Replenishing and Restoring Jing

By Ron Teeguarden, MH

I learned an important principle from my great Taoist Master Sun Hak. He taught me that all people "leak" Jing, and that we can mitigate or stop this leaking, and as a result strengthen our life force, develop enhanced adaptability and lengthen our life.

He taught me that, from a Taoist point of view, the first things you do with a new student (or "client" or "patient") are to replenish their Jing and establish "protection."

Jing is the primal life force in living beings. It is our genetic stock and it determines the power of our life. Jing is a fundamental determinant of our potential for a long life. A person with an abundance of Jing will most likely be healthy, strong and resilient, and can achieve great longevity. Unfortunately, for those who would like to live forever, Jing is depleted by life itself, moment by moment and day by day. All disease, minor or major, diminishes Jing; and in turn, in a vicious cycle, reduced Jing makes us more susceptible to disease, degeneration and general aging. As Jing slowly or quickly runs out, we age, degenerate and then die. All death is ultimately associated with the loss of Jing.

Jing "leaks" away as we age or during disease. Master Sun Hak therefore emphasized that it is essential that a person discover where, how, when and why they "leak" Jing. And then they must change their lifestyle and habits so as stop the leaking. From a Taoist point of view, meditation, focused contemplation, the inner and outer exercises (neigong and qigong), diet and herbs can all play key roles in eliminating "leaking."

Although acupuncture does not directly boost Jing in the body, it can harmonize the body in dramatic ways so as to prevent leaking and to allow the body to restore Jing with tonic food and herbs.

From the Lingshu section of the Yellow Emperor’s Classic:

"Xue and Mai, Ying and Qi, Jing and Shen are stored by the Five Zang. If a situation becomes such that by a succession of overflows (leaking) and invasion they leave the Zang, then Jing is lost, and Hun and Po are carried away in an uncontrollable agitation."

Almost all stress diminishes Jing. If a person is highly adaptive, and possesses an abundance of free flowing qi, one may be able to overcome a great deal of minor daily stress for a long time. However, stress draws on
our Jing and unless the Jing is replenished, we will lose a little bit every day of our lives. Jing is NOT automatically replenished as qi is. It simply goes away unless we know how to supplement it. A heavy or acute stress can drain a large amount of Jing quickly, resulting in overnight aging. This loss is known as "leaking."

The five primary organs (Zang) are all considered to be Yin because they all store Jing. However, the Kidney is the central and most powerful reservoir of Jing for the entire body/mind. When we speak of the Kidney from a traditional Asian point of view, of course, we are including the structures and functions of the renal kidneys; the adrenal glands, both cortex and medulla, and their secretions and hormones; the reproductive glands, tissues and associated hormones, in both males and females; the skeletal structures, critically, from the point of view of longevity, the inner bone structure that houses, protects, nurtures and modulates bone marrow; the bone marrow itself, the source of stem and progenitor cells for the whole body throughout our lifetime; major aspects of the brain and mind; all the sense organs, and especially the sense of hearing and the tissues and organs that support these functions; and much of the functionality of the autonomic nervous system that controls fight and flight, courage and fear. When Asian health care focuses its attention on the Kidney, it is a priori focusing on maintaining, increasing and regulating Jing – and on stopping the leaking of Jing.

All of the Yin organs become more stable when they have an abundance of Jing stored within their tissues – especially when the Kidney function is strong. When functioning optimally, these Yin organs conserve Jing. They do not "leak." This goes double for the Kidney.

Jing is one of the three "Treasures" and according to Taoist and traditional Chinese health principles, Jing must be protected and conserved. However, Yin organs can "leak," and generally do. "Leaking" in this case is defined as any loss of energy which should be stored. There are many causes for leaking.

An inflammation, for example, causes a leak of energy and resources from the body. It requires enormous energy on the part of the body to maintain an inflammatory response. Even a small inflammation like a hangnail, pimple or eye inflammation can drain Jing. Chronic inflammatory conditions like chronic gum inflammation are silent Jing leaks with a high bill. A huge inflammation as might occur with an organ disease, traumatic injury or autoimmune condition is a grave drain on Jing. Those with chronic inflammations die earlier than they would if they were inflammation-free, often by decades.
More than 50 percent of all heart attacks are the result of chronic inflammatory conditions in the major arteries near the heart. Alzheimer’s Disease, Cancer, Diabetes and COPD, among thousands of other disorders, all have an inflammatory component that drains Jing and in and of itself shortens life. Some of the famous anti-aging, tonic, longevity herbs of Asia are famous for their ability to constrain and eliminate inflammation. For example, Gynostemma leaf, an herb that is consumed by the longest lived group of people on earth, is known to counteract dozens of inflammatory conditions, as well as chronic low grade inflammation. This general inflammation is now well established to be a cause of aging and premature death. Gynostemma fights this “inflammaging” and thus prolongs youthfulness, prevents degenerative disorders and extends life. It does this by repressing the activity of the universal inflammatory molecule in every cell of our body, known as nuclear factor kappa B (NFkB). Gynostemma may be consumed as a dietary supplement, in tonic formulations or as a tea to reduce false fire and thus diminish leaking.

