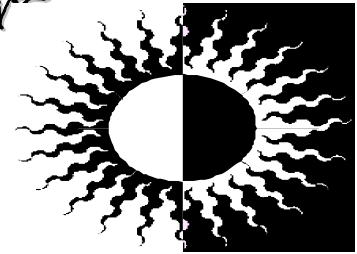


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The Twelve Primary Qi Channels

by Yang, Jwing-Ming



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In this chapter we will briefly review the twelve primary Qi channels along with the eight extraordinary meridians. You should also know the organ's Yin and Yang. In our body, there are six Yang organs and six Yin organs. Each Yang organ is associated with a Yin organ by a special Yin/Yang relationship.

Paired Yin and Yang organs belong to the same phase in the Five Phases. Their channels are sequential to each other in the circulation of Qi, their functions are closely related, and disease in one usually affects the other. In Chinese medicine, the channel corresponding to the Yang organ is often used to treat disorders of its related Yin organ.

In the limbs, the Yang channels are on the external side of the limbs while the Yin channels are on the internal side. Generally speaking, the outsides of the limbs are more Yang and are more resistant and prepared for an attack, while the internal sides are more Yin and weaker.

The organs are further subdivided in order to distinguish the different levels of the Yin/Yang characteristics. The Yang organs are divided into Greater Yang (Taiyang), Lesser Yang (Shaoyang), and Yang Brightness (Yangming). The Yin organs are divided into Greater Yin (Taiyin), Lesser Yin (Shaoyin), and Absolute Yin (Jueyin). In the following discussion, all of the classifications will be shown in the title, for example: the Lung Channel of Hand Greater Yin.

1. The Lung Channel of Hand -- Greater Yin

The lungs (Yin) and the large intestine (Yang) are considered paired organs. They belong to Metal in the Five Phases, the westerly direction, the season of autumn, the dry climatic condition, the color white, the pungent taste, the rank odor, the emotion of sadness, and the sound of weeping. Their opening is the nose, and they govern skin and hair.

In Qigong practice, since the lungs belong to Metal, they are able to regulate heartburn. The heart belongs to Fire. Whenever the heart has excess Qi, deep breathing is able to lead the heart's fire to the lungs, and therefore cool the heartburn. When the weather is changing from damp, hot summer into dry and cool autumn, lungs are the first organ to sense the change. If your lungs are not able to readjust themselves to fit the new situation smoothly, you will catch a cold. The lungs access the outside world through your nose. The lungs are responsible for taking Qi from the air, and for the energy (Qi) state of the body.

Breathing is considered a strategy for leading Qi to the extremities such as skin and hair. When your breathing is regulated properly, you are able to strengthen your body's Guardian Qi and generate an expansive Qi shield to protect your body. You are also able to raise or lower your Qi state through your breathing. For example, when you are angry, deep breathing is able to calm your excited Qi state.

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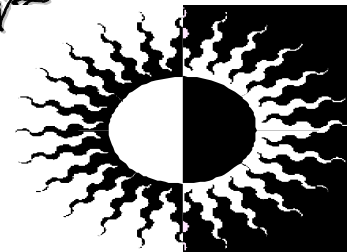
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The lungs are sensitive to emotional changes, especially when you are sad or angry. They also control that part of the liquid metabolism which distributes liquid to the skin.

Because the lungs are usually the first to be attacked by exogenous diseases, they are called the Delicate Organ. These diseases can also cause what is called the Non-Spreading of the Lung Qi. The main symptom of a problem with the lungs is coughing, which is a form of Rebellious Qi (since the lung Qi normally flows downward). If coughing is also accompanied by lassitude, shortness of breath, light foamy phlegm, and weakness in the voice, it is called Deficient Lung Qi. However, if the cough is a dry one, with little phlegm, a parched throat and mouth, and Deficient Yin symptoms (such as night sweating, low grade fever, red cheeks, etc.), the condition is referred as Deficient Lung Yin.

