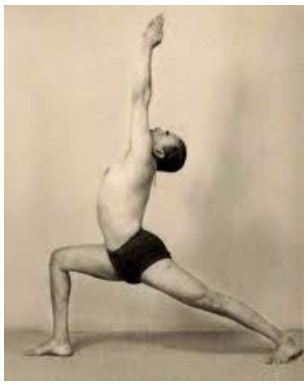
YIN: *Yoga At Its Deepest*

Fundamentals & Principles of Modification

with Chip Hartranft, PT

Yoga of Energy Flow, April 16, 2025

All bodily energetic yoga - Vinyasa, Iyengar, Kundalini, Kripalu, Anusara, Viniyoga, Ashtanga, Bikram, Power - derives from **haṭha** yoga (*haṭha* - Skt, force, energy; *ha* 'sun', *ṭha* 'moon')



ha ≈ yang	**ṭha ≈ yin**
Light	Dark
Hot	Cool
Active	Passive
Outside	Inside
Rapid	Slow
Doing	Being
Energy	Matter
Obvious	Mysterious
Male	Female
Sun	Moon

Yin Yoga is a style of practice that emphasizes sustained, gentle but deep stretches that stimulate the body's internal energy system, invigorate joint and connective tissues otherwise neglected in dynamic styles, and develop the meditative factors of mindfulness, tranquility, and insight. Although today's Yin practices have largely been developed from ancient Chinese yoga by contemporary teachers like Paulie Zink, Paul Grilley, and Sarah Powers, they come closer than any other form of modern yoga to the earliest known Indian *asana* practices found in such seminal guides as the *Siva Samhita, Hatha Pradipika,* and *Gheranda Samhita*. As such, they are an especially powerful vehicle not only for cultivating optimal health and vitality, but also for opening into the profoundest space of yoga: *awakening*

> Yin Yoga is a perfect complement to the dynamic and muscular (yang) styles of yoga that emphasize internal heat, and the lengthening and contracting of our muscles. Yin Yoga generally targets the connective tissues of the hips, pelvis, and lower spine.
>
> While initially this style of yoga can seem quite boring, passive, or soft, yin practice can be quite challenging due to the long duration of the poses. We can remain in the postures anywhere from one to twenty minutes! Yin and yang tissues respond quite differently to being exercised. You need to experience this to really know what Yin Yoga is all about. After you have experienced it, even just once, you will realize that you have been doing only half of the asana practice.
>
> Bernie Clark, *YinSights*

FASCIA: *Connective Tissue*

Yin vs. conventional, 'muscular' yoga

Yang develops strength, builds heat, improves balance, works superficial tissues more than deep
Yin stimulates joints & deep fascia, moves *prana/chi/ki*, promotes meditative factors of mind

Unlike most dynamic yoga styles, Yin Yoga stimulates the **deeper structures** of the body:

bones	joint capsules
articular cartilage	periosteum (bony 'stocking')
intervertebral discs	deep fascia
ligaments	tendons

Gentle but sustained pressure stimulates fascial cells called **fibroblasts** which produce one of the body's most important substances, **hyaluronic acid** (**HA**). **HA** binds more efficiently to water molecules than almost any other substance on earth, and is a substrate of **synovial fluid**, hydrating and lubricating joints. It is present in all fascia as an essential factor affecting hydration, inflammation, immune response, and tissue repair.

Regular intervals of deep fascial stimulation appears to **slow or prevent the degenerative trajectory** of joints characteristic of modern sedentary life. Yin practice:

stimulates dormant & new fibroblasts	increases synovial lubrication
increases tissue hydration	accelerates deep tissue fluid exchange

Temperature - Since yin yoga targets deep connective tissues, it is often practiced *before superficial muscles are warmed up* - for example, in the early morning. Since unheated muscle tissue is less elastic, more stretch is therefore transmitted to the fascia. Overall, fascia contributes more to bodily flexibility (50%) than does muscle tissue (40%)

Force - Yin poses uses as little force as possible, and props are frequently used to support the body at an appropriate depth. Unlike muscles, a forceful stretch could destabilize a joint instead of delivering an invigorating, healing stimulus. An analogy: braces on the teeth transmit very small forces over a long time so that teeth shift position without loosening. Instead of trying to push the body toward a future state, practice surrender to this moment. If you're tightening instead of releasing, there's been too much force

