

# Summer and the Heart : Flower Essence support



by Kathleen Aspenns

Early summer is a delightful time in the garden. The temperature is pleasant, trees are blooming, and roses are in their prime. It's easy to see the connection between this season of warmth, openness and gentle expansion and the Chinese Medicine concept of the Heart.

The realm of the heart is a frequent area of focus for all of us engaged in the study and use of flower essences. We refer often to matters of the heart, from heartache and happiness, and to the idea of the heart as a centre for empathy and guidance. The importance of the heart is also foremost in Chinese Medicine theory, as it is central to the health of both the mind and the body. The emotion associated with the Heart is joy, and it provides residence to the Shen.

## What is the Shen?

Shen is often translated into English as spirit, but can also be accurately described as consciousness or mind. The Shen is the spirit that resides in the Heart which guides and interacts with the spirits of your other organ systems, such as the Hun spirit of the Liver. When you are calm, the Shen is able to reside in the spaciousness of your Heart, providing a wise influence to guide your life, as well as maintaining the healthy function of your body. Without this organising force, the systems of the body fall into disarray that may eventually manifest in disease. As the health of the body and mind are inseparably interlinked, there will also be mental and emotional distress, with signs such as anxiety, lack of focus, worry and even depression.

## The Role of the Heart

Modern science considers the heart to be a pump that circulates the blood. The role of the Heart is much larger in Chinese Medicine, and includes the organ itself, while incorporating elements that influence the health of the entire body. The quality of the function of the Heart energy is primary to the physical and mental health of the individual - if the Heart is not calm and balanced, none of the other functions of life and health can run smoothly.

Studies in mainstream medical literature have shown that 60-90% of illnesses have stress-related components. The Cartesian split between mind and body is becoming harder to defend, and the approach of treating physical disease as wholly unrelated to the mind and emotions of the patient leaves many people feeling hopeless.

In Chinese Medicine, the Heart is characterised as the emperor of the body. The role of the emperor is to maintain order and calm, ruling wisely and taking appropriate actions. The Heart is a calm and spacious environment and provides residence for the Shen, which then provides inspiration and guidance. The Shen and the Heart direct all functions of life, maintaining health of the body and mind.

Anything that upsets the Heart will disrupt the Shen and cause risk to health. Factors that upset the Heart include stress, conflict, lifestyle and environment. One of the statements from classic texts is that "the Heart loathes heat". In Chinese Medicine theory heat can be high temperatures creating heatstroke or an internally generated heat such as a fever. Heat can also be more abstract in that it describes any type of overactivity such as agitation of the mind or the emotions.

Normal emotions are experienced without injuring the stability of the Heart, but any time an emotion is too strong or long lasting there is a potential for imbalance. An emotion that stays in the body, as in cases of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder when a trauma is repeatedly triggered and experienced over and over, causes lasting imbalance and harms the Heart.

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## Working with Shock and Trauma

In normal situations, the qi is rooted securely in the body, guiding the functions of general health. In a stressful situation, the qi leaves its base in the lower body and rises into the chest and head. This is termed 'heat rising', and correlates to the fight or flight response of the nervous system. Heat rising feels like panic - your mind may race or freeze and you will be unable to focus or think clearly. You may have an exaggerated outward response or you may shut down and be unable to function.

If a person is generally healthy in mind and body the shock of an event can pass through and they will be restored to a normal state of calm in a relatively short amount of time. But if the shock is repeated, or the stressful situation is ongoing, there will be an injury to the healthy function of the Heart and the Shen will be disturbed. Without healing support, the health of the body is at risk.

Using flower essences after shocking or traumatic experiences is as essential as any other type of first aid. Five Flower Formula was created by Dr Bach for this type of situation and, ideally, should be offered immediately, and often, to support the release of the fear and trauma, creating a calm inner environment so the Shen can be restored. The Post Trauma Stabilizer formula from FES is also an excellent choice and one I often recommend to clients and friends. I advise taking any of these crisis type formulas as often as possible, even a drop every few minutes, while you are recovering from the immediate aftermath of a shock or fright. In the days and weeks following, taking these essences four or more times a day will be supportive as you rebuild your resilience. Once the effects of the immediate crisis have passed, you may follow up with targeted essences to address any lingering issues.



*Delavay's Tea Olive- Flora of Asia*

## The Pattern of Shen Disturbance

When I first spoke with my client “Susan”, I found it a challenge to get a word in edgewise. She spoke quickly, and recounted many of the doctors, diagnoses, and therapies she had experienced. Even though Susan had received the best of care, she was still sick and in pain all the time. As she told me her story, it became clear how stressed and miserable she was, and that she rarely felt any rest or relief.

