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Class 1
12 Meridians

There are twelve meridians—six on the arms and six on the legs. They’re on both the right and left side of the body. So, just remember that when we say there are six meridians on the arms, we mean six on the right arm and six on the left arm. They flow down the front and back of the arms and legs—three on the front of each limb and three on the back.

We know Chinese medicine is all about Yin and Yang, which applies to the human body in many ways. In relation to the meridians, we will talk about the surfaces of the body—the front is Yin and the back is Yang.

- Back of left arm: three Yang meridians
- Back of right arm: three Yang meridians
- Front of left arm: three Yin meridians
- Front of right arm: three Yin meridians

- Back of left leg: three Yang meridians
- Back of right leg: three Yang meridians
- Front of left leg: three Yin meridians
- Front of right leg: three Yin meridians

The Yang surface, the back (also called the “posterior”), is the more protective side of our body. If you touch the skin on the back of your arm and then on the inside of your arm, you can feel that the inside, or the “Yinside” (get it?), is a little more sensitive. It doesn’t have the tougher exterior of the Yang surface. It’s the same with the inside and outside of your legs. (We may talk about the “front” and “back” of your legs but we’re really referring to the inside and outside.)

The meridians are all grouped into Yin and Yang pairs. In the legs, the Spleen meridian (Yin) is paired with the Stomach meridian (Yang); the Liver meridian (Yin) is paired with the Gallbladder meridian (Yang); and the Kidney meridian (Yin) is paired with the Bladder meridian (Yang).

In the arms, the Lung meridian (Yin) is paired with the Large Intestine meridian (Yang); the Pericardium meridian (Yin) is paired with the San Jiao meridian (or Triple Heater—Yang) and the Heart meridian (Yin) is paired with the Small Intestine meridian (Yang).

I know this is a lot of information. Don’t worry. We’re going to break it down into four classes. We’ll do four meridians in each of the first three classes, then we’ll talk about how to work with the meridians. So, there’s no need to get overwhelmed here at the beginning.
Lung Meridian

The Lung meridian travels through the lungs and large intestine inside the body. Each meridian has an internal and external pathway. The internal pathway can sometimes take twists and turns within the body—the Lung meridian, for instance, connects the lungs, loops around the neck, and then moves through the outer front of the shoulder.

The external pathway runs down the arm and that’s what we’ll be focusing on in this class.

However, it is important to be aware of the internal pathways as well because that’s where the Qi flows through the body.

So, when you look at images of the meridians, you’re going to see the internal pathway mapped out. You’ll also only see the meridian drawn on one limb. You just have to imagine it on the other limb.

There are important, energetic points on each meridian where you can access the Qi directly. We won’t get into all of these points but we will talk about a few of the important ones. The Lung meridian officially “begins” at a point on the chest over the left lung, where the internal pathway comes to the surface. That’s the first external point where it begins and it runs down the Yin surface of the arm, along the “thumb side.” The Lung meridian ends on the thumb, near the outside of the nail, by the lower corner of the nail. Try pinching your thumbnail with your other hand. You can activate the entire meridian that way.

The lungs are all about the breath, right? So we can use this meridian to boost our Qi, support breathing, and strengthen the respiratory system to prevent colds and flus.
Lung Meridian

LU 2

LU 1

LU 10

LU 11
Large Intestine Meridian

The Lung meridian is paired with the Large Intestine meridian, which is its Yang partner. The Large Intestine meridian runs up the arm along the Yang side. It begins on the index finger, at the base of the nail bed, and on the side of the nail closest to the thumb.

The cool thing about this placement is that it runs directly above the Lung meridian. So, it’s like we’ve got the Yin and Yang pair mirroring each other as they run along the arm. And again, the nature of Yin and Yang is kind of reflected in the different textures of the skin on your arm.

Chinese medicine is mostly based on observation. Therefore, the more you pay attention to little things like this, the more you can see Yin and Yang at work in the body.

The Large Intestine meridian runs up your arm and if you bend your elbow to examine the crease at your elbow, you can find a big Large Intestine point. It’s on the outside of your elbow crease, close to the bone.

Trace your finger from the outside of your elbow crease, down the Yang side of your arm (near where it becomes the Yin side of your arm), ending at the tip of your first finger. That’s the path that your Large Intestine meridian takes.

Now, trace your finger from your elbow crease, up toward your shoulder. Just move straight up with no wavering. That is still the Large Intestine meridian’s path.

The meridian crosses your shoulder, moves up the side of your neck and ends at your nostril. This makes sense because this is all connected with the lungs and breathing. We can actually use the Large Intestine meridian for all kinds of respiratory issues. It can help open up the nose, clear up congestion, a sore throat, a cold, or any condition where your head is congested.

The plan is to use the Yang meridians to reduce any kind of pain that exists within their pathways. So, we could also use the Large Intestine meridian for something like tennis elbow. Just rub around on the main meridian points to get the Qi moving.

