

This is an attempt to put into words my interpretation of the information presented to me from TCM classic texts given to us in this class, and see how the information is demonstrated to me through the action of a medical case.

The time is summer 1981. I was at the time a mother of a 13 year-old son, a 5 year-old daughter, and an active midwife. This case (although in those days I didn't label it "case") came to me when I was just weeks from discovering that a class in san Francisco would give me a license to practice an ancient medicine that used needles and herbs as the vehicle to wellness, and considered the spirit as important as the physical.

A telephone call came on a warm afternoon, which I remember vividly. I had been reading a story to my daughter, and with this call I was asked if I was available to take on a birth in the fall. I learned that day that this was a 19 year-old woman experiencing her second pregnancy and presently a full time student in college. Her first pregnancy ended up in a therapeutic abortion. This pregnancy was half over, and she was totally healthy, having received minimal but thorough pre-natal care including all necessary lab work. She was preparing for a home birth and seemed to be very well informed about pregnancy and birth. I shall call her Ganna Fay. On that afternoon Ganna and I made an appointment for a few days from that one.

When Ganna entered my home, I saw a tall, lithe, blond-blue-eyed beauty who seemed to have the personal presence of one much older. She had a beautiful posture, standing every single bit of her 5'11". I was struck with her eyes, as they had the particular lightness that made them look as if I could see right through them and into her soul. There was great depth there, and I knew I was in for an interesting possible relationship.

Ganna was totally healthy, eating a conscientious diet including all food groups, complete with pre-natal vitamins and herbs. She was physically and mentally active and had been her entire life. Her movement was full of grace and she moved up and down easily, making me see an interesting sense of the vertical in her. It didn't take long for me to see she was a soldier of sorts, and on a mission.

Ganna's physical history was minimal until her first pregnancy. At that time she was living with her parents in India and going to an American school. She fell in love with a young man and they conceived a child. When Ganna told her parents, they were adamant about her terminating the pregnancy. While living in India and being influenced by the spiritual aspect of life, Ganna had chosen to become a Buddhist and thus believed that an abortion was the absolute last thing she would do. But Ganna was 14 and her parents were her parents. Before she knew it, she was on her way to the doctor's for a therapeutic abortion, which she fought as best she could till the bitter end. When it was over, Ganna severed her emotional relationship with her parents and turned inward, dealing with her feelings of betrayal of trust, grief, and rage. At that time she consciously went to war with her parents, angrily waiting out the four years she had left in their care. She had a sister, but refused to disclose any feelings with her, either. And so, Ganna stood alone.

When I met Ganna, she was five years past this event, but as she told me about it, it seemed as real and alive as it had been all those years ago. What I witnessed in her was a resolve that physically showed in her eyes, jaw, and mouth, all with an upright posture that reminded me of a black African.

Within the first few months following Ganna's forced abortion she began to have lower abdominal pain with each ovulation and menstruation. The pain was insidious at first, and only bothered her slightly, but within the year the pain became quite unbearable and she needed medication to get through life on the days surrounding her menstruation. Her interpretation of why the pain was there is that she broke a spiritual law in committing a sin against life and herself. By the end of the first year following her abortion she felt that until she could rectify the energy of ending a life, by instead giving one, she would not resolve her pain. She used the word Karma that day, telling me that the action of giving life was going to clear hers. She knew she was in no position to raise a child herself, nor was her boyfriend, but that until she could go through a pregnancy and give life, and then give away that life, she would suffer the pain that had begun five years ago. So with the consent of her boyfriend, she consciously conceived and was as happy as any young woman I had worked with about her pregnancy. She treasured the conception and the pregnancy, and was doing all she could to create not only a child, but a healthy and strong one, physically

and mentally. She was also looking for parents, and was contemplating a set of them whom she had recently met, but she felt unsupported by them. She had asked them to buy her vitamins and herbs, as she was a full time student and living on her own with little money. The herbs and vitamins were luxuries that were financially burdensome, and so if monies were tight, they were the first to be set aside. The perspective parents thought about this and decided that Ganna should buy her own vitamins. Needless to say, this didn't make Ganna feel too generous in giving a baby to these people, so she asked me if I knew of anyone interested in a direct adoption. Of course I did.