As she talked, I gently attempted to steer the conversation to the ways flower essence therapy could help her feel better. We talked about essences to help calm her mind and ease the anxiety that kept her in a constantly stressed state. When the body is perpetually in a sympathetic nervous system state, that of fight or flight, the natural processes of restoration and healing cannot engage. Learning how to access the parasympathetic response (rest and digest) is essential to recovery of health, and flower essences can be an important part of the overall strategy to regain health. I advised her on breathing exercises, acupuncture and holding her intention for healing as she took her essence formula. Even a few moments of calm, repeated regularly, can begin the process of resetting the nervous system towards balance and health.

Chinese Medicine recognises Susan’s condition as a Shen disturbance. This can be caused by physical or emotional trauma of any kind, whether it occurred in childhood or more recently. The Shen is described as a flock of birds resting in a tree that fly away when startled. If the shock is severe or repeated, the Shen may not fully return home to the Heart.

## Signs of Shen Disturbance

A person with an unsettled Shen will often suffer from mental agitation. This may show up as distractedness, lack of focus, poor memory and excessive talking. The nervous signs can include restlessness and inability to fully relax or sleep well, nervous irritability and startling easily. They may feel depressed, dull and tired, and worried.

Reading through this list, you may recognize Shen disturbance as a vastly common experience in modern life. Thankfully, we're blessed with flower essences to help ourselves and our clients. For each of these signs, we have essences to help ease them, and bring our spirits back to health. In Susan's case, in the time we worked together she developed the inner resources to see her life more clearly and was able to leave the toxic relationship that was causing her such distress. She began to make choices that supported her mental and physical health, and step by step her situation became better. Now Susan leads a life she loves, full of warmth and connection, and her physical conditions have stabilised and improved.

## Flower Essences for Mental Overactivity

Dr Bach's Vervain is a primary essence to counter signs of heat that manifest in excessive mental activity or garrulousness. The cooling qualities and general downward energetic of the remedy can calm and soothe what is a very distressing internal state.

I use Delavay's Tea Olive (Flora of Asia - see previous page) to help people slow down enough to focus and start to process their thoughts. When the Shen is disturbed, the mind races so quickly that ideas or information don't have a chance to sink in, and concentrating is impossible. This essence brings spaciousness into the mind, helping you think clearly and calmly.

Giant Burnet (Flora of Asia) is another flower essence that is helpful to cool heat. When there is an excess of activity in the body or mind, this essence helps it to release and restore a natural state of calm. I find this essence especially helpful when the digestion is upset by the mental state.

Using gem essences with flower essences helps to anchor the desired shift into the body. Aquamarine gem elixir (Alaskan Essences) is one I reach for over and over to calm and cool the mind. Nearly everyone can benefit from this soothing essence, not only in cases where the Shen is unsettled.

## Flower Essences for Nervous Agitation

When you are not able to fully rest and sleep well, it is very difficult for your body to heal and restore itself. Calming down the nervous system is an essential first step in the restoration process. Fortunately there are many

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*Japanese Beautyberry - Flora of Asia*

flower essences that guide the system into this state. In most of the formulas I create for my clients I include several essences from this category, as they are so important for healing.

Calming and centering flower essences help to secure the qi, rooting it into the body. Japanese Beautyberry (Flora of Asia - image above) encourages your energies to remain in your centre, connecting to a still place that exists no matter how chaotic your outer circumstances may be.

Members of the Theaceae family share qualities that enhance calm presence. The flower essence of Tea (Flora of Asia) calms the mind and the nerves, drawing your attention and awareness into your centre. Schima (Flora of Asia) offers a similar energy, and adds an element about healing dependency on stimulants such as caffeine. The habitual overuse of caffeine so endemic in our culture is well known to deplete the nervous system.

One of the best gem essences to calm nervous agitation is Jadeite Jade (Alaskan Essences). I love the soothing qualities of this stone, and find the essence to be deeply grounding and calming in a formula.



## Flower Essences for Nervous Depression

When the Shen is disturbed, there can be a type of depression characterized by low energy, dullness, and unsettled worry. The individual will have trouble adapting to changes and lack a sense of perspective of their life.

Borage (FES) is a useful essence in so many situations, and is helpful here too. It provides a sense of stout-heartedness and gently elevates depressed Heart energies. I love Chiming Bells (Alaskan Essences) for its joyous qualities, a natural state of healthy Heart energy. Taking this essence over time will help to restore the pattern of the Heart.

All the rose flower essences work with the energy of the Heart, and can help with different aspects of restoring Shen. Gigantea Rose (Flora of Asia) essence gives a sense of hope, a light at the end of the tunnel, buoying your spirit. There is a quality of radiant fullness this essence imparts that can remind you of your natural state, and help you find your way back. Wild Rose (Bach) can give hope and perspective to someone mired in disheartenment and worry. It remains a favorite in cultivating little sparks of joy that can build into optimism.