Timings - Superficial tissues such as the large muscles can tolerate powerful forces and benefit most from vigorous, repeated movements and relatively brief stretches. Deep fascia responds best to extended periods of gentle, unforced, non-aggressive stretch for anywhere from 1-10 minutes. Most yin stretches are held for about 5 minutes and some supported spinal stretches such as the Caterpillar (*pascimottanasana*) and Saddle (*supta virasana*) may eventually be sustained for 15-20 minutes! It is helpful to have a timer so you can be focused and meditative instead of watching the clock

3 Principles (Sarah Powers)
Enter the pose to an appropriate depth
Resolve to remain still
Hold the pose for time

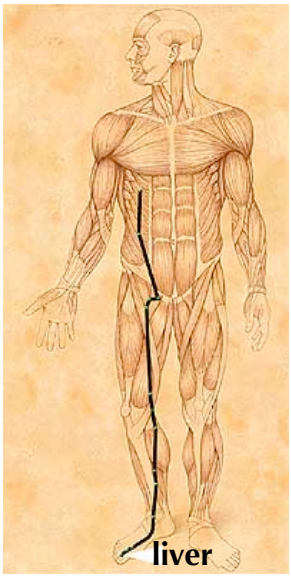
Chip's Uniqueness Principles
Your skeleton is different than your teacher's
Don't copy others' (or yours)... discover!
Flexibility: heredity > practice

ENERGY: *Meridians & Nadis*

Indian and Chinese traditions recognize similar internal human energy systems. While the **Indian** understanding of the energetic pathways is ultimately directed toward **liberation**, the **Chinese** system is oriented mainly toward the goal of **optimal health, vitality & wellbeing**

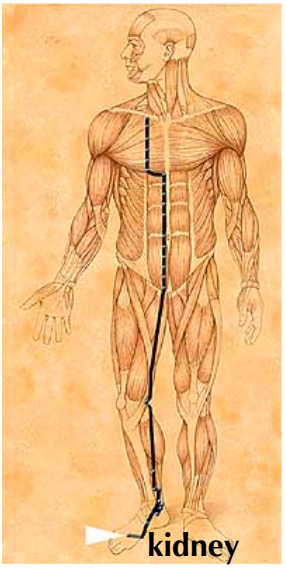
Indian
3 principal *nadis* (Skt, 'rivers')
sushumna - central channel
ida - terminates in left nostril
pingala - terminates in right nostril
11 or 12 main *nadis* usually named
72K-350K others (in other words, countless)
connect 7 *cakras* - energy 'wheels' (Skt)

Chinese
10 major 'organs'
14 oft-referenced meridians
71 meridians total
each meridian has key points along its length that respond to pressure, needling stimulation moves energy, relieves blockage



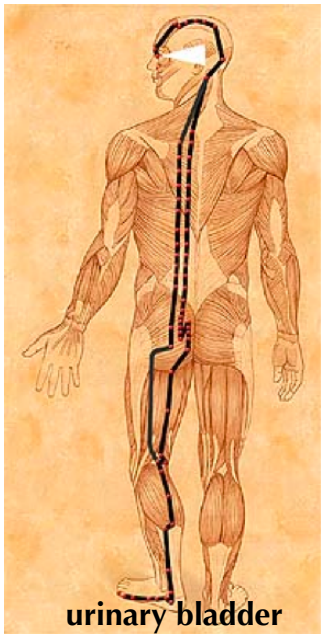
dysfunction
anger, irritation
back pain
stagnation

harmony
calm
vitality



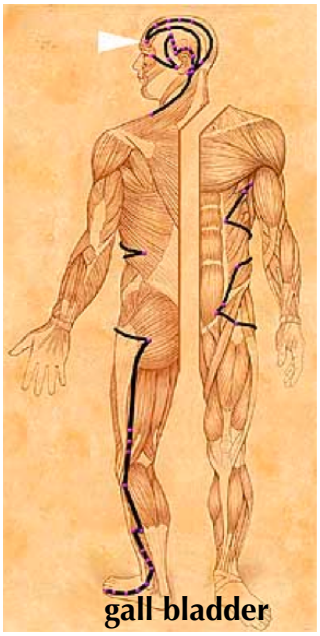
dysfunction
fear, anxiety
urological problems
throat & chest

