

Heart Dis-Ease & Soul-Loss:
*A Cross-Cultural Examination of Historical and Modern Perspectives
And Corresponding Herbal Treatment
For Healing the Heart*

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The human heart is estimated to beat one hundred thousand times a day, forty million times a year, and around three billion times during the life of a person living to the age of seventy to eighty years old. The heart circulates two gallons of blood per minute and one hundred gallons per hour as the blood travels through vessels and arteries with a combined length of sixty thousand miles, which is more than twice the circumference of the Earth (Buhner, 72). Modern medicine defines a healthy heart based on the organ's ability to pump and circulate blood throughout the body. These actions generate pressure waves throughout the body, and in turn, designate the heart as an electromagnetic generator (Buhner, 71). This highly sophisticated organ is also responsible for a wide range of lesser known endocrine related activities such as making and releasing numerous hormones; sending neurohormonal, electric, magnetic, and chemical messages; and is responsible for central nervous system activity such as sending information concerning the body's temperature and pressure to the brain and the rest of the body.

Aside from all these impressive functions, the heart has maintained a mystical allure more than any other organ in the body in many cultures throughout history. Within the spiritual beliefs of many traditional peoples, the heart is believed to be the true seat of intelligence, and is considered closely related to the soul, which is comprised of the mind, will, and emotions.

In this report, we will analyze what is understood about the heart through the knowledge of a variety of cultures, past and present, in addition to current knowledge gained through modern science, which believes that negative emotions such as stress and anxiety can lead to heart disease. For the purposes of this report, *heart disease or dis-ease* is used as a broad term to signify not only impairment of cardiac function, but also compromised emotional states, which negatively effect the health of one's heart and soul. Through the cross-cultural examination of the heart in a historical and modern context, a profound understanding of the

perceptive nature of this organ can aid one to accurately treat modern afflictions of heart disease (and dis-ease) through the use of herbal remedies.

In ancient Egypt, the heart, known as “ib,” was thought to be the center of all human emotions, as well as the source of memory and intelligence. The heart was believed to be the most vital organ of the body. During the mummification process, the heart was left intact in the body, while other internal organs were removed. The Egyptians believed that the deceased would need their heart when they were resurrected into the next world (Remler, 68). It was accepted as common knowledge that the soul, known as “ka,” “ba,” or “akh,” could leave its mummified body on occasion to wander freely (Redford, 2). Belief in the afterlife was a fundamental concept inherent in the daily lives of ancient Egyptians, so much so that many Egyptians invested a large portion of their wealth into the afterlife. This investment was unique to Egyptian culture, and is beautifully displayed in their lavish tombs (Redford, 1).

The concept of two souls inhabiting one body is found in some African traditions, as well as some native North American tribes. In African society a person is believed to be mainly composed of a body and a soul that have joined together to make a living person. It is not exactly known when the soul joins the body, but some believe this occurs when the man and woman initially conceive, while others believe the soul joins the body right before or right after the birth. Some African tribes believe that every person has two souls, one of which wanders around while one is sleeping (Mbiti, 118).

This concept of dual souls was also found in the belief systems of some native North American tribes living north of the Rio Grande. They believed that each individual had at least two souls, and thought that neither soul lived forever. One soul was the life soul that simply died with the body; usually this was thought to be when a person breathed their last breath. The other soul was the free soul that wandered around in dreams and left a person when they were

ill (Underhill, 63). The free soul could be easily lost and then recovered, possessed by spirits, or reincarnated (Underhill, 70). Often the tribe's medicine man or woman was needed to retrieve the free soul (Underhill, 63).

The concept of soul-loss may seem to be an obscure or archaic premise at first glance, but it is widely applicable to many modern diagnoses after one has experienced a traumatic event. It is all too common that a person is involved in an accident or traumatic event, after which they have trouble feeling "normal" again. Often they will be afflicted with a variety of issues from depression and anxiety to insomnia and obsessive behavior. It is true that these diagnoses can accurately describe the behavior or moods of a person, but the true challenge is to find what is at the root of these fundamental changes in the person. Unfortunately, a healthy grieving or coping process is often repressed in our culture, leaving people feeling isolated and in search of a quick fix when a search for what is causing this dis-ease would be more appropriate.

In 1931 famed Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung wrote the following:

"The most important of these perils of the soul, as they are technically called, are loss of soul and possession. Both are phenomena of dissociation. In the first case, he will say that a soul has wandered away from him, and in the second, that a strange soul has taken up its abode in him, generally in some unpleasant form.

