

Qi Flow ... Meridians and Connective Tissue

Energy, as we defined it in Western terms, is the ability to do work. In Eastern terms, energy is that which provides breath and life. That which provides life is pretty important. How to nurture and enhance this life giving energy is worthy of study and practice.

In India, yogis called this energy *prana* and its pathways *nadis*; in China, the Taoists called it *qi* (pronounced chee) and founded the science of acupuncture, which describes the flow of qi through pathways called meridians. The exercises of tai chi chuan and qi gong were developed to harmonize this qi flow; the Indian yogis developed their system of bodily postures to do the same.

The six meridians that begin or end in the lower body are of most interest to Yin Yoga practitioners. These are the lines affected the most by the yin asanas. They are the Liver, Gall Bladder, Kidney, Urinary Bladder, Spleen, and Stomach meridians. The six upper body meridians are the Heart, Small Intestine, Large Intestine, Lung, Pericardium, and San Jiao. The meridians themselves do not begin or end on the outside of the body, but originate deep within the organs and vital energetic centers (Chakras) of the body.

Our energy flows through all tissues, bones and moistens our joints. As such, our energy flows through our connective tissue, the material inside our body that supports many of its parts, the "cellular glue" that gives your tissues their shape and helps keep them strong. Connective tissue makes up a variety of physical structures, including tendons and the connective framework of fibers in muscles, capsules and ligaments around joints, cartilage, bone, adipose tissue, blood, and lymphatic tissue. If someone has deficient chi a weakness or lack of vibrancy results. If someone has stagnant chi that means the energy is flowing in a distorted pattern. If someone has healthy chi, the energy is stable, strong and moves with ease throughout the body.

Western medicine has been skeptical about meridians, the traditional energy maps of acupuncture, tai chi, and yoga, since no one had ever found physical visual evidence of nadis and meridians. But in recent years researchers, led by Dr. Hiroshi Motoyama in Japan and Dr. James Oschman in the US, have explored the possibility that the connective tissue running throughout the body provides pathways for the energy flows described by the ancients. Dr. Hiroshi Motoyama created a diagnostic electroacupuncture device called the AMI (short for Apparatus for Measuring the Functions of the Meridians and Corresponding Internal Organ). The AMI accurately target energy deficiencies and excesses. Because of its usefulness, the Japanese government has adopted it for official medical screenings.

There are three ways that yin yoga helps this flow of energy to create healthy chi flow. First, as we relax our habitually tightened muscles, yin yoga places the body in a yoga pose for a longer amount of time to pull on and pressurize the tissues. This coaxes chi and blood into these sites making them stronger and better lubricated. Second, lengthening and deepening the breath (pranayama) oxygenates the blood while increasing the flow of prana throughout the body. Third, mindfulness practices in yin practice, allows chi to flow smoothly. Where the attention goes, the chi follows." Quieting the mind allows the chi flow to be uninhibited as it travels through the body, heart and mind.

The Upper Body Meridians

There are six meridians that begin or end in the fingers of the hands. They all pass through the shoulder or armpit. The Yin Yoga practice does not often target these lines. [1]The six upper body meridians are the Heart, Small Intestine, Large Intestine, Lung, Pericardium, and San Jiao.

The Heart Meridian

The three branches of the Heart meridian begin in the heart. One branch flows downward through the diaphragm to meet the small intestines. Another rises up alongside the throat and ends in the lower eye. The third runs across the chest, through the lungs, and comes out through the armpit. It flows along the midline of the inside upper arm, through the inner elbow, along the midline of the inner lower arm, until it crosses the wrist and palm, before ending in the inside tip of the little finger where it connects to the Small Intestine meridian.

Disorders of the heart and chest such as palpitations, pain, insomnia, night sweats, and mental problems may signal problems with the Heart meridian.



The Small Intestine Meridian

Starting where the Heart meridian ends, the Small Intestine meridian begins at the outer tip of the little finger. It runs along the back edge of the hand, through the wrist, upward along the outer forearm and upper arm, to the shoulder. After circling the back of the shoulder, it meets the Governor Vessel meridian. Here it branches, with one branch going inside the body and descending through the heart, diaphragm, and stomach before ending in the small intestine. Another branch ascends along the side of the neck to the cheek and outer corner of the eye from where it then goes to the ear. Another small branch leaves the cheek to run to the inner eye where it meets the Urinary Bladder meridian.

