



Blood Bliss:

Dancing with our Internal Yang and Yin

By Michelle Wilkinson FwSS



Michelle trained in Shiatsu in the early '90s in Bristol and Totnes. She integrates Shiatsu into her community 'Moving Naturally' practice in East Devon. Each week has a different theme inspired by TCM – e.g. 'Braving Bones' in winter and 'Gathering Gall' in spring. Michelle is a somatic movement educator (ISMETA) with an MA in Dance and Somatic Wellbeing. See www.movingnaturally.co.uk for more information about in-person and online sessions



Moving Naturally, Shiatsu Client and Movement participant Lesley Davies

In weedy shallow pools brimming with life

Warmed by the sun, sheltered by rocks, buoyed up by friendships

Free-floating with space and time suspended

My bruised heart lets down its defences, lays down its cares

And blissfully opens to a rising tide of joy

And feelings held in a place of safety, love and playfulness

For the ancient Chinese it is the Heart organ, home to the Shen, which governs 'Blood' and blood vessels (Kirkwood 2016). The Heart has its peak energy during the summer months, the season of the Fire Element. For somatic movement educator (SME) Miranda Tufnell (2004), the heart is the sun of the body creating a pulsating centre to the rivers and tributaries of our lifeblood. I find it easy to have a strong sense of my heart through touch, physical vibrations and emotional expression. Less tangible is my connection with the blood that flows through it and around my body. This has brought me to the Body-Mind Centring work of Bonnie Bainbridge-Cohen who explores different bodily systems including the fluids. The blood is a subsystem of the body's fluid systems, which is in fact one fluid which transforms into a variety of fluids via membranes found, for example, around cells and vessels. These membranes choose the molecules essential for creating a specific fluid with its own function and quality of movement.

The physical manifestation of the Heart has two distinct sides, a left and a right separated by the septum. This allows for two different forms of blood: red oxygenated blood forming a Yang outward flow away from the Heart and blue deoxygenated blood providing a Yin inward flow returning to the Heart. If you make fists with your hands so that the fingers and thumbs touch, this may offer a physical sense of the two sides of the heart.



Drawing by Michelle Wilkinson

Red is a colour often associated with Blood and the Element of Fire. Estes (1992), offers a dual meaning of the colour red. Related to death and destruction, like some fires it can be rageful and destroy. In contrast, as a life giver, red is vibrant, dynamic and an expression of arousal, love and desire. Red is the colour of the oxygenated arterial blood which leaves the left side of the heart and is Yang in nature due to its outward focus. It has a stimulating rhythm which engages with the environment (Hartley 1995).

Red Oxygenated Blood – Exploration:

- Give Shiatsu touch to yourself or a partner - moving from the Heart out to the periphery
- Give active and stimulating Shiatsu touch
- Find strong, direct and quick movements. Engage and interact with your environment
- Create different rhythms with your feet. Allow this to travel throughout your body. If you are with other people take turns to follow each other's rhythms; to dance to another beat

When the red oxygenated blood leaves the heart through the aorta to be pumped around the body, it also flows immediately back to the heart muscle through the coronary arteries which branch out of the aorta. This reflects the importance of self-care. For the heart to circulate blood it requires its own healthy functioning. As a Movement and Shiatsu practitioner, taking time to meet my own needs prior to sessions feels very important. SME (Collinson 2015) views the body as a resource and offers ways of tuning into oneself such as slowing down, connecting with personal breath cycles and sensing whether more Yang physical activity or restful Yin time is required. Listening to the messages of my body and responding to them creates a resonant presence which enables a client to attune to their own needs and discover resources which can subsequently meet them. Lesley Davies - a client of mine since 2010, whose words and photo opened this article - offers the following from her dialogue with her heart:

Doorways

Stretches

Containments

Portals open and close

Glimpses, echoes

Linger fade and Shine

Tell me heart

How may I hold true to you?