This way of putting it may sound odd, but it describes exactly the symptoms which today we call phenomena of dissociation or schizoid states. They are not by any means purely pathological symptoms, for they are found just as much in normal people. They may take the form of fluctuations in the general feeling of well-being, irrational changes of mood, unpredictable effects, a sudden distaste for everything, psychic inertia, and so on. Even the schizoid phenomena that correspond to primitive possession can be observed in normal people (Jung, 181)."

Jung viewed the loss of a soul as a profound event that could happen to anyone, and could severely impact one's health and negatively impact one's well-being. He spent much of his time studying and comparing the mind of primitive man to modern man, and he saw the same

afflictions of soul-loss in both groups of people. While primitive man has long understood the concept of soul-loss, Jung's explorations were, and still are, groundbreaking for western biomedical communities. A major focus in Jung's work was to re-establish one's connection with the natural world and with the individual nature of "self" to achieve an optimal state of wellness and to promote overall healing for a variety of psychological ailments.

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, soul-loss is not easy to treat, diagnose, or even study in the context of western biomedicine or western herbalism. Thankfully, we are able to look to other cultures for guidance on this complicated subject, which is a central issue when examining heart dis-ease. Systems of traditional medicine reveal some of the core issues that need to be addressed, and clarify the need for personalized treatment. Individualized treatment of one's specific problems is the key to sustained mental, emotional, and spiritual health for those afflicted. Just as stress affects each person differently and also presents itself differently in each person's body, a more deep-rooted issue such as soul-loss presents itself differently as well. Proper identification and treatment of this deep-rooted issue will allow many secondary problems to easily dissipate. To further elaborate, we must look once again to a more energetic understanding of the heart as presented through traditional systems of medicine.

The highly developed systems of traditional medicine in China and India have had the good fortune of longevity. These systems of medicine (Traditional Chinese Medicine and Ayurvedic Medicine from India) are mostly untainted by modern influences. While both these traditional systems of medicine have thrived by a lineage-based method of education, we currently have easy access to ancient fundamental texts, which remain the focal point of these systems of medicines. For example, *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine*, which was written at least 2,000 years ago in China, is now readily available to teach students the principles of "yin" and "yang," which are just as relevant today as they were 2,000 years ago

(Reid, 25). In India, Ayurveda (translated as “the science of life”) was first recorded in the Vedas, which many scholars consider to be the world’s oldest extant literature. This healing system has been practiced for more than 5,000 years in India (Lad, 18).

Both these systems of traditional medicine border on an esoteric philosophical realm that initially alienated many in the western medical community. But the ability of both systems of medicines to be sustained through to modern times, and overwhelming ability to heal, has brought about more respect for these sophisticated healing modalities in recent years. The United States is now plentiful with Traditional Chinese Medicine graduate schools and a wide variety of Ayurvedic courses and certificate programs. Integrative medicine is becoming a collaborative science in its own right, and Traditional Chinese Medicine and Ayurveda are able to integrate the more shamanic, spiritual, and energetic aspects of primitive and indigenous people’s medicine to subtly combine with western treatment and teachings about health. These traditional medicines have managed to articulate highly sophisticated energetic understandings of the body, and as a western herbalist, this information can be fully understood and put to use in powerful ways with our broad scope of treatment options.

Ayurvedic medicine utilizes a variety of diagnostic tools to determine the health of the heart. This includes tongue, nail, eye, and pulse diagnoses. These methods of diagnoses may take years to fine tune, but even for a beginner, these methods of diagnoses can provide very accurate results. Ayurveda teaches that through awareness, all negative emotions can be released. They consider the heart to be negatively effected by the emotions of greed and possessiveness (Lad, 69-70). The heart is weakened by worrying (Lad, 103). Cardamom is considered to be a heart strengthener, and nutmeg and onion are heart tonics (Lad, 132, 139, 140). Ayurveda also uses some more unconventional treatments such as metals, gemstones, and colors. Gold and ruby are known to strengthen the heart muscle (Lad, 143, 148). Diamonds are

thought to bring subtle positive vibrations to the heart (Lad, 146). The color green brings energy to the heart chakra, and has a soothing effect to emotions while bringing happiness to the heart (Lad, 150). The broad scope of treatment and diagnoses that Ayurveda employs to treat the heart are known to be very effective. A typical treatment may include dietary suggestions, herbal formulas, exercise recommendation, and possibly a gemstone, metal, or color suggestion.