harmony
calm



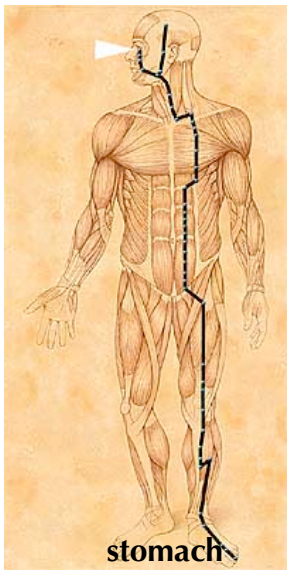
dysfunction
mental problems
back pain, headache
frequent urination

harmony
calm
sound sleep



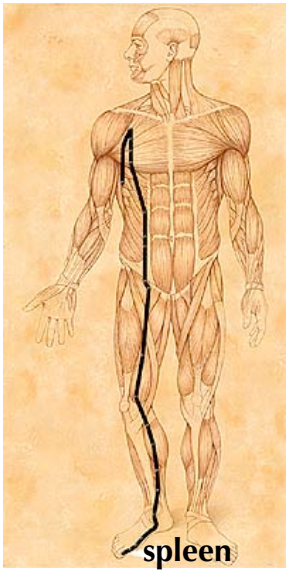
dysfunction
indecisiveness
headache
blurred vision

harmony
confidence



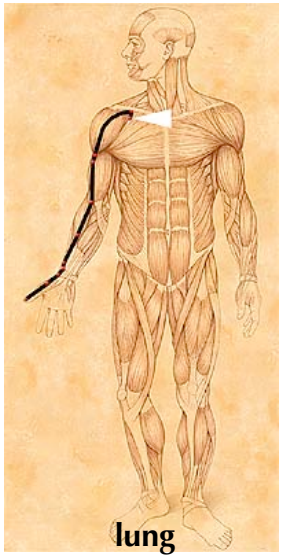
dysfunction
mental problems
digestive problems
nasal, dental pain

harmony
vitality



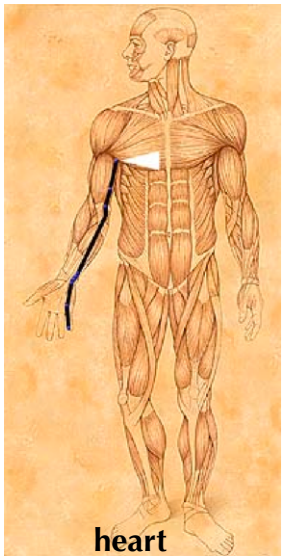
dysfunction
worry
decreased
willpower
digestive problems

harmony
drive
food tastes better



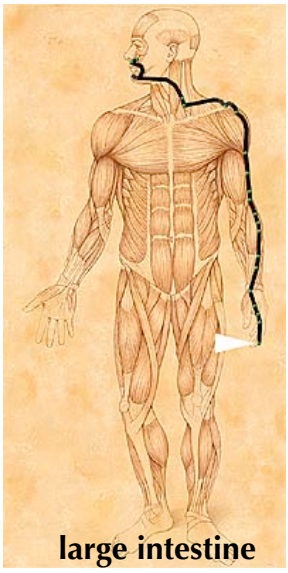
dysfunction
sadness, grief
respiratory
problems
decreased sense
of smell

harmony
sense of wellbeing



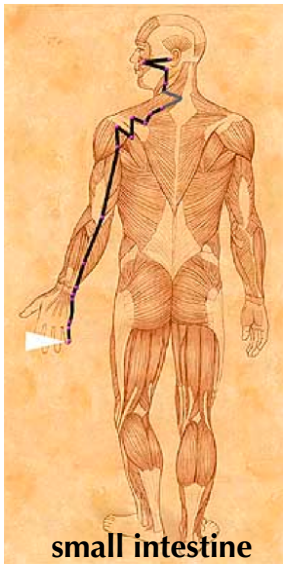
dysfunction
insomnia,
agitation
night sweats
disturbing dreams

harmony
sleeping well



dysfunction
digestive problems
toothache
sore throat

harmony
good digestion



dysfunction
digestive problems
abdominal pain
shoulder/neck pain

harmony
good digestion

SPINAL RELEASES

butterfly

meridians	liver, kidney
joints & organs	all spinal joints, hips; pelvic organs
concerns	sciatica, SI strain, whiplash, reverse cervical curve
modifications	bolster under hips, using sticky mat; block under hands; bolster/block under trunk/forehead; cushions under knees; perform lying down on back
emerging	corpse