As the months passed and I worked with Ganna, I came to know a lovely young woman. She was in her junior year of university with a 4 point GPA. She had a love for beauty and life, and a creative and bright mind to accompany her through hers. She met the perspective parents that I had contacted, and they were more than generous to her. Within a month, a commitment was made between them. Since I had never done a direct-adopt birth, I called one of my sister midwives who had recently done one and asked her what she learned relative to the physical, psychological, and emotional difficulties surrounding it. The most important thing I remember learning that day (long before the internet) was that if Ganna was crystal clear about adoption at the time of delivery, to insist that she not nurse the baby after she birthed, as that could deeply affect the pain of separation.

Now I shall take you straight to the birth. The day was a glorious sunny one and Ganna had begun rhythmical contractions the night before. When I arrived in the early morning hours with my assistant midwife Cybele, a labor pattern was clearly in action, and Ganna was quite excited and looking forward to labor and being at the end of this five year quest. I remember the bright sparkle of her eyes as I confirmed that yes, she was in a beautiful labor pattern and that it looked the baby would be born that day.

Labor progressed well. Ganna was by herself most of the time, although her boyfriend briefly came in and out of the apartment a few times as the day passed. The adoptive parents who lived just blocks away were to be called around an hour before the predicted time of delivery. Since my apprentice was a new one, I called another senior midwife to come the last hour, as it is important for two seasoned people to be at a home birth in case

of emergency. This midwife's name was Genesis. It is important to say about Genesis that I called her another name, Walk-on-the-Water woman, because she often said and did just the right magical thing resulting in positive outcomes. She arrived about an hour before the delivery, along with the adoptive parents, as we had planned.

Ganna's labor progressed quickly and efficiently, with fetal heart tones showing us that the baby withstood labor well. When Genesis arrived, she looked over my notes and asked if the waters had ruptured, as I had not mentioned this in them. I replied no, they remained intact.

As the delivery began, there was a palpable vibration in the room that was different from the hours preceding. At this time the adoptive parents were present, respectful, and their anticipation and excitement was building, just as any new parents awaiting the birth of their baby. Ganna, on the other hand had taken a sudden behavioral turn. The absolute lightness of her telling eyes had begun to darken, and the lithe vertical body that had gracefully gone through labor thus far began to stiffen and seem to be laying down armor. I remember her hands and her mouth go from being open to clenching, and I worked with her to return to her former openness, as those signs are very indicative of how a delivery will go. Ganna tried, but instead she continued to tighten. I asked her if she wanted privacy in the delivery and if so the adoptive parents could retire to the living room, but Ganna declined, she wanted them there for the birth. The force of the baby was good, and soon we had a head to fully gaze upon. Ganna looked at the face of her baby and what I saw was a total overwhelm and a physical sudden paralysis, while just a few feet from her the adoptive parents stared in excitement and anticipation. Their breaths were quickening, Ganna's had slowed down.

Normally after the birth of the head and before the birth of the shoulders the baby turns a 45-degree angle so that the shoulders can birth through the largest diameter of the maternal pelvis. The following contraction usually then produces the shoulders and often times the rest of the baby. This did not happen here. I then instructed Ganna to change her physical position to hands and knees and to push with all her might on the following contraction.