Traditional Chinese medicine attributes different emotions to specific organs; the heart is of utmost importance for health, of course. The heart is recognized as the “king” of the organs (Reid, 55). The classic text *The Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Internal Medicine* states, “The heart commands all of the organs and viscera, houses the spirit, and controls the emotions” (Reid, 55). In Chinese, the word “heart” is also used to represent the mind. Therefore, when the heart is strong and steady, it controls the emotions; when it is weak and wavering, the emotions rebel and prey on the heart/mind, which then loses its command over the body (Reid, 55). The heart is a fire-energy yin organ (Reid, 55). Chinese medicine believes that the heart joins with the small intestine to form the fire element in the body. It is associated with the summer months, and the hours of 11AM to 1 PM. During these months and hours, the heart is believed to receive optimal amounts of “qi,” also known as energy or life force (Monte, 158-159).

The heart is considered to be the organ that is most vulnerable to injury from emotional excess because it houses the spirit and consciousness. Sudden unexpected fright is known to shock the system, alarm the spirit, and cause energy to scatter (Reid, 81). Sustained periods of grief and pessimism are also known to injure the heart, as well as the lungs (Reid, 80). The Chinese also associate the heart with joy, but for these purposes they define joy as a state arising from inner tranquility when we do what we love (Monte, 160). Laughter is believed to lighten the heart and help heal it (Monte, 161). The understanding of both positive and negative emotions attributed to the heart can reveal a deeper understanding of how one emotional

pattern can create another. For example, if an individual's joy is restricted or limited by their fear, then they most likely will have difficulty following their true inner nature. Their fear will prevent them from experiencing joy (Monte, 161).

Understanding this emotional process and emotional patterning in an individual can reveal potential for the development of disease (or dis-ease) states. Likewise, working backwards with an individual already in a progressed state of dis-ease can provide a profound comprehension of emotional patterning and how this actively influences one's life and the tendency towards certain illnesses of the body and/or mind. Modern science has solidified the interconnectedness of emotions and illness, no matter how implausible the connection first seemed.

An emerging science known as psychoneuroimmunology demonstrates that emotional states dramatically change heart rate, heart function, the health of arteries, and immune responses (Monte, 155). Fear or stress can cause heart disease (and dis-ease). "Fear changes heart rate and respiration, elevates cholesterol levels, and creates hormonal imbalances" (Monte, 161). For those with heart disease, it is crucial to limit stress and fear by removing oneself from stressful or fearful situations, by limiting exposure, or by acting more courageously (Monte, 161). By encouraging joy, laughter, and spontaneity, we can encourage the heart "qi" in a positive way, which ultimately strengthens it.

The Institute of HeartMath, based out of Boulder Creek, California, provides fascinating research in the field of psychoneuroimmunology and cardioelectromagnetic communications between two individuals, as well as within oneself. This fascinating research can help make sense of the energetic understandings of the heart that are already present in traditional Chinese medicine. The HeartMath Research Center has found that the heart generates the largest electromagnetic field in the body. This field is 5,000 times stronger than the brain

(McCraty, 2)! With this large amount of energy generated from the heart, it can be seen as a “global internal synchronizing signal” (McCraty, 2). Scientist Karl Pribram has proposed that the “low frequency oscillations generated by the heart and body in the form of afferent neural, hormonal, and electrical patterns are the carriers of emotional information, and that the higher frequency oscillations found in the EEG (electroencephalogram) reflect the conscious perception and labeling of feelings and emotions” (McCraty, 2).

The HeartMath Research Center has found that of all the bodily organs, the heart plays a particularly important role in emotional experience. The relatively new discipline of neurocardiology has confirmed “that the heart is a sensory organ and acts as a sophisticated information encoding and processing center that enables it to learn, remember, and make independent functional decisions that do not involve the cerebral cortex” (McCraty, 4). In addition, numerous experiments have demonstrated that patterns of cardiac “afferent neurological input to the brain not only affect autonomic regulatory centers, but also influence higher brain centers involved in perception and emotional processing” (McCraty, 4). It has been proven that positive emotions are associated with a higher degree of coherence within the heart’s rhythmic activity (auto-coherence) as well as increased coherence between different oscillatory systems (cross-coherence/entrainment) (McCraty, 5).