Disharmony in the Small Intestine meridian may be indicated by ear, eye, or stomach problems such as

deafness, pain in the lower abdomen, or pain in the shoulders or neck.

The Lung Meridian

The Lung meridian begins inside the belly just above the navel, and drops down to the large intestines. From here it comes back up through the diaphragm and connects to the stomach. It ascends through the lungs and follows the throat before coming to the front surface of the shoulder from under the clavicle. From here it runs along the outer, thumb side (medial/radial) of the upper arm and the front (anterior) of the lower arm. It crosses the wrist and ends at the outer tip of the thumb. A small branch goes from the wrist to the tip of the index finger, where it connects to the Large Intestine meridian.

Respiratory problems like coughs, asthma, and chest pains may signify Lung meridian dysfunction. Extreme and persistent sadness and grief may also indicate problems here.



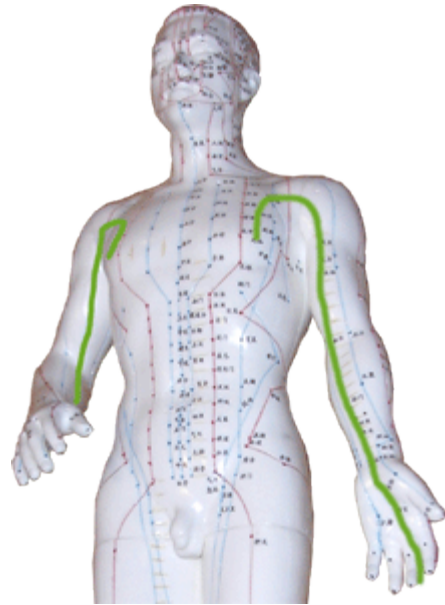
The Large Intestine Meridian

Beginning at the tip of the index finger, the Large Intestine meridian runs between the thumb and forefinger and along the outside (lateral side) of the arm. It comes over the outside top of the shoulder and along the back of the shoulder blades to the spine. Here it branches, with one branch descending through the lungs, diaphragm, and the large intestines. The second branch ascends along the neck and the lower cheek, and enters the lower gum, circling the lower teeth. On the outside, this line also circles the upper lips, crosses under the nose and rises up to join the Stomach meridian.

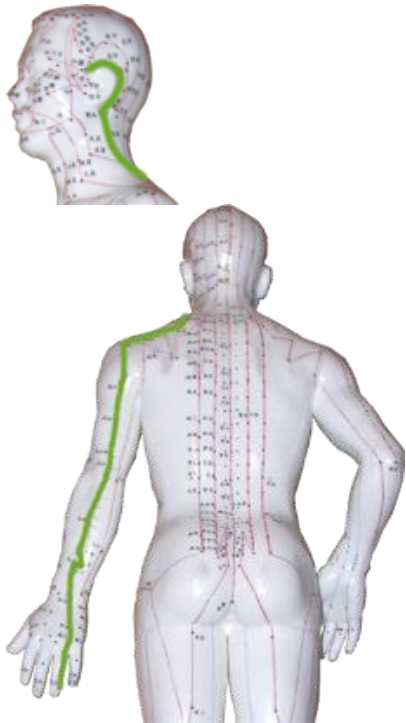
Problems in the mouth, teeth, nose, and throat such as toothaches and sore throats, as well as problems with the neck and shoulders, may indicate disharmony of the Large Intestine meridian.

The Pericardium Meridian

The pericardium covers the heart and is considered in Chinese medicine to be an organ function of its own. The Pericardium meridian begins in the chest and connects to the pericardium. From here it moves down the chest, connecting the three sections of the San Jiao meridian. Another branch moves horizontally across the chest, coming to the surface of the ribs, moves up and around the armpit and down the front of the bicep and forearm to the palm, and ends at the tip of the middle finger. A small branch leads from the palm to the tip of the ring finger where it connects to the San Jiao meridian.



Pain in the heart area, poor circulation, some stomach problems, and mental problems may indicate disharmony of the Pericardium meridian.



The San Jiao Meridian

The San Jiao meridian is often called the "Triple Burner" or "Triple Energizer." It begins in the ring finger where the Pericardium meridian ends. It runs over the back of the hand, the wrist, and lower arm. It passes the outer point of the elbow and the back (lateral) of the upper arm to the back (posterior) shoulder. From here it comes over the shoulder to the front of the body and enters the chest beneath the sternum. Here it branches, with the main branch running to the pericardium and continuing down through the diaphragm to the three burners: upper, middle and lower. The second branch ascends along the side of the neck, circles the back of the ear and then circles the side of the face. Another small branch emerges from the back of the ear and connects to the Gall Bladder meridian at the outer corner of the eye.