Despite these changes, the following contraction also did not produce the rotation of the baby or birth of the shoulders. With this, I had Ganna change her position to one of full gravity, and went inside Ganna to assist the baby with the dance of birth. Ganna was shut down like a gate, with every vaginal and perineal muscle fully engaged. This was full physical obstruction, and I remember thinking that there were two mothers awaiting this child, and an obstruction such as this might challenge either of them getting a baby to hold in the following few minutes. At that point Genesis did her magical thing and said “what is this child’s name going to be? I think the baby needs to be called by name outloud”. Ganna replied that the adoptive parents were the ones who would name the child, so she looked to them for the name. The adoptive mother replied “Jess, Jess Jones”. With the name now in the room, and my hands flexing the baby’s shoulders, Ganna shouted from the depths of her body “get out”. With that piercing shout, Jess was born. Despite his slow delivery, he had excellent apgars and cried almost immediately. I handed him to Ganna, who held him for a few minutes before the next several contractions, which produced the placenta. Normal cutting of the cord and wrapping the baby followed, and while doing this, I realized that this child was born without any waters at all, as the bed was totally dry with the exception of a small amount of blood. Later that day I went over Ganna’s early labor with a fine tooth comb, because I was sure there had to be a breaking of the waters at some point before arrived that morning. According to Ganna, there was none. I had long since learned that there is no such thing as a “dry birth”. But this seemed to be.

Once Jess was examined and then wrapped in a blanket, all of us attending held him beside Ganna, including both adoptive parents. After some time they returned Jess to Ganna saying that they felt a closure between Ganna and the baby had not yet taken place, nor had she actually “given” him to them. Ganna confirmed that. The adoptive parents respectfully left the room and I had a talk with Ganna, asking her if she was having second thoughts regarding the adoption. She assured me that she was not, but that she needed to spend a little time with the baby before she let him go. We three midwives did normal post partum clean up, assisted Ganna in the shower, prepared a bottle for the baby, food for Ganna, and began the work of stopping the onset of lactation.

Normally, with the delivery of the afterbirth, the fundus of the uterus falls into the lower abdomen, as a process of involution takes place to shrink the uterus so that the vessels that fed the placenta for the past ten months shut down and the mother does not bleed. This process is enhanced by the hormone oxytocin, which is released in the actions of birth and then again in lactation and bonding. Science tells us that in these very specific early post hours for both the mother and baby, that the amounts of oxytocin that course through the blood are the highest than at any other time in life. For Ganna lactation didn't take place, not was she demonstrating normal bonding with Jess. These two significant differences were the reason I thought the uterus did not feel tight or low enough in the abdomen to confirm the clamping down of the vessels, and my lack of experience in a woman not following nature's course was woven into that decision. An abdominal massage was done to aid the contraction of the uterus and was taught to Ganna to do for five or ten minutes hourly, with the hopes that the uterus would fully clamp down. A few hours after the delivery, I left along with Cybele and Genesis, and was on call should anything happen where one might need my attendance. As I left the house, Ganna was sitting as upright as ever, looking at Jess who lay on her lap, at least 2 feet below the level of her eyes, her fingers touched Jess, but caresses or skin to skin holding were not taking place. Her boyfriend had left, as Ganna asked him to do, and the adoptive parents were to spend the night in the living room awaiting the gift of their son, as soon as Ganna was ready to let him go.

The following morning I arrived to find Ganna's mother and sister attending the wait. Both of them were against Ganna releasing this child, as Ganna's mother was this time very desirous of becoming a grandparent, and the sister of becoming an auntie. They were in the kitchen, the boyfriend was outside in the garden, and the adoptive parents were in the living room. Everyone was crying and everywhere there were baskets filled with tissues of tears. I remember saying, "here are the waters".

The physical post partum was typical and all was well with the exception of the fundal height, which still remained a bit high and never felt tight and hard, as is usual. The breasts were beginning to swell, but herbs to stop lactation were in full use. Ganna was still resolved that the baby would go to the adoptive parents sometime that day. She had no

idea how long she needed to see the child before letting him completely go. She told me to trust her and her timing, as she was very near the act of finally clearing her karma. I asked her if her mother's and sister's combined wishes for her to keep the baby were making it harder for her to let him go. She replied that she didn't give a damn about their wishes, and that it was their turn to feel loss.