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2. [The Large Intestine Channel of Hand - Yang Brightness](#)

The lungs (Yin) and the large intestine (Yang) are considered paired organs. From Table 2-1 you can see that they belong to Metal in the Five Phases, the westerly direction, the season of autumn, the dry climatic condition, the color white, the pungent taste, the rank odor, the emotion of sadness, and the sound of weeping. Their opening is the nose, and they govern skin and hair. The main function of the large intestine is the metabolism of water and the passing of water. It extracts water from the waste material received from the small intestine, sends it on to the urinary bladder, and excretes the solid material as stool. Many disorders affecting this organ are categorized as spleen and stomach patterns. Certain abdominal pains are considered manifestations of a blockage of Qi or blood in the large intestine.

In Qigong, the Dan Tian in the lower abdomen is considered the residence of Original Qi. In order to keep this Qi at its residence, this area must be strong and healthy. The Qi circulating around the intestines must not be stagnant. When you practice Qigong you must learn how to regulate your breathing to smooth the Qi flow in the large intestine and the lungs. This will allow you to relax the front of your body and regulate the Qi flow in the other organs.

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3. [The Stomach Channel of Foot - Yang Brightness](#)

The spleen (Yin) and the stomach (Yang) are paired organs. They belong to Earth in the Five Phases, the center, the season of long summer (the end of summer), the climatic condition of damp ness, the color yellow, the emotion of ppsiveness, the taste of sweet ness, fragrant odor, and the sound of singing. Their opening is the mouth and they control the flesh and the limbs.

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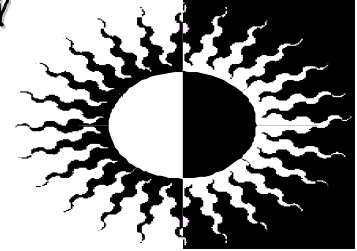
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The Yin/Yang relationship between the spleen and the stomach is a particularly strong example of the relationship between organs. The stomach receives food while the spleen transports nutrients. The stomach moves things downward while the spleen moves things upward. The stomach likes dampness while the spleen likes dryness.

Though there are some patterns relating to deficiency of the stomach (many of these originate in the spleen), most stomach disorders are caused from excess. Stomach Fire gives a painful, burning sensation in the stomach, unusual hunger, bleeding of the gums, constipation, and halitosis.

Once saliva has begun the process of digestion, food passes to the stomach, located in the middle Sanjiao (middle triple burner) area. The stomach breaks down the food, and then passes it on to the intestines, where the essence is absorbed and converted into Qi, and circulated through the entire body.

The stomach is related to the emotion of pensiveness. When you are upset, the stomach will not function normally. In Qigong, regulating the mind is the first step to maintaining the stomach in a healthy condition. The type of food you eat is the second consideration. The proper amount and quality of food will help you to obtain high quality Qi to circulate in your body.

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4. [The Spleen Channel of Foot - Greater Yin](#)

The spleen (Yin) and the stomach (Yang) are paired organs. They belong to Earth in the Five Phases, the central direction, the season of long summer (the end of summer), the climatic condition of dampness, the color yellow, the emotion of pensiveness, the taste of sweetness, fragrant odor, and the sound of singing. Their opening is the mouth and they control the flesh and the limbs.

The spleen is the main organ of digestion. Its function is to transport nutrients and regulate the blood (regulate means to keep it within the channels). It is responsible for the transformation of food into nourishment.

When the spleen is weak, the body will not be able to use the nourishment available in food. This will cause general lassitude, fatigue, and a pasty complexion. The upper abdomen is considered the province of the spleen. Deficient spleen Qi is shown by a sense of malaise or fullness in that area. Because it is required that the transportive function of the spleen distribute its Qi upward, weakness in the spleen will usually cause diarrhea. Spleen Qi is also regarded as the Middle Qi, and it is responsible for holding the viscera in place. Insufficiency of the Middle Qi will presage prolapsed stomach, kidneys, etc. In more serious cases, the spleen Yang Qi will be deficient, which is manifested in diarrhea, cold limbs, and abdominal pain that can be soothed by the warmth of frequent hot drinks.