Circle, dance, rest,

Take care of your precious body

My true and only home

I have served you well

Give thanks

*Hold me gently in soft downy
feathers*

*Stride into the storm, wind and
rain*

Accept me in my many weathers

*Journey with me through light
and darkness*

I will not fail you



Summer Activation

Blue is seen in nature in the skies above and the waters below, in berries and flowers. It is often regarded as a cooling restful/relaxing colour and as such reflects Yin qualities that are found in blue venous deoxygenated blood. The focus is inward with a sense of returning home, back to the centre, the heart. It has a sustained flow of rises and falls, like waves lapping on the seashore (Hartley 1995).

Blue Deoxygenated Blood – Exploration:

- Give Shiatsu touch to yourself or a partner - moving from the periphery back to the Heart
- Give soft sustained touch. Allow the focus to be inward

- Discover wave-like movement through the space. You may want to move with small or large pieces of material
- Both indoors and outdoors find a safe space. Here discover ways to rock and soothe yourself



Material Sculptures Doyle Centre Exmouth

Our blood offers us two contrasting modes of expression, the outward Yang of red oxygenated blood and the inward Yin of blue deoxygenated blood. This enables us to move between our activated sympathetic, and our restful parasympathetic nervous systems. This is reflected within our breath cycle where the inbreath carries the oxygen and the outbreath waste products from the return blood flow of the heart; experience this in the following exploration.

Blood and Breath Exploration:

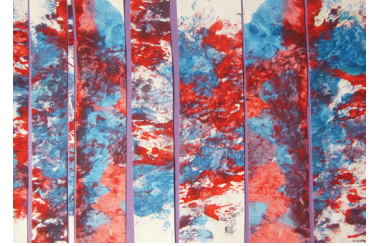
- Whether sitting or lying in supine place your hands on your lower ribcage
- Connect with the in and out flow of breath
- Imagine the colour red as you breathe in
- Imagine the colour blue as you breathe out
- Connect with the pauses between the in and out breath

Sonia Moriceau, in her 1996 article 'The Breath Awareness', illuminated the importance of the gap between the end of an outbreath and the beginning of an inbreath as a place where awareness and potential can occur and give rise to healing.

These pauses between the in and out breath have a similar sense of suspended alert rest, a sense of expanded peacefulness that can also be found in the 'Capillary Iso Rings' (Bainbridge-Cohen 1999). It is here that the red blood gives up its oxygen into the bodily tissues and in turn takes up the waste products which travel in the blue deoxygenated blood back to the heart to be released in the lungs and expelled from the body.

Capillary Iso Rings – Exploration:

- Place your hands together with finger and thumb tips touching
- Imagine the red oxygenated blood leaving the left side of the heart to flow down your left arm - which represents the arteries and arterioles. Once it gets to the left fingers and thumb, which represent the Capillary Iso Rings, imagine the oxygen diffusing into the surrounding interstitial fluid where it can then pass into the cells
- Now imagine CO2 and other waste products moving out of the cells into the interstitial fluid and back into the fingers and thumb of the right hand, as they enter the deoxygenated blood and flow up the right arm - which represents the venules and veins - back to the right side of the heart



Blood Exchange

I love the Yang dynamics of jumping, running and tuning into the vibrancy of life. Likewise, I love the soft purr of my breath (Olsen 1995) holding me in gentle rest for my ease and restoration. Discovering Blood has been a blissful experience, a dance of contrasts which complement each other and enable me to engage in the challenging and changing tides of my life. Hartley (2024) informs how after conception a circulatory system is required to deliver nutrients to the cells, making the embryonic heart the first organ to commence functioning. Within the embryo she also highlights the intimate relationship between the heart and brain, as the brain folds into the heart with only a membrane between them. I have recently witnessed my 102-year-old mother's end of life journey. Returning to her embryonic curl she dropped into a deep sleep and peacefully released her last breaths, gently exchanging life for death.

References

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