Problems associated with the San Jiao meridian may occur in the side of the face, neck, or throat, or in the abdomen. Examples could include deafness, ringing in the ears, bloating, and urinary difficulties.

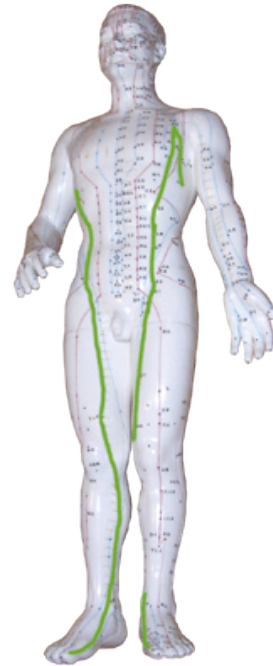
The Lower Body Meridians

The six meridians that begin or end in the lower body are of most interest to Yin Yoga practitioners. These are the lines affected the most by the yin asanas. They are the Spleen, Liver, Gall Bladder, Kidney, Urinary Bladder, and Stomach meridians.

The Spleen Meridian

Starting at the inside of the big toe, the Spleen meridian runs along the inside of the foot, then turns and runs up the inside of the ankle and the shin. It runs just in front of the Liver meridian and enters the abdominal cavity, just above the pubic bone. It connects to the spleen and then the stomach, where it branches. The main branch comes to the surface and runs up the chest to the throat where it again enters the body, going to the root of the tongue, where it spreads out. The second branch remains internal and reaches the heart, connecting to the Heart meridian.

Indications of Spleen disharmony include stomach problems, flatulence, vomiting, and bloating. Unreasonable worry may also arise.



The Liver Meridian

The Liver meridian begins at the inside of the nail of the big toe and runs along the top of the foot. It climbs the front of the ankle and then runs up the inside (medial) part of the leg (running just beneath the Spleen meridian) until it reaches the pubic area. From here it curves around the external genitalia and goes into the lower abdomen [1] where it enters into the liver and the gall bladder. Rising higher, it branches in several directions, with one branch connecting to the Lung meridian. Rising still higher, the Liver meridian follows the throat and connects with the eyes before branching again. One branch reaches down across the cheeks and circles the lips, while a higher branch goes across the forehead to the crown where it links with the Governor Vessel meridian.

Lower back pain, abdominal pain, or mental disturbances may be a sign of disharmony of the Liver. Frequent or unreasonable anger or irritation may also be a sign of dysfunction here.



The Gall Bladder Meridian



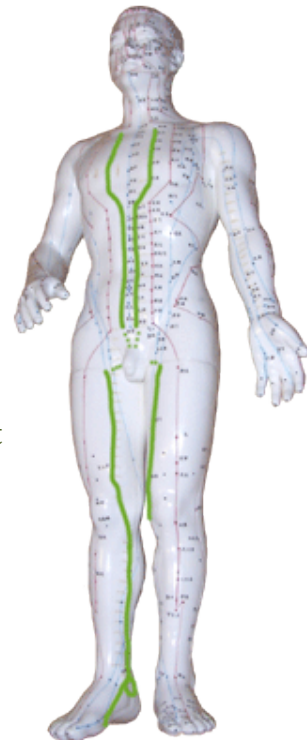
The Gall Bladder meridian begins at the outer corner of the eye (close to the Liver meridian, which passes through the center of the eye) and immediately branches into two lines. A main branch remains on the surface and winds back and forth across the side of the head and above the ear, before turning downward along the side of the neck. After following the top of the shoulder, it passes under the arm and zigzags along the side of the ribs to the hips. The other branch goes inside the cheek and descends to the liver and gall bladder. From there it descends farther and emerges in time to rejoin the first branch at the front of the hip. The single line then descends, running along the outside (lateral) thigh and knee until it reaches the ankle. It runs across the top of the foot until it reaches the fourth toe; however, another branch leaves at the ankle to run across the top of the foot and join the Liver meridian at the big toe.

Headache, blurred vision, and pains along the side of the body including the eyes, ears, and throat may be an indication of problems with the Gall Bladder meridian.