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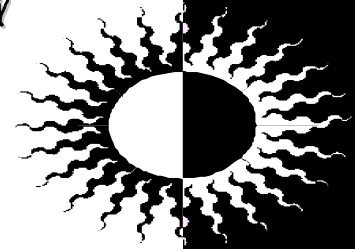
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If any of the above symptoms are accompanied by bleeding, especially from the digestive tract or uterus, it is called Spleen Not Controlling the Blood.

Cold and Dampness Harassing the Spleen is a manifestation characterized by a pent-up feeling in the chest and a bloated sensation in the abdomen, lassitude, lack of appetite and taste, a feeling of cold in the limbs, a dark yellowish hue to the skin, some edema and diarrhea or watery stool. The cold and dampness prevent the spleen from performing its transforming and transporting functions. This leads to a great disturbance in water metabolism and is one of the origins of Phlegm.

In Qigong training, one of the final goals is to regulate the Qi flow to its original (normal) level in the five Yin organs. Among them, the spleen is the last and the hardest organ to regulate. It is believed that if you are able to regulate the Qi in your spleen to a normal and healthy level, you will have grasped the key to health and longevity.

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5. [The Heart Channel of Hand - Lesser Yin](#)

The heart and the small intestine are paired organs. The heart is considered Yin, and the small intestine is considered Yang, balancing this paired channel. These two organs correspond to Fire in the Five Phases, the southerly direction, the summer season, the climatic condition of heat, the color red, the emotion of happiness, the sound of laughter, the taste of bitterness, and the odor of burning. Their point of entry is the tongue, they control the blood vessels and are reflected in the face.

Almost all of the problems and disorders of the heart are associated with weakness. The four major types of heart weakness are Deficient Heart Qi, Deficient Heart Yang, Deficient Heart Blood, and Deficient Heart Yin.

The main functions of the heart are associated with the spirit and the blood vessels. The heart governs the blood vessels and is responsible for moving blood through them. It also stores the spirit, and is the organ usually associated with mental processes. Therefore, some forms of emotional distress, dizziness, palpitations, shortness of breath, and lack of vitality are common symptoms of heart ailments. Deficient Heart Qi is symbolized by general lassitude, panting and shallow breathing, and frequent sweating. If the face is swollen and ashen gray or bluish-green, and the limbs are cold, it is called Deficient Heart Yang. The symptoms of restless ness, irritability, dizziness, absentmindedness, and insomnia are typical signs of Deficient Heart Blood. In Deficient Heart Yin cases, developments with a flushed feeling in the palms and face, low grade fever, and night sweating will occur.

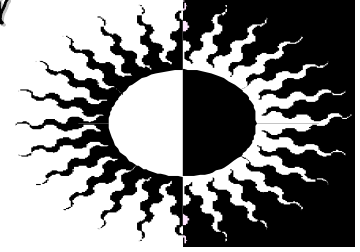
The symptom of Heart Excess arises from an excess of Heart Fire. This is manifested by fever, occasionally accompanied by delirium, a racking pulse, intense restlessness, insomnia or

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frequent nightmares, a bright red face, a red or blistered and painful tongue, and often a burning sensation during urination. The latter symptom is the result of Heat being transferred from the heart to the small intestine, which interferes with the small intestine's role in metabolism and the body's management of water.

In Qigong society, it is believed that the mind is associated with the heart, and that it is also directly related to the spirit. The term heart (Xin) is usually used to represent the emotional mind or ideas. The Middle Dan Tian at the solar plexus is considered the residence of the Fire Qi. This Fire is used to nourish the brain and the spirit (Shen) at its residence, the Upper Dan Tian or third eye. In Chinese medicine it is said that the heart is the temple of the spirit because it supplies Fire Qi and can nourish the spirit without limit.