half butterfly

meridians	urinary bladder; liver, kidney
joints & organs	spine, knees; pelvic organs
concerns	sciatica, SI strain
modifications	bolster under hips, using sticky mat; block under hands; bolster/block under trunk/forehead; towel roll under knees; bent knee in *virasana*
variations	turning toward, away from leg
emerging	other side; corpse

caterpillar

meridians	urinary bladder
joints & organs	spine, hips; kidneys
concerns	sciatica, SI strain
modifications	bolster under hips, using sticky mat; block under hands; bolster/block under trunk/forehead; towel roll under knees; legs wider
emerging	corpse

snail

meridians	urinary bladder
joints & organs	all spinal joints; viscera, thyroid
concerns	cervical strain, glaucoma, rotator cuff
modifications	padding under shldrs; feet supported; knees bent to floor; hands to toes; join hands behind back
emerging	*urdhva pascimottanasana*, corpse

dangling

meridians	urinary bladder
joints & organs	spine, hips; lungs, liver, spleen, kidneys
concerns	sciatica, SI strain, lumbar disc, high blood pressure
modifications	bend knees; elbows on chair or thighs; support face with hands
emerging	corpse, squat, gentle backbends


1 cat tail 2

meridians 1: stomach, spleen
2: kidney, urinary bladder
joints & organs lumbar, sacrum; kidneys
concerns sciatica, SI strain
modifications 1: straight arm
2: support head w/ hand, block; push foot backward
emerging sidelying; prone corpse

sphinx

meridians urinary bladder, kidney, stomach, spleen
joints & organs spine; kidneys
concerns SI strain, headache
modifications legs spread (lumbar) or close (sacrum); elevate elbows on blocks; pad pubis
emerging prone corpse, child

seal

meridians urinary bladder, kidney, stomach, spleen
joints & organs spine; kidneys
concerns SI strain, headache
modifications legs spread (lumbar) or close (sacrum); hands/arms to side instead of forward; pad pubis
emerging prone corpse, child

child pose

meridians spleen, stomach, kidney, urinary bladder
joints & organs spine, ankles, knees; viscera
concerns sciatica, SI strain, hip compression, knee joint irritation
modifications bolster under chest/face; bolster/block under forehead; towel roll behind knees; legs wider
emerging downward dog, corpse

saddle

meridians stomach, spleen, urinary bladder, kidneys
joints & organs ankles, knees, hips, spine, shldr; kidneys
concerns patello-femoral irritation, SI strain
modifications bolster supporting upper back/head; blanket 'step' for ankles; one leg straight, bent, or flexed over trunk (Half Saddle)
emerging sit up or roll to side; supported child

reclining twists

meridians urinary bladder, gall bladder; heart, lung & small intestines if arms overhead
joints & organs sacrum, lumbar, shldr; liver, spleen, pancreas
concerns shldr, cervical, SI strain
modifications arm position; crossing knees (Twisted Root); neck rotation; straighten top leg
emerging gentle spinal flexion between, after

HIP & EXTREMITY RELEASES

twisting dragon

meridians stomach, spleen, liver, gall bladder, kidneys
joints & organs ankles, hips, spine; kidneys
concerns rotator cuff impingement, patello-femoral irritation, SI strain
modifications straight arm; foot turned out
emerging other side; dog, child

baby & flying dragon

meridians stomach, spleen, liver, gall bladder, kidneys
joints & organs hip, sacrum, spine; pelvic organs
concerns patello-femoral irritation, SI strain
modifications blocks/chairs under hands; front foot tucked under knee
emerging other side; dog, child

gecko

meridians stomach, spleen, liver, gall bladder, kidneys
joints & organs hip, sacrum, spine; pelvic organs
concerns patello-femoral irritation, SI strain
modifications blocks/chairs under hands; front foot tucked under knee
emerging other side; dog, child

dragon splits

meridians stomach, spleen, liver, gall bladder, kidneys
joints & organs hip, spine, knees; pelvic organs
concerns patello-femoral irritation, SI strain
modifications blocks under hands; pad above back patella
emerging other side; dog, child