The following day I returned to the exact same scene as I had left the day before. Baskets of tissues everywhere, and they were now overflowing. When I saw Ganna, her breasts had already begun to soften from the treatment for stopping lactation. I asked her when she was going to give Jess to the adoptive parents, as they were losing faith that she was actually going to do that. She replied to me that she was going to give Jess to them, and that she didn't know when she would be ready. In witnessing Ganna while she held Jess, there was still too big a physical distance between them, even when feeding him the bottle. I asked Ganna to come into the bathroom with Cybele and me, and when we got in there, I shut the door for complete privacy. We had a talk and I told her it was time to make the decision, as a paralysis of indecision had permeated the air, and that the baby needed to be mothered by someone. I reminded her that the adoptive parents were completely ready to embrace him fully, as he needed. The three of us sat in the bathroom, with Ganna sitting on the toilet as on a throne, upright as ever, with Jess on her lap. I told her that until she made a final decision to either keep the baby or give him away, and I fully supported her either way, we would not leave the bathroom. After half an hour or so, Ganna said she was ready and asked Cybele to summon everyone in the bathroom. Within minutes the entire group of us were in there, crowding next to each other, while the adoptive mother was standing directly in front of Ganna. With everyone assembled and awaiting Ganna's request of our presences, Ganna asked the adoptive mother if she wanted Jess. The reply was "yes, yes". Then Ganna said for her to take off all of her clothes. There were a few minutes of absolute stillness and silence. Then Ganna repeated herself and the adoptive mother slowly unbuttoned her blouse, took it off and let it fall on the floor. Then she stopped. Ganna then nodded to the pants she was wearing. Slowly the adoptive mother slipped out of her shoes and pants and stood barefoot in her underwear. Ganna said "all of it", and the mother timidly unhooked her bra and slipped out of her underwear, standing naked before us all.

With this task done, Ganna instructed her to turn around and spread her legs, which she did slowly and with trepidation and embarrassment. One could have heard a pin drop during those moments. As the adoptive mother stood with her back to Ganna and opened her legs, Ganna with Jess in her arms got up off the toilet, squatted down, and passed Jess through the adoptive mother's legs. She then regained her upright stance with empty hands pointing toward the floor. The adoptive mother was crying in ecstasy as she held Jess tight to her naked body. Ganna then instructed the adoptive parents to take a bath with Jess and while all three of them were nude, to hold and feel him and fall in love. With those words, she walked out of the room. The rest of us followed and I shut the door to give the bonding family privacy in this awkward situation and in the final receiving of their son. Back in the birth room, Ganna was crystal clear and happy, as she was done with the long vigil of clearing herself from an action that was done to her when she was unable to do anything about it.

The following day Ganna was dressed for life again, feeling fine, with no problem with her breasts, and she looked like she had never been pregnant. Mysteriously, the fundal height of her uterus curiously remained high, despite the hourly massage and the herbs. All other signs for post partum were fine. When we talked at length that day, Ganna told me that she knew she would no longer have abdominal pain with her menses, and that the resolve she felt with her karma had been cleared. She also told me that the ritual of adoption in India was what she did yesterday, and that she knew all along she would do that, but that it wasn't going to happen until she was fully ready to let go. There was no regret and no indecision.

Because of the unusual circumstances of this birth, Ganna did not remain at home and recover energetically, physically, and emotionally as most women do. She felt that to go back to school and resume her leading role in the college play was exactly what she needed. During the weekend performances that she was home surrounding her birth, an understudy took her role, but now was the last weekend of the performance and she was clearly going to be there and give it her all.