Trans-Resveratrol operates in a similar manner and has been shown to extend the life of all animals so far tested.

This makes perfect sense to all of us who have been involved in Chinese health care. Inflammation and its symptoms are called “false fire” in Chinese medicine. The Taoists have been teaching for over three thousand years that chronic false fire in and around the heart will ultimately result in heart failure, kidney failure, or both. Sun Hak (Sung Jin Park), my Taoist teacher, explained that as we become older, the Yin Jing becomes weaker. This allows Heart Yang to expand uncontrollably and attack the heart. This shortens life. To the Taoists, both Kidney Yin (Yin Jing) and Heart Yin must be maintained in order to control Heart Yang. Yang also diminishes as we grow older and eventually must be supplemented in everyone, but Yin deficiency goes to the root of false fire. Yang deficiency goes to the root of advancing impotence, feebleness, sluggishness and physical decline.

Where You Come In

As a practitioner of the Asian health and healing arts, you encounter leaking every day, all day long. A person with a chronic cough, pain, an injury or menstrual irregularity, are all are leaking Jing. A person engaged in a bad relationship or playing a rough sport is leaking. You yourself are leaking as a caregiver.

It is a primary job of the professional herbal practitioner to discover where and how energy is being leaked, determine why it is being leaked, to plug the leak and to re-establish energy and functional balance in that leaking organ. This is one of the primary secrets to becoming a master practitioner of the Chinese healing
arts. He or she who can discover such leaks and who knows what to do about it can be my herbalist.

The great Taoist sage Ancestor Lu said "Jing is controlled by Qi. Once Qi runs outside (leaks), Jing eventually leaks out as well. Therefore, to stabilize Jing one should guard the Qi."

**Restoring Jing**

Here is one of the greatest teachings of the Orient: Jing can be replenished and restored. It can even be increased on a constitutional level by those who know the secrets and try very hard! This is the basis of Taoist life cultivation.

First, we should attempt to stop the leaking. Second, we should provide protection from that which is causing leaking. Third, we restore Jing to fullness. Fourth, we establish a full state of radiant health ("health beyond danger") through the art of life cultivation.

We should stop the leaking by whatever means we have at our disposal. As acupuncturists and herbalists, you have a wealth of skills to stop leaking. Of course, you must focus on it in order to achieve it. It is very important that you do not just treat symptoms, though symptoms must be addressed. Remember always that most conditions have deep roots, usually reaching down to the Three Treasures themselves (Jing, Qi/Blood and Shen). Never-ever forget that emotions usually play a key role in leaking. Habits must be ascertained and looked at (openly or discretely) and changed where necessary to stop the leaking.

Modulating one’s stress level is a primary key to mitigate "leaking." Chronic and/or acute stress promotes inflammation, adrenal hyperactivity, hormone imbalance, sleep disturbance, emotional upheaval and much more. Either stopping the source of the excessive stress or taking measures to deflect and mitigate the effects of the stress are critical. Meditation, exercise, recreation, hobbies, giving and serving all tend to reduce stress. Adaptogenic herbs are among the most important health substances on earth. They promote adaptability. Schizandra, Astragalus, Rhodiola, Ginseng, Gynostemma, Goji, Eleuthero and Polyrhachis Ant are profound adaptogens that can fundamentally improve our stress response, preventing the loss of Jing to stress.

Herbs can play a profound role in stopping leaking and replenishing Jing. Both tonic and medicinal herbs are used to stop the leaking. The restoration process, however, is all about tonification.
The reason tonic herbs are central to Taoist life cultivation is because the tonic herbs restore the Three Treasures (Jing, Qi and Shen). Sun Simiao (581-682 A.D.) a prominent physician of the Tang Dynasty, consumed tonic herbs every day of his life until he died. Master Sun wrote *Important Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Pieces of Gold*, a conglomeration of the medical achievements before the 7th century and is considered a Chinese medical classic. Sun Simiao insisted on drinking Goji wine in the morning and at night, and he lived to be 101 years old. Li Shizhen, arguably the greatest herbalist in the history of China and author of the "Compendium of Medical Herbs," consumed tonic herbs every day until they died. Sun Simiao lived to be over 100 years old and remained more than lucid until the end. Xiao Peigen, the greatest herbologist of our modern era and semi-retired director of the Institute of Materia Plant Medica in Beijing is an avid user of anti-aging tonic herbs.