The loss of equanimity that comes along with Shen disturbance results in an inability to place life events in perspective. Without the grounding influence of wisdom, even minor challenges feel insurmountable and deeply distressing. I find essences from the conifers to be helpful as they provide the perspective of ages. The conifer family is about 300 million years old and essences from these trees provide a grounded and timeless wisdom. White Spruce (Alaskan Essences) is particularly relevant in cases of Shen disturbance as it helps to re-integrate lost soul parts and restore connection to higher sources of wisdom. Yunnan Pine Pollen essence (Flora of Asia) has



*Chiming Bells - Alaskan Essence*

a potent grounding quality that stimulates release of everything non-essential so you can take stock of your situation, and then engage in aligned action.

## Acupressure to Support a Calm Heart

Modern life is stressful, lives are increasingly busy, and most people are under-rested and over-stimulated. In my practice, I regularly teach clients acupressure points to support the Shen. Developing a self care routine that involves flower essences and acupressure can create moments of calm to build on as you make the lifestyle changes that are within your power to make. Working with just a few points each day can be beneficial in building resilience as well to the situations that are outside of your control.

In addition to taking flower essences you can integrate acupressure into your daily routine. Utilising the three regulations of body, breath and mind (fully described in the Winter edition of Sentire 2018 article Chinese Medicine and Flower Essences) you can work intentionally with the qi flows that calm the Shen and support the Heart. You may wish to apply an appropriate flower essence (or from your formula of essences) to your fingertip as you make contact with the point.

Take up a position with your body where you can reach the point without straining, engage in deep and regular breaths, and lightly contact the point. Following the directions to find the point, gently stroke over the skin in the area and notice where your fingertip tends to gravitate. This can be a little hollow place, it may feel a little different than the other areas, or you may simply find your fingers resting in the same place each time you stroke over the area. Make a gentle contact and keep your mental focus aligned by attending to your breath and the sensations you may feel under your finger(s).



*Jadeite Jade - Alaskan Essence*

One of the points I recommend to nearly every client is Conception Vessel 17 (CV 17). This point is on a channel of qi running along the center and front of the body. Acupressure on this point has many beneficial effects that include calming the Shen and alleviating tension in the chest, allowing deeper breathing. Find CV17 by stroking the midline of the body at the sternum. Most guides list this point as at the level of the nipples, which always creates a moment of amusement for my female clients. I modify this direction by saying “the original location of the nipples”. You will know you have found the point when you start to feel your breath deepen and a sense of calm spreads through you.

Pericardium 6 (PC 6) is another important calming point. The Pericardium is considered to be the protector of the Heart, calming strong emotions and clearing heat so the Heart stays calm and the Shen is settled. PC 6 is found on the inside of each wrist. To find the point on your left wrist, bring the left palm up in front of your face. Bend your hand inwards, creating a crease at the wrist. With the right hand, place your ring finger at the level of the crease, with your middle and index fingers alongside. Your index finger will now be at the correct level of the point, simply find the center of the wrist between the two long bones that make the forearm. Spend one to three minutes here, then switch sides to work on PC 6 on the other arm.

Once you have spent some time with these points, you may wish to connect with Heart 7 (HT 7). It is the source point for the Heart channel, with a strongly calming effect on the Shen. It is indicated for all the signs of Shen disturbance such as anxiety and restlessness, poor sleep, and inability to relax. This point is a direct connection to the Heart, and should be used with a good measure of respect and mindfulness, so I recommend working with other calming points first. Once you are feeling calm and focused, start acupressure on HT 7.

To find HT 7, locate the bone on the pinky side of the wrist. Most of us will remember striking this bone on accident and feeling significant pain and tingling. This sensitive area is where HT 7 is found. If you follow the line of wrist crease towards the inner surface of the wrist, and bend your hand inward slightly, you'll find a hollow just past the bone. There is some disagreement at the precise location of this point, and its location does vary a little from person to person. You can explore this area with your

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fingertip and you will know where your HT 7 point is located from the experience of calm that happens when you apply acupressure to HT 7. You'll likely start to feel deeply peaceful, and even yawn as the qi begins to flow.

## In Harmony with the Seasons

When you align your healing work in harmony with the seasons, you are supported in your intentions by the greater forces around you. This summer, cultivate your Heart energy by working with flower essences that benefit the Shen, add calming and mindful acupressure, and you will create a spacious environment in your Heart to stand you in good stead no matter what life throws your way.



*Giant Burnet - Flora of Asia*

**Website:**

[www.floraofasia.com](http://www.floraofasia.com)

**Images:**

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