In the middle of the night between Sunday and Monday, I received a phone call. This was not unusual for a midwife, and so I answered it as if it was a daytime call. On the other end of the phone was someone who was crying and breathing so heavily that I only knew it was the voice of a woman, but other than that, I did not know who was on the line. I began to work with the heaving sighs, and within another minute or two recognized the voice as Ganna's. A red flag went up and I asked her if she had changed her mind about the adoption. No, she replied, I am crystal clear in my decision. And then, another deep lamenting cry. That Sunday night was the last performance of the college play, and a stage party was set up for the entire crew after the final curtain. At the party, people were celebrating by drinking and dancing. Ganna was happy to be back in her life, partying and dancing with someone, when she spun around and out of her vagina came a gallon of water, flooding her feet and wetting her dancing skirt. She called me within minutes. We talked for some time while she calmed down, the intermittent crying was involuntary and immediate when it came, and she received the feelings and let them happen. She expressed between her sobs that she just needed someone who could be with her in this time of huge transition. She felt that the war she waged for five years, as well as the care she gave her child for the last one was truly over. She was feeling both loss and relief, but knew in her heart and mind that she had done the right thing. She said that Jess was the greatest treasure she ever had, and that her ability to follow her decision of long ago and give two desiring parents the gift of a child was for her the most important action of her life thus far, and that in time it might prove to be the greatest one in her entire life.

Six months later, the adoption went through, and Ganna was fully back into her life and doing well. All the pain of her ovulation and menses had stopped, which to her was confirmation of her deep convictions and personal values.

Now, you fellow classmates must be wondering why I have chosen to tell a dramatic obstetrical story that may seem as if it has little or no meaning to anything that we have been studying, and in fact is filled with words like fundus and involution, while covering information relevant to the science and mechanics of birth. Please let me invite you into my mind at this time, and give you an example of how I interpret the information we are learning. For me, this personal history brings our lessons to life. Let me show you how.

In reading and contemplating my notes from Elisabeth, while also weaving the concepts and attributes of any zang organ, I was initially struck how Ganna's story was steeped in so many aspects of liver. First of all, in learning that liver has the ability to go far away, or to be visionary, I was struck at how Ganna was able at 14 years of age to make a plan so that when she came of age and was able to do life without her parent's control, she would fulfill her plan and "clear her karma". I was struck also with the Chinese characters and translations that were given regarding liver 肝, and saw so many of them as characteristic of Ganna and the journey she went through while I knew her: bravery, courage/HAN 悍, planning and contemplation/LU 慮, anger/NU 怒, and the ability to act toward the future/JIANG 將. That Ganna engaged in a war with her parents, remaining in anger and opposition/NU 怒 to them for four full years before going forward with her plan was to me this aspect of JIANG 將. The assessment of her circumstances, which produced her plan/MOU LU 謀慮 was clearly present.

Also, associated with liver is wood signifying the ability to give life/Sheng 生. In Su Wen chapter 2, liver is known to exert the will for life as well as letting live and not killing, or giving rather than taking away. Liver is the drive of life/QING, and Ganna was driven to right a wrong and clear herself from her part in that.

As Ganna cultivated the life within her, once pregnant, she treasured her essences—another aspect of liver. In this case, the treasured essences translated into a growing child. The liver keeps the essences, but not forever, and Ganna knew that she would cultivate these essences within her for the right time--when she had the ability to control her own life, and that when it was time, not only would she let go as all women do in birth, but she would ultimately and completely let go. In the actual delivery of Jesse, a full obstruction/YU 鬱 took place, and had all of us not worked to get that child born, there could have been a possible demise, as the blockage/obstruction was so great. The final act of shouting/HU 呼 at the delivery was the key that released the obstruction from the crises taking place in her body.

From the first moment I saw Ganna till the last, her posture was upright/Zhi 直. Her stance the day I met her seemed to be one of a soldier, with a shield/Gan 干 as her stance, which I came to see as opposition. Her voice was able to open up and shoot out or send forth/Fa 發 at the delivery, and again, four days later when she commanded the ritual of adoption and then said a final goodbye. She acted as a general/JIANG 將 as she sat on the toilet and commanded the adoptive mother to partake in a ceremony that she had known she would implement if she were ever able to fulfill her plan. And we, her midwives and boyfriend, acted as her chariot/JUN 軍 which gave her the support she needed to move quickly with her decision and walk out the door and out of Jess' life forever; no small feat. Her son could not be held onto, and so she had to ultimately let go/XIE 泄. That ability to come to complete clarity/QING 清 and know that this action of adoption was the right thing to do is also partly indicative of liver.