Should a weak person with false fire take tonic herbs? Resoundingly YES. They may simply need to restore Jing to restore much of their health. Of course, as their guide, you will be careful to provide them with the guidance they need to restore Jing, Qi and Shen safely and efficiently. The person with false fire condition would need Yin tonifying herbs and herbs that quell fire. American Ginseng, Gynostemma, Tortoise Shell and Dendrobium come to mind.

Jing deficiency is essentially a "weak (or nearly dead) battery." One could compare Jing to the battery in a car, where Qi is like the gasoline. Most people need Yin Jing tonics first: herbs like Heshouwu, Goji, Dendrobium, Ligustrum, Steamed Rehmannia, Asparagus root, Tortoise Shell and Schizandra. These Yin Jing tonics will quickly re-establish a baseline of Jing. It is like recharging their battery. If done correctly, with high quality tonic herbs from Di Tao sources, a person can be out of Jing deficiency danger in one hundred days. If the leak is resolved, Jing replenishment is generally fool-proof.

Qi tonics are necessary for both vitality and protection. Any person can start taking qi tonics at the same time they start taking Yin Jing tonics. Especially profound at restoring qi, strengthening metabolism and respiration, and boosting the immune system on all levels, are the major qi tonics: high quality Asian Ginseng, American ginseng, Reishi mushroom, Astragalus root, Atractylodes, Rhodiola (Himalayan or Russian), Eleuthero (Siberian Ginseng), Schizandra, Licorice root, Chinese Mountain Ant (Polyrhachis), Codonopsis, Dioscorea (Mountain Yam), Siberian Chaga and Ashwaganda.

Blood tonics may be very useful for those who have been leaking blood or not producing it. Of course the cause of the blood-leaking must be addressed. Great blood tonics include Dang Gui, He Shou Wu, Goji,
Steamed Rehmannia, Deer Antler and Longan fruit. There’s no question that green vegetables play a key role in blood building as well.

Since most "leaking" has an emotional and/or spiritual context, the great Shen tonics of Chinese herbalism play a key role. Reishi mushroom is king in this regard. I believe that most Asian Taoists throughout history would agree that Reishi stops leaking at the level of qi and Shen, and allows Jing to grow. Reishi mushroom should be part of every program to stop leaking and restore the Three Treasures. Once Yin Jing is partially restored, the moderate (gentle) Yang Jing tonics can be added to the restorative program. These would include Eucommia bark, the remarkably effective Yang tonic that is also a profound Yin Jing tonic herb. Eucommia bark is safe for almost anyone right from the beginning, but it is for sure safe after an initial blast of Yin tonic herbs. Deer Antler and Deer Placenta are the most powerful Jing tonics of them all. These two "herbs" are both Yin and Yang, and they restore Jing better and faster than anything else on Earth.

Last, but not least in this discussion of leaking and restoration, are the astringent "locking" herbs, adored by the Taoists for stopping and preventing leaking of Jing. King of the locking herbs is the Schizandra berry from Manchuria (not the southern variety of Schizandra commonly marketed to unknowledgeable Americans). Schizandra stops leaking throughout the body and helps all the organs to store Jing more effectively. It is particularly powerful at storing and protecting the Jing of the Kidney. Schizandra is the quintessence of Chinese herbs. It enters all 12 meridians, nurtures all five elements (thus the name "Five Flavor Fruit") and tonifies all Three Treasures. Other locking herbs may (should) be used and these include Cornus fruit, Ligustrum fruit and Astragalus seed. Great locking formulations are available that are gentle, powerful and directly stop leaking of Jing.

The Bottom Line

There are some who believe that Jing cannot be restored. This is a terrible fallacy. A serious student of the Asian health arts can find hundreds of references to the art of growing Jing in the classical literature. The greatest herbal masters in history personally and professionally practiced the art of Jing tonification for themselves and their clients. All emperors of China and Korea have consumed Jing tonics to fortify their Jing, and anti-leaking herbs are always included.

The fact is, Jing is very easy to restore. Acupuncture, Taoist yoga cannot directly restore Jing, but they can make restoration much more efficient. It is perhaps the greatest secret of the Orient that one’s life force, Jing, can be maintained, stored and even increased. Some practitioners have heard that constitutional
(prenatal) Jing cannot be replaced or restored, but there are certainly methods in the Taoist yogic system that purport to accomplish just that.

That issue notwithstanding, anyone and everyone can dramatically reduce or stop leaking their Jing through conscious behavior, thought, meditation and lifestyle adjustments. Herbs and tonic foods supplement Jing. With some focus, one can restore Jing and regain their life.

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