Generally speaking, the heart is very sensitive during the summertime: The heart is a Yin channel, and when the summer Yang comes it can increase the heart's Qi level and cause problems. Emotional disturbances, such as excitement from happiness, are considered harmful to the heart as well, especially during the summer time. Qigong emphasizes regulating the heart in the summer.

[TOP](#)

6. [The Small Intestine Channel of Hand - Greater Yang](#)

The heart and the small intestine are paired organs. The heart is considered Yin, and the small intestine is considered Yang, balancing this paired channel. These two organs correspond to Fire in the Five Phases, the southerly direction, the summer season, the climatic condition of heat, the color red, the emotion of happiness, the sound of laughter, the taste of bitterness, and the odor of burning. Their point of entry is the tongue. They control the blood vessels and are reflected in the face.

The major function of the small intestine is to separate waste material from the nutritious elements in food. The nutritious elements are then distributed throughout the body and the waste is sent on to the large intestine.

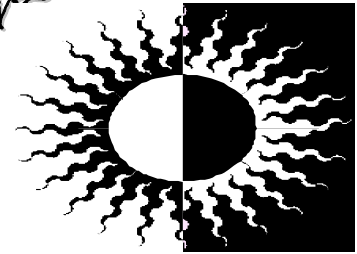
The small and large intestines are located in the Lower Dan Tian. In order to store the Original Qi converted from Original Essence, the abdomen must be healthy and the Qi circulation in the area of the intestines must be smooth and natural. The best way to reach this goal is through abdominal breathing exercises. One such exercise is to lead the Original Qi upward following the heart and small intestine Qi channels to cool down the heart Fire.

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7. [The Urinary Bladder Channel of Foot - Greater Yang](#)

The kidneys (Yin) and the urinary bladder (Yang) are paired organs. They correspond to Water in the Five Phases, the winter season, the cold climatic condition, the southerly direction, the color black, the emotion of fear, the taste of salt, the smell of decay, and the sound of groaning. Their sensory organ is the ear. Their opening is the urethra. They control the bones, marrow, and brain, and their health is reflected in the hair of the head.

The main function of the urinary bladder is to transform fluids into urine and excrete it from the body.

In Qigong, the urinary bladder has never enjoyed serious attention. However, its pairing partner the kidney is one of the most important organs - one with which all Qigong practitioners are concerned and train most often. The reason for this is simply that the kidneys are the residence of the Original Essence.

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8. [The Kidney Channel of Foot - Lesser Yin](#)

The kidneys (Yin) and the urinary bladder (Yang) are paired organs. They correspond to Water in the Five Phases, the winter season, the cold climatic condition, the southerly direction, the color black, the emotion of fear, the taste of salt, a rotten smell, and the sound of groaning. Their sensory organ is the ear. Their opening is the urethra. They control the bones, marrow, and brain, and their health is reflected in the hair of the head.

The kidneys store Original Essence (Yuan Jing) and are therefore responsible for growth, development, and reproductive functions. They play the primary role in water metabolism and control the body's liquids, and also hold the body's most fundamental Yin and Yang.

Because the kidneys are the repositories of the basal Yin and Yang of the body, any disorder, if sufficiently chronic, will involve the kidneys. More significantly, a disease of the kidneys will usually lead to problems in other organs. Methods of strengthening the kidneys are therefore used by both medical and Qigong societies to increase or maintain vitality and health. The symptoms of Deficient Kidney Yang or Yin are typical symptoms of the disorder, and will appear to a certain extent as Deficient Yang or Yin patterns in any organ.