Now I want to briefly move to Ganna's post partum and look at the organ, Lung 肺. I am not sure how to interpret some of what I learned about the lung relative to Ganna's holding her amniotic fluids for the many days she held it. What I learned is that the lung has a double function of 1. controlling Qi as well as liquids, and 2. expansion and dissemination. Lung also has the yin/yang rhythm of respiration, which is Qi 氣, and therefore Lung is said to be the Master of Qi. This Lung Qi circulates the fluids of the body and regulates the waters, descending them as needed. In this birth, the liquids and the Qi to hold them were controlled in an unnatural way for an extraordinary amount of time, whereas in a normal labor, these specific waters come with birth or before. Obstetrical books will say this phenomenon is impossible, and that there is no such thing as a dry birth, but anyone studying the natural world will know that anything in nature is possible. The second function of the lung is expansion and dissemination XUAN 宣. I see these functions in Ganna's journey by the coming to a full term pregnancy, birthing, and then, letting go.

Elisabeth taught me that the metal element/lung has an ability to obey and change, and after reaching its utmost expansion, it also has the ability to stop. For a few days I wondered if Ganna would change her mind, but instead she chose to follow (obey) her plan,

and knew when it was time to stop, let this treasured child go, and get on with her life. She, however, held down her emotions of loss, and restrained/SHOU 收 the natural feelings of motherhood that flooded her body through the intense physiological, hormonal, and emotional changes that are inherent in birth. While she was in this altered post partum space that night at the stage crew party, and with the relaxation of a few drinks, she twirled around while dancing, loosening her hold on her womb, and her ability to continue blocking those waters from a final release was finally over. With that, the Qi of her chest (including her liver Qi) then brought out the unrestrained sounds of intense feelings; loss, grief, overwhelm/YOU 憂 and sadness/BEI 悲, while she sobbed/KU 哭 that night on the phone. It was at this time that all Ganna's final waters were shed, as her tears and nasal mucous were heard with the sounds of her cries. And lastly regarding lung and the metal element is Ganna's resolve to get rid of her karma and clear it/SU 素 so that she could once again be pure in the eyes of her belief system.

The last and final organ I see played out in this story is that of the heart 心, or heartmind. The heart is an open receptacle to that which comes from the heavens, and what comes from the heavens is spirit. Spirit contains thoughts, emotions, consciousness, and knowledge. The heart unifies and integrates all of these complexities, and sees them ultimately as one's own story i.e. "my life". The heart represents the root of life/BEN 本, which is directly connected to spirit SHEN 神. In Ganna's immediate post partum, she was fully open, waiting for the time and message that her journey had come to an end. She took in all the feelings and emotions that were surrounding her in her environment, and combined them with not only her own complex emotions but with the extraordinary physiological transformations/BIAN 變 that had taken place. At this time, a cosmological change had taken place in her/YI 意.

At the completion of this experience Ganna fulfilled her destiny by being true to her nature/XING 性, which gave meaning to her life and the experiences she had in it thus far. The character XING is often seen along with passion and emotion/QING 情. By Ganna recognizing and fulfilling her nature, she achieved her destiny (MING 命), XING/QING. The

heart being fire is held in the highest position of the five elements. It is sovereign. Ganna intuitively knew that she had to follow what was in her heart and if she didn't, she would have continued to experience disturbed reproductive cycles. So she connected with her physiology/body and her emotions/mind, and took control of her life. In the final days of my work with Ganna, I could see joy/LE 樂 in her eyes once again, witnessing a great transformation/Da Hua 大化 in her spirit, knowing that she was in harmony with nature, her beliefs, and her destiny.

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