The Kidney Meridian

The Kidney meridian begins at the outside of the little toe and immediately goes under the sole of the foot. It follows the arch, makes a circle around the inner ankle and then it runs through the heel, and comes up the inmost (medial) side of the leg (just beneath the Liver meridian) and into the tailbone. It follows the spine to the kidney and then branches. One branch heads to the Urinary Bladder, where it comes back to the surface of the abdomen and up the chest, ending at the clavicle. The other branch touches the liver and diaphragm and moves up through the lungs and throat until it ends beside the root of the tongue.

Disharmony of the Kidney meridian is suggested by gynecological problems, genital disorders, and problems in the kidneys, lungs, and throat. Examples may include impotence, frequent urination, and weakness in the lower limbs. Emotional problems may also occur related to anxiety and fear.





The Urinary Bladder Meridian

Like the Gall Bladder meridian, the Urinary Bladder meridian also begins at the eye. The Urinary Bladder line starts at the inner eye and then goes up, across the forehead, to the crown. One branch splits here, enters the brain, and then reemerges at the scapula and runs just inside the line of the scapula down the spine to the buttocks, where it reenters the body and runs to the urinary bladder and the kidney. The second branch from the crown flows down the back of the neck and shoulder and runs just outside and parallel to the first branch. This branch continues down the back of the buttocks and legs, circles the outer ankle, runs along the outer edge of the foot, and ends in the small toe where the Kidney meridian begins. Dr. Motoyama believes that the ida and pingala nadis correspond to the Urinary Bladder meridians, because they run along either side of the spine.

Signs of disharmony in the Urinary Bladder may include backaches, headaches, an inability to urinate, mental problems, and disease of the lower limbs.

The Stomach



Beginning at the side of the nose, the Stomach meridian rises to the corner of the eye (where it connects to the Urinary Bladder meridian) before descending along the side of the nose, to enter the upper gum, and follow the outer lips to the lower jaw, toward the joint of the jaw. It branches here with one branch ascending along the front of the ear to the forehead. The other branch descends through the body to the diaphragm, and runs to the stomach and spleen. A third branch emerges from the lower jaw and runs across the outside of the body, crossing the chest and belly, until it terminates in the groin.

The line that runs through the stomach reconnects with this third branch and runs downward along the front of the leg, reaching the top of the foot. Here it splits again, with the main branch ending in the outside (lateral) tip of the second toe. The other branch reaches the inner (medial) side of the big toe where it meets the Spleen meridian. Just below the knee an additional branch splits off and runs to the lateral side of the third toe.

Like the Spleen meridian, problems with the Stomach meridian may be indicated by abdominal problems such as bloating, vomiting, pain in any of the areas the meridian passes through (mouth, nose, teeth, etc.), as well as mental problems.

Many of US, throughout our lives have enjoyed Yang activity such as yang yoga and regular yang exercises like weight training, biking and running. Yang Yang exercise is always accompanied by compression of the joints. Compression is good for joints and stimulates the bones to healthy growth. However, yang exercise doesn't allow the full range of motion. Yang exercise develops strong muscles and bones but can leave the joints contracted and stiff resulting in a lack of blood, elimination of toxins and range of motion.

Conversely, Yin yoga safely, even pleasantly develops the full range of motion of a joint. This type of practice leaves the practitioner feeling relaxed, light and free. A Yin sequence of long-held poses anywhere from 3-5 minutes, nurtures our flow of Chi, the meridian and organ systems.

In almost every moment, we have opportunity to experience the importance of balance, whether it is experienced through the simple workings of a thermostat in our home, the more complex working of our body's homeostatic mechanisms. In part, a balance of Yin and Yang Yoga assists in creating balance in our life.

Achieving BALANCE is a key ingredient in living a physically, emotionally, relationally and spiritually healthy, empowered and fulfilling life. Balance creates empowerment, a position each of us has been given the opportunity to experience and is capable of.



With a BS in Nutrition and Human Development, Master Degree in Psychology; and as a Holistic Life and Sports Coach and Consultant, Certified Yin Yoga Instructor, 8-time Marathon finisher, avid cross-trained athlete, Life Coach, Realtor and a Mother of 2 great sons, one an International, Gold Medal Gymnast, I am a very grateful and inspired woman who feels it is my life's work to assist others in living their best life.

It is my hopes that my writings and work together will offer reinforcement to our wonderful experience together of offering nourishment, enlightenment and a resulting balance to each of us and our experience of life bringing us a sense of purpose, joy & gratitude.

Please feel free to contact me at Lorraine@AttainYourVision.com or call me at 609-502-0880.

Thank you for this opportunity. Namaste, *Lorraine*