The Institute of HeartMath confirms that positive emotions promote better functioning of the heart, and therefore, the entire body. Anger was found to create erratic rhythmic activity in the heart that was disordered, while love creates a highly ordered and coherent rhythmic pattern (McCraty, 4). The Institute of HeartMath has also performed research on two individual’s energetic hearts interacting. They found the nervous system to act as an antenna, which is tuned to respond to magnetic fields produced by the hearts of other individuals, also known as cardioelectromagnetic communication (McCraty, 11). Cardioelectromagnetic

communication is the term used by the scientists to describe this profound energetic exchange that can explain concepts of magnetic attractions or repulsions between two people (McCraty, 8). The researchers at The Institute of HeartMath believe cardioelectromagnetic communication to be an “innate ability that heightens awareness and mediates important aspects of true empathy and sensitivity to others” (McCraty, 11). They have observed that this energetic communication ability can be enhanced, resulting in a much deeper level of nonverbal communication, understanding, and connection between people. They also propose that this type of energetic communication between individuals may play an important role in the therapeutic interactions between clinicians and patients (McCraty, 11).

This fascinating research confirms the affect our emotions can have on our bodies. In addition, the research provides an interesting insight into the dynamics between clinician and patient, which also reveals that being fully present with someone and fully aware can provide true healing as one’s kindness and support can actually be interpreted by another person’s heart.

All these teachings are also beneficial when choosing herbal formulas for a patient’s heart dis-ease. Through proper assessment of one’s heart dis-ease or soul-loss we can guide them to the proper herbal medicines that will fully support their healing process.

Plants of Value in the Treatment of Heart Dis-Ease:

1. Crataegus spp. (Hawthorne)

Crataegus is perhaps the best-known heart tonic. Also known as the Hawthorne tree, the flowers, leaves, and berries are medicinal. Crataegus is indicated for irritable, nervous heart conditions, which are typically related to emotional heartache or spiritual heartache (Tilgner, 103). There may be a general feeling of disconnection present. Crataegus can be thought of as an adaptogen for the heart and circulatory system as a whole, therefore it is safe and recommended to use long-term (3 months or more) (Tilgner, 103).

On a structural level, it will help the heart maintain healthy arteries and veins by enhancing the connective tissue structure of the endothelial lining of the heart, blood, and lymphatic vessels. This will give the heart more protection and resiliency against injury, disease, aging, and normal wear and tear (Tilgner, 103). Crataegus also improves coronary blood flow, thereby reducing the likelihood of angina attacks and relieving angina symptoms (Tilgner, 103). This increased blood supply enables the cardiac cells to receive and process nutrition from the blood more efficiently (Tilgner, 103). Essentially, anyone with a medically diagnosed heart condition could benefit from the tonic effects of Crataegus. Caution is advised, though, because Crataegus can decrease the need for cardiac drugs such as digitoxin, digoxin, and other cardiac glycosides. Individuals consuming Crataegus and ingesting pharmaceutical medications should be monitored by a physician (Tilgner, 103). As a whole, Crataegus is a very gentle plant, and most people will experience zero negative side effects.

2. Selenicereus grandiflorus (Cactus)

Cactus (also known as Night-Blooming Cereus) is a stimulating cardiac tonic and a cardiac trophorestorative. It is indicated for conditions “of dilation and atony from muscular laxity and has a special affinity for the heart” (Tilgner, 57). Specifically, Cactus acts upon the

circular muscle fibers of the heart and arterioles. It is used for cardiac incompetence, cardiac weakness in general, mitral insufficiency, and angina (Tilgner, 57). It can also be helpful for menopausal heart palpitations. Mentally and emotionally it is specifically indicated for someone who fears they will die from their heart stopping or from other vital functions shutting down. These individuals may be prone to nervousness and insomnia (Alfs, 41). Like Crataegus, Cactus can potentiate cardiac drugs and other plants containing cardiac glycosides. Since it is a strong cardiac stimulant it should only be used under the guidance of a trained herbalist. Overdose may cause rapid/erratic heartbeat, cardio spasms, or a feeling of constriction in the chest (Tilgner, 57-58).

3. Melissa officinalis (Lemon Balm)

Lemon Balm is a very gentle plant that can have a profound effect on the emotions. It is indicated for anxiety, melancholy, restlessness, heart palpitations, headache, depression, hypertension, and irritability associated with stress or hyperthyroidism (Tilgner, 111). It can have an overall tonic effect to the emotions for people with reoccurring negative thought patterning. It is a great remedy to carry on hand and to use throughout the day when dealing with stressful situations or negative situations. It can provide a little “pick me up” if feel low in spirits. Some people even call it “liquid sunshine”! For some people smelling the essential oil can have a greater affect than taking the tincture, it just depends on the individual.

