

## The Empress: At the Heart of Chinese Medicine

In the Empress card of the tarot, we often find the Earthly Queen lounging on her low lying throne. She tranquilly rests in a beautiful outdoor setting upon pillows and a blanket of red. Whatever tradition she comes from she is the archetype of fertility and the abundance of nature's gifts in the season of spring.

In the holistic healing tradition of Chinese Medicine it is commonly known that the heart is the Emperor of the body. What many don't realize is that he has an important feminine or *yin* counterpart. The Empress known as *ling* Spirit makes her home in the heart as well. Though strangely lacking from ancient classics, there is enough reference to *ling* Spirit to know that as the spiritual potency of an individual she is the earthly goddess within. The Chinese character for *ling* Spirit depicts two female shamans performing ritual to call forth the blessings, symbolized as rain, from the heavens. What the Chinese character shows us then is that the Empress archetype can be embodied in physical form to activate our innate powers of manifestation.

We see this spiritual potency in the Empress card as well. The base or foundation of the Empress' throne has a heart shaped stone upon it with the symbol of the female sex upon it. So why is the heart below the Empress and why is it marked with the sexual symbol of the female gender? Finally, where does the Empress' spiritual potency come? The answers to these questions can be found with a bit of background into the inner traditions of Chinese Medicine.

According to Traditional Chinese Medicine *jing* essence is the most *yin* or feminine energy in the body. A plentiful supply is desirable and leads to physical health. Someone with an abundance of *jing* essence feels strong and has great endurance. He or she exudes a natural vitality in body and strong mind while maintaining a positive attitude towards life. As a bonus, individuals with healthy *jing* maintain a youthful appearance, also experiencing greater sexual and creative potency.

Qigong, the Asian practice of working with life force energy for health, happiness and spiritual wellness, explains that *jing* essence is slowly depleted as we age. It is also unnaturally lost through overwork or unhealthy emotional strain. The depletion of essence which corresponds to the aging process is, however, reduced by maintaining a balanced lifestyle with quiet times for inner rejuvenation or by doing sexual essence generating exercises.

*Jing* essence can be regenerated through inner cultivation techniques such as Qigong. Regular practice is known to halt or slow down signs of aging. Qigong is an easy to learn exercise to improve health and prevent disease in the first place. The basic method for achieving health and long life comes from building and refining this *jing* sexual energy in the lower *dan tian* or elixir field of the belly. This is the inner cauldron of the body, what renowned gynecologist and author of women's health wisdom, Dr. Christiane Northrup, MD, refers to as the lower heart. The Empress card shows that by bringing fresh vital energies of nature into the belly through exercises like Qigong an alchemical transformation occurs. When sufficient *jing* essence has been accumulated and the watery fluids sufficiently warmed, *jing* essence transmutes into a higher frequency force known as *ling* Spirit. *Ling* Spirit can then gently rise out of the lower cauldron of the belly on its own accord. Rising like steam the Empress can then return to her noble position on the throne at the heart center.

The following simple Qigong exercise mimics the downward flow of blessings from heaven associated with the Chinese character for *ling* that appears as water cascading downward in the background of the Empress Waite-Rider tarot card. Below the feet of the Empress, we see fertility represented by the young growth of golden wheat. As a substitute for rice in the Chinese character for *jing* essence, the sprouting of new vegetation, nonetheless, shows abundant rewards from physical transmutation through body-minded practice.

With regular Qigong practice, we build spiritual potency. Then we, like the Empress in this card, hold within ourselves the potential to work with the heavens (represented by the golden scepter of power and the stellar crown upon her head in the card imagery) to help restore order and harmony to the land, our community and ourselves.

We always want to finish Qigong movements by guiding the energies we have generated from our practice into the storehouse of the lower *dan tian*. Gently place both hands, palm over palm, over the lower abdomen. Take a few deep slow breaths allowing the energies to consolidate into this physical vitality center. Like a cauldron of vitality, the energy contained in this center will replenish the other energy channels, ultimately providing nourishment in the form of oxygen and fresh nutrients to all the cells of the physical body while enhancing the spiritual potency when we work through the heart.

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