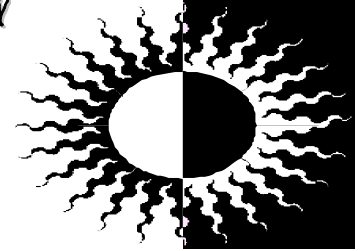
It is easy to understand and memorize the symptoms of Deficient Kidney Yin if one learns the correspondences of the kidneys and remembers that Yin represents the constructive, nourishing, and fluid aspects of the body. Usually, the lower back is weak and sore, there is ringing in the ears and loss of hearing acuity, the face is ashen or dark, especially under the eyes. It is common to feel dizziness and thirst, and to experience night sweats and low grade fevers. In addition, men have little semen and tend toward premature ejaculation, while women have little or no

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menstruation.

Deficient Kidney Yang symptoms are significantly associated with loss of energy or warmth. Similar to Deficient Kidney Yin, there is commonly ringing in the ears, dizziness, and soreness in the lower back. However, the soreness is characterized by a feeling of coldness, lassitude, and fatigue. Weakness in the legs can be noticed. In men, there is a tendency toward impotence, and in both sexes, clear and voluminous urine or incontinence.

Usually, Deficient Kidney Yin generates similar disorders in the heart and liver, while Deficient Kidney Yang disturbs the functions of the spleen and lungs. The progression could be in the opposite direction. When this pattern is associated with the lungs, it is called "Kidney Not Receiving Qi," a type of wheezing characterized by difficult breathing, mainly during inhalation. In addition to the Deficient Kidney Yang symptoms, this condition is also manifested by a faint voice, coughing, puffiness in the face, and spontaneous sweating.

The kidneys perform an important role in the metabolism of water. If these functions are disrupted, the condition of Deficient Kidneys will lead to Spreading Water.

In Qigong practice, essence (Jing) is considered the most original source of human vitality. Qi is converted from essence, and this Qi supplies the entire body and nourishes the brain and spirit. It is believed by both Chinese medical and Qigong societies that the kidneys are the residence of Original Essence. In order to protect your inherent essence, you must strengthen your kidneys. Only when your kidneys are strong will you be able to keep your essence at its residence. Therefore, keeping the kidneys healthy has become one of the most important subjects in Qigong.

Maintaining the kidneys in a healthy state includes protecting the physical kidneys from degeneration, and maintaining a smooth and correct level of Qi flow. In order to reach this goal, the diet must be considered. For example, too much salt is harmful to the kidneys, and eating too much eggplant will weaken the kidneys. In addition, the condition of the body is also important. Such things as over working without proper rest will increase tension on the kidneys and make the Qi flow stagnant. In winter, the kidneys will have more tension than in summer. Due to this, the Qi flow is more stagnant in the wintertime than in the summertime. Consequently, back pain problems increase in the winter.

In order to protect the kidneys, Qigong practitioners have studied the relationship of the kidneys to nature, food, and even to emotional states. They have developed massage techniques and specific exercises to increase Qi circulation in the kidneys during the winter. Since the health of the kidneys is related to the emotions as well, learning how to regulate the mind in order to regulate the Qi has become one of the major training goals in Qigong.

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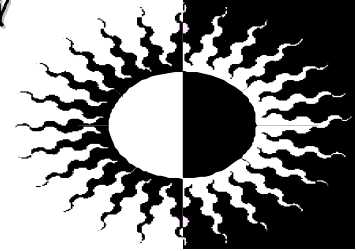
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9. [The Pericardium Channel of Hand - Absolute Yin](#)

The pericardium (Yin) and the triple burner (Yang) are paired organs. They are said to correspond to the "Ministerial Fire," as opposed to the "Sovereign Fire" of the heart and small intestine. Though the pericardium has no separate physiological functions, it is generally mentioned with regard to the delirium induced by high fevers.

The regulation of Qi in the pericardium is considered a very important subject in Qigong. It is believed that the heart, the most vital organ in your body, must have a proper level of Qi circulation in order to function normally. The Qi level of the heart can be raised easily to an abnormal state by illness, emotional disturbance, exercise, or injury. The function of the pericardium is to dissipate the excess Qi from the heart and direct it to the Laogong cavity (P-8), located in the center of the palm. From Laogong, the excess Qi will be released naturally and hence, regulate the heart's Qi level. The Laogong cavity is used in Qigong massage to reduce the body's temperature during a fever. You can see that the purpose of the pericardium is to regulate the Qi in the heart through the Laogong cavity.

