us in bringing self-love and compassion to our own wounding as much as to the suffering of others.

Shentang ≈ Spirit Hall

Shentang (BL 44, Spirit Hall) is the outer shu point of Heart. It treats the Heart and the *shen* more directly. Joy is the emotion of Fire and the resting point of an open heart. When the Fire and the Heart are removed from this place of joyful contentment, there is a slide to the extremes of either joylessness or a hyperactive, false joy that are reactions to hurt. The Heart is synonymous with the mind and many sources refer to the Heartmind or Mindheart. Therefore any disturbance in the mind, anything that might be called a mental disorder or mental illness, is a disturbance of the Heart. It is by working through the hurts of our life that the Heart can heal, the mind can settle, and the *shen* can shine in the eyes.

Shentang settles the heartmind, treats restlessness, insomnia, volatile emotions, anxiety, panic, depression, poor memory and concentration. It supports calmness, settled sleep, appropriate heart boundaries, coherent communication, and the capacity to give and receive love. It is a portal to discovering our true identity, the true nature of who we are.

Yiche ≈ Abode of Thought

Yishe (BL 49, Abode of Thought) is the outer shu point of the Spleen. Spleen houses the spirit of Earth, the *yi*. Translated as intention, thought or intellect, *yi* is the spirit which supports the manifestation of new things into being. It unifies thought and action to produce desired ends. Integrity is the virtue of Earth and reflects intention that comes sincerely from the heart. While *hun* provides the vision for our action, *yi* provides the means to carry out the plans in a way that is sincere, integrous, and has care and concern for others. Incessant worry and rumination, over-thinking and too much study can injure the Spleen and the *yi*. So too does an over-concern for other people at the expense of oneself which is a kind of worrying for others.

Yishe supports steadiness, dedication and application. Where there is worry, repetitive thoughts, a foggy mind, ungroundedness and loss of centre, this point is called for. It supports the discovery of one's life purpose in the highest sense, that what we manifest in this life is for some greater purpose than mere self-satisfaction.

Pohu ≈ Door of the Corporeal Soul

Pohu (BL 42, Door of the Corporeal Soul) is the outer shu point of Lung, the organ where unresolved grief and sadness accumulate. *Pohu* can open us to embracing the preciousness of the present moment. Grief and sadness are reactions to having lost something important to us, or a longing for something that we don't have. Both responses keep us from being right here right now. After all, the present is all we really have. Everything else is a memory of the past or an imagining of the future.

Pohu supports us in working through the emotion of grief and at the same time guides us in being fully in the here and now. *Po* is the animal soul, the part of us that is our instinctual nature. The more we can assimilate our spiritual nature with our animal nature, the more we can embrace the present moment in the way that animals live in the moment, unconstrained by ego, the more we can appreciate the value of this life.

Clinical Applications

The outer shu points can be well supported by pairing them together with their corresponding mu and source points in turn. In working with these points, I will often engage the client by asking questions from the perspective of the emotion and spirit of the point being held, encouraging the person to stay as fully as possible with the feelings. I find that this method eases the emotional holding, brings a wider view of life, and opens the qi at the point in a way that supports lasting change.

As practitioner, I try to find in myself the positive qualities of the spirit of the Element I am working with. This offers a holding space for the client to contact and process the often difficult emotions, and provides a beacon that guides the person through the emotion towards the essential qualities that the emotion is masking. From fear to true will; from anger to true path; from unbalanced joy to true self; from worry and over-sympathy to true purpose; and from grief to true presence. In short, from small self to true self; from ego to Tao.

Outer Shu Point	Mu Point	Source Point
BL 42	LU 1	LU 9
BL 43	CV 17	HP 7
BL 44	CV 14	HE 7
BL 47	LV 14	LV 3
BL 49	LV 13	SP 3
BL 52	GB 25	KI 3

Table 3: Point combinations for outer shu points

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