dragonfly

meridians	liver, kidney, urinary bladder
joints & organs	hips, spine, knees; pelvic organs
concerns	sciatica, SI strain
modifications	bolster under hips, using sticky mat; block under hands; bolster/block under trunk/forehead; towel roll under knees; *variations*: fold over 1 leg; twist
emerging	sitting meditation; assisted leg add; corpse

swan

meridians	urinary & gall bladder, liver, kidney, stomach, spleen
joints & organs	hip, knee, spine; kidneys
concerns	SI strain; knee strain
modifications	elevate seat; block under hands; flex front foot; enter from kneeling
emerging	child

sleeping swan

meridians	gall bladder, liver, kidney, stomach, spleen
joints & organs	hip, knee, spine; kidneys, pelvic organs
concerns	SI strain; knee strain
modifications	elevate seat; block under elbows; bolster under chest/head; flex front foot
emerging	supported bridge

shoelace

meridians	liver, kidney, urinary & gall bladder
joints & organs	hips, spine; pelvic organs
concerns	sciatica, SI strain, knee strain
modifications	elevated seat; block under hands; one leg straight; twist, lateral stretch
emerging	table pose

square/firelog

meridians	liver, gall & urinary bladder, kidneys
joints & organs	hips, knees, spine; pelvic organs
concerns	knee torque, SI strain
modifications	elevated seat; bolster supporting upper body; top ankle in front if hip ER limited
emerging	table pose

toe squat

meridians all 6 lower body meridians: urinary & gall bladder, liver, kidney, stomach, spleen
joints & organs toes, ankles, knees
concerns bunions, knee strain
modifications elevate knees on blanket; lean forward
emerging downward dog, child

squat

meridians liver, kidney, urinary bladder
joints & organs hips, knees, ankles; pelvic organs
concerns knee joint: meniscal tears, ACL repairs
modifications blanket roll/bolster under heels; rolled mat/bolster behind knees
emerging toe stretch, ankle stretch, downward dog, dangle (standing forward bend)

ankle stretch

meridians stomach, spleen, liver, gall bladder
joints & organs ankles, knees; pelvic organs
concerns sciatica, SI strain
modifications towel roll under knees; one knee at a time; folded blanket 'step'
emerging 'toe under' poses: dog, plank, squat

melting heart (anahatasana)

meridians urinary bladder, heart, lung
joints & organs thoracic, shldr; lungs
concerns rotator cuff impingement, cerv sprain
modifications bolster/block under chest/forehead; cushions under knees; arms wide
emerging child

tadpole/frog

meridians spleen, liver, kidneys, heart, lung, small & large intestines
joints & organs hips, sacrum, spine; pelvic organs
concerns patello-femoral irritation, SI strain
modifications knees forward (tadpole); padding under knees; forehead supported
emerging other side; dog, child

Yin Sequences

spinal flow
butterfly > corpse
half butterfly, R & L
corpse > supine twist
deer > bharadvajasana
caterpillar > corpse
snail
urdhva pascimottanasana
corpse > prone corpse
passive bridge/block
cat tail
locust
sphinx
seal > child
saddle

hip opening flow
dragonfly > corpse
twisting dragon
dragon
gecko/split > dog > child
squat
dragonfly > corpse
swan
sleeping swan
shoelace
square > dog > child
saddle

UE & LE releases > *yang* flows
toe squat (downward dogs)
ankle stretch (supta virasana, dog, child)
squat (standing fwd bends)
an**a**hata (dog, twists, backbends)
tadpole/frog (child, pigeon

Yin Resources

BOOKS
yin yoga
Complete Guide To Yin Yoga Clark & Powers
Yin Yoga Paul Grilley
YinSights Bernie Clark
Insight Yoga Sarah Powers
Yin Yoga Kit Biff Mithoefer
energy
The Web That Has No Weaver Ted Kaptchuk
Theory Of The Chakras Hiroshi Motoyama
meditation
Yoga-Sutra Of Patañjali Chip Hartranft (transl)
Breath By Breath Larry Rosenberg

DVD
Yin Yoga Paul Grilley
Yin Yoga Paulie Zink
Insight Yoga Sarah Powers

CD
Yin Yoga Sarah Powers
Yin & Vinyasa Yoga Sarah Powers

Online
www.yinyoga.com
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