You should understand that in Qigong it is believed that there are five centers (called gates) where the Qi of the body is able to communicate with the surrounding environment, and, consequently, regulate the Qi level in your body. Two of these five centers are the Laogong cavities, and two others are the Yongquan cavities (K-1), used to regulate the Qi in the kidneys. The fifth one is your face. The face is connected and related to many of your organs. Whenever any of your organ Qi is not normal, it shows on your face.

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10. [The Triple Burner Channel of Hand - Lesser Yang](#)

At least as far back as the 3rd century A.D., in the "Classic of Difficulties" (Nan Jing) the triple burner was regarded as "having a name but no form." In the "Inner Classic" (Nei Jing), the triple burner was considered an organ that coordinated all the functions of water metabolism. In other traditional documents, the burners were considered three regions of the body that were used to group the organs. The upper burner includes the chest, neck, and head as well as the functions of the heart and lungs. The middle burner is the region between the chest and the navel, and includes the functions of the stomach, liver, and spleen. The lower burner spans the lower abdomen, and the functions of the kidneys and urinary bladder. Therefore, the upper burner has been compared to a mist which spreads the blood and Qi, the middle burner is like a foam which churns up food in the process of digestion, and the lower burner resembles a swamp where all the impure substances are excreted.

Regulating the Qi to a normally "smooth-flow" state is one of the main Qigong training methods for maintaining health. It is normally done through Wai Dan exercises, and it is believed that the Qi must flow around internal organs smoothly in order for them to maintain their normal functions.

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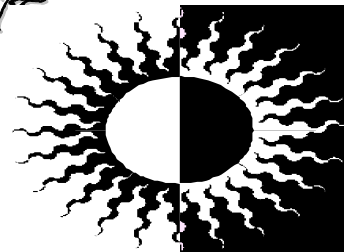
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This means that in order to keep Qi flow smooth and the organs healthy, you must first learn how to regulate and relax muscles that are holding and related to a given organ. External movements also exercise internal muscles. One of the most common external exercises is regulating the triple burner by lifting your hands up above your head and then moving them down slowly. These up and down arm movements extend and relax the internal muscles and thereby increase Qi flow.

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11. [The Gall Bladder Channel of Foot - Lesser Yang](#)

The liver (Yin) and the gall bladder (Yang) are paired organs. They correspond to Wood in the Five Phases, the direction east, the spring season, the climatic wind, the color green, the emotion of anger, the taste of sourness, the goatish odor, and the sound of shouting. Their point of entry is the eyes. They control the sinews (muscles and joints), and their health is reflected in the finger and toe nails.

The main function of the gall bladder is storing and excreting the bile produced by the liver. Together with the heart, the gall bladder is responsible for decision-making.

The main disease related to the gall bladder is a disorder affecting the flow of bile, usually caused by Dampness and Heat. This is commonly manifested by pain in the region of the liver, an oppressive sensation of fullness in the abdomen, and yellowish eyes, skin, urine, and tongue.

The gall bladder has never enjoyed serious attention during Qigong training. Its paired partner the liver however, has received much more attention.

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12. [The Liver Channel of Foot - Absolute Yin](#)

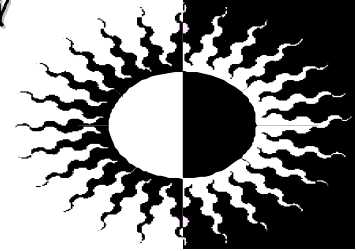
The liver (Yin) and the gall bladder (Yang) are considered paired organs. They correspond to Wood in the Five Phases, the direction east, the spring season, the climatic condition of wind, the color green, the emotion of anger, the taste of sourness, the goatish odor, and the sound of shouting. Their point of entry is the eyes. They control the sinews (muscles and joints), and their health is reflected in the finger and toe nails.