4. Leonurus cardiaca (Motherwort)

As indicated by the name, *Leonurus cardiaca* has a very powerful effect on the heart. Mentally and emotionally it is indicated for melancholy, restlessness, and disturbed sleep from emotional or physical ailments of the heart (Tilgner, 124). In general, Motherwort strengthens the heart with an overall tonic effect. It can help nervous palpitations, premenstrual nerve tension, high blood pressure due to stress, and insomnia due to anxiety. Motherwort has been

shown to decrease blood viscosity and fibrinogen volume and increased antiplatelet aggregation in one human study (Tilgner, 124). It has been used to treat chronic atrial fibrillation and heart inflammation including endocarditis and pericarditis (Tilgner, 124). As the name also suggests, Motherwort can be useful to mothers who are experiencing stress or difficulty with some of the maternal roles.

5. Salvia miltiorrhiza (Sage Root)

Sage Root is used in the Chinese pharmacopeia. It is hypotensive, inhibits platelet activity, antiarrhythmic, heart tonic, and has antioxidant properties. It is used to treat angina and chronic glomerulonephritis (Tilgner, 146). It improves the flow of blood through coronary arteries and protects the heart from ischemia-induced derangements. Sage root also helps restore contractility after ischemia incidents. Sage root is also very useful for heart palpitations (Tilgner, 146).

6. Tilia spp. (Linden flower)

Mentally and emotionally Tilia is indicated for nervous agitation, hysteria, and any type of stress. Tilia is a powerful anti-stress remedy because it decreases adrenal enlargement, and can even protect against stress-induced ulcers (Tilgner, 15). Tilia is indicated for hypertension with arteriosclerosis and nervous palpitations. This person may be fed by anger relating to ascendant Liver yang (Alfs, 73).

7. Borage Flower Essence (Borago officinalis)

Borage flower essence is excellent for a feeling of heaviness in the heart and throughout the body. It counteracts this by giving the heart buoyant courage and optimism enabling one to rise about their disheartened state. It is specifically indicated for a soul that has experienced too much grief, sadness, or other adversity, and as a result of these life occurrences the individual

may lack confidence in facing difficult circumstances. Borage is an excellent all-purpose toner for the heart needing upliftment and encouragement (Kaminski and Katz, 293).

8. Bleeding Heart Flower Essence (Dicentra formosa)

Bleeding Heart flower essence is indicated for those suffering enormous pain and broken heartedness because their feelings have been deeply shared with another soul who is no longer present. Often the type of person needing this remedy has made the mistake of living to extensively outside the boundaries of their own self. This tend to have extreme emotion dependence on other people and to form co-dependent relationships. Bleeding Heart can help these situations because it acts as a heart cleanser and strengthener for those who must learn deeper spiritual lessons of love and freedom. Bleeding Heart helps the soul to learn to fill itself from within with strong spiritual forces (Kaminski and Katz 292).

9. Rock Rose Flower Essence (Helianthemum nummularium)

Rock Rose flower essence is indicated for moments when the soul has stepped almost completely outside the body and is in a survival mode of consciousness. Often this person is forced to address a severe life-threatening emergency, a violent attack, or other traumatic incident. Rock Rose can provide the soul with courage when dealing with these situations during and after they have occurred. Rock Rose reestablished sun-like forces of courage to the soul so it can deal with these challenging situations and ultimately transcend them with strength (Kaminski and Katz, 365).

10. California Wild Rose Flower Essence (Rosa californica)

California Wild Rose helps a soul to take a hold of its responsibilities and task during one's lifetime. A person needing California Wild Rose may be apathetic, they may hesitate or holdback for fear of pain or a challenge, and they may find it hard to take emotional risks in relationships. They may be prone to deep-seated social isolation from their habitat of anesthetizing themselves from pain or suffering, and therefore holding back from many life experiences. California Wild Rose will help them to find enthusiasm for all aspects of their life. It will awaken the inner fire of their heart toward compassion, caring, and loving for others and the world (Kaminski and Katz, 297).

11. Nicotiana Flower Essence (Nicotiana glauca)

Nicotiana Flower Essence is indicated for individuals who have an inability to cope with deep feelings. They numb their emotions so they can avoid having to cope. Sometimes this is in the form of an actual chemical dependency, but not always. Nicotiana helps these individuals to find true energy and sustenance, which is not divorced from their feelings. It provides one with a feeling of peace that is deeply rooted in the heart. It provides an integration of physical and emotion wellbeing and promotes a harmonious connection with the Earth (Kaminski and Katz, 348).

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