The main task of the liver is spreading and regulating Qi throughout the entire body. Its unique character is flowing and free. Therefore, depression or frustration can disturb the functioning of the liver. In addition, the liver is also responsible for storing blood when the body is at rest. This characteristic, together with its control over the lower abdomen, makes it the most critical organ in

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regards to women's menstrual cycle and sexuality.

Depression or long-term frustration can stagnate the liver's spreading function and result in continuing depression, a bad temper, and a painful, swollen feeling in the chest and sides. If this condition worsens, it may cause disharmony between the liver and the stomach and/or spleen. This disorder is symbolized by the "rebellion" of Qi in the latter organs, whereby Qi moves in the opposite direction than is normal. For example, the stomach Qi normally descends, so rebellious Qi means hiccoughing, vomiting, etc. In the case of the spleen, the Qi ordinarily moves upward, so rebellious Qi in this organ means diarrhea.

Depression of the liver Qi is the main cause of many women's disorders, including menstrual irregularities, swollen and painful breasts, etc.

One of the most important responsibilities of the liver is the storage of blood with intended emphasis upon nourishing and moistening. Whenever the liver blood is deficient, the liver will not be able to handle the function of moistening. This is generally shown as dry and painful eyes with blurred or weak vision, lack of suppleness or pain in moving the joints, dry skin, dizziness, and infrequent or spotty menstruation. If the Deficient Liver Yin has become serious, the conditions Rising Liver Fire or Hyper Liver Yang Ascending occur. These occurrences are evidenced in ill-temper, restlessness, headache, vertigo, red face and eyes, and a parched mouth. If the liver Yin is so deficient that it is incapable of securing the liver Yang, many of the symptoms appear as disorders of the head. Weakness in the lower joints may also be manifested.

The liver is one of the five Yin organs whose Qi level the Qigong practitioner wants to regulate. Since the liver and the gall bladder are directly connected, when the liver's Qi is regulated, the Qi circulating in the gall bladder will also be regulated. Many methods have been developed for regulating the liver Qi. Wai Dan Qigong works through the limbs. For example, when the arms are moved up and down, the internal muscles surrounding the liver will be moved and the Qi around the liver will be circulated smoothly. In Nei Dan Qigong, it is believed that the liver is closely related to your mind. It is also believed that when your mind is regulated, the Qi circulation in the liver will be normal and therefore the liver will function properly.

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Important Points

1. The spleen, liver, and heart are the organs with the most direct relationship with the blood. The spleen filters the blood (modifying the blood's structure), the liver stores the blood, and the heart moves it. Any problem associated with the blood will involve at least one of these organs.
2. The liver and the kidney are closely related. Their channels cross in many places. The liver stores blood; the kidney stores essence. These substances, both of which are Yin, have a considerable influence on the reproductive functions.
3. The heart (upper burner, Fire) and the kidney (lower burner, Water) keep each other in check and

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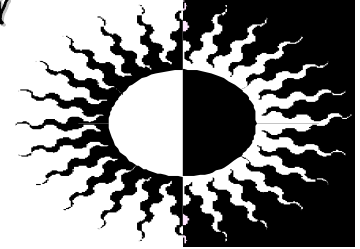
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are dependent upon one another. The spirit of the heart and the essence of the kidneys cooperate in establishing and maintaining human consciousness.

4. The spleen's digestive function is associated with the distributive functions of the liver. Disharmony between these two results in various digestive troubles. The transportive and digestive functions of the spleen (also called the Middle Qi) depend upon the strength of the kidney Yang.
5. Although the lungs govern Qi, Qi from the lungs must mix with essence from the kidneys before Original Qi can be produced. The lungs govern Qi, the liver spreads Qi, and the kidneys provide its basis.

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From the book entitled "Chinese Qigong Massage", [YMAA Publication Center](#), Jamaica Plain.

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