If you hold up your own arm, you can see the place where the Yang side of your body meets the Yin side. You can also see this pretty easily on your hand, in the difference between the top of your hand and your palm. Notice where the skin changes in texture and color. There’s less hair on the Yin side. The same thing happens on your feet. Get used to observing that difference. It can be very helpful in your practice.
Large Intestine Meridian

LI 20

LI 4

LI 1
Putting Yin and Yang to Practical Use with the Meridians

The concept is that we want to bring Yin energy to the Yin meridians and bring Yang energy to the Yang meridians. This isn’t a hard and fast rule, but it’s frequently the case, and a great place to start.

We use the Yin meridians to deeply nourish the organs connected with them because Yin has such a strong nourishing and supportive energy. When working with them, we usually go slower, working more quietly, and building up to deeper pressure. (Don’t just go shoving into the Yin meridians though. Start with skin contact, then take your time and gently sink through the layers of tissue to figure out what feels right.)

If we want to build up and nourish the lungs, we’ll use the Lung meridian directly. However, if there’s something going on with the lungs—congestion, for example—then we’ll use the Large Intestine meridian. Together, this pair of meridians has more power to create change and bring balance back to this organ system, than if we worked with just one meridian.

When we’re working with a Yang meridian, we can be a little more vigorous. We can use a lighter touch because we’re working more quickly. The attitude to have here is that we’re using Yang energy to work with the Yang meridian. This is how we get the energy flowing, clear out heat (for a fever), and flush out pathogens and congestion. We would use the more active, Yang meridian to address the symptoms of a cold. Then use the quieter, Yin meridian to build up and stabilize the lungs to get more Qi.

The Large Intestine meridian is also great to address any pain that occurs anywhere along its pathway.
Spleen Meridian

The Spleen and Stomach are our next pairing. We’re working with leg meridians now. Just remember that with the legs, the Yin and Yang sides don’t equate to the front and back of the legs. They’re more aligned with the inside and outside of the legs. You can feel how the skin on the outside of your thigh, and even wrapping around to the back, is different from the skin on the inside of your thigh. Those are the Yin and Yang areas on the legs.

The Spleen meridian is Yin, and it’s closer to the front of your leg than any other. It begins on the big toe at the medial base of the nail bed (on the outside of the toe). It runs up the leg and moves internally at the top of the thigh near the groin area. Then it comes closer to the surface on the abdomen, travels up the side of the body, and ends on the side of your chest between the 6th and 7th ribs.

The Spleen meridian is key to digestive function, absorbing nutrients, and having plenty of great Qi and vitality. It’s also a very important meridian for women in terms of our reproductive health.
Stomach Meridian

The Stomach meridian is paired with the Spleen meridian. It’s a big, long, Yang meridian and it’s a little special because it’s found on the chest and belly—the Yin side of your body. It’s the only Yang meridian on the Yin side of your body. (I know, I know—I said the Yang meridians were all on the back! I promise we won’t be breaking the rules every time!)

It begins just below the eye, then goes down the cheek to the jaw, and then turns to come back up to the “corner of the head.” Then the Stomach meridian comes back down the head, goes down the throat, down the chest, across the abdomen and then runs along the Yang surface of the leg (just a little to the outside of the thigh and lower leg).

The Stomach meridian comes across the front of the ankle and ends on the second toe. (Just like the Lung and Large Intestine meridians are on the thumb and index finger, the Spleen and Stomach meridians are on the big toe and second toe.)
Spleen and Stomach Working Together

The Spleen and Stomach meridians are all about digestion, and they work with the digestive system in the same way the Lung and Large Intestine meridians work with the respiratory system. So, this means if we have digestive issues, like ulcers, bloating or cramps, we use the Stomach meridian, which is Yang, to clear all that out. Then we can go in with the Spleen meridian, which is Yin; to strengthen, support, and balance the digestive system. That helps us absorb more nutrients.

I think it’s so cool that the Stomach meridian goes along the mouth and jaw. Chewing is a big part of digestion, right? It’s Yang, so we can use it to clear up issues in its path, which means things like tooth abscesses. And like the Yang, Large Intestine meridian, we can use the Stomach meridian to clear out heat.

Let’s talk about heat for a little bit here. Heat is fever, inflammation, an abscess, or an acidic stomach. It’s all those hot, inflamed things that can get swollen, red, and painful. So, that’s what the Yang meridians can help clear out and with practice you’ll know which meridian to use.

Just like it’s cool that the Stomach meridian goes along the mouth and jaw, which are important for digestion, it’s pretty cool that the Stomach meridian runs through the nipple. It makes sense if you think in terms of nourishment, right? The stomach and spleen are all about feeding ourselves, nourishment, nutrition, digestion—all of that good stuff.

In terms of positioning, the Stomach meridian is on the outside of the leg, along the same side as our pinky toe (but it doesn’t end at the pinky toe). The Spleen meridian is on the inside of your leg, directly opposite. Remember how the Lung and Large Intestine meridians mirror each other as they run up your arm? Well, the Stomach and Spleen meridians do the same thing as they run up your leg. All the paired meridians mirror one another this way.

By the way, the Stomach meridian goes through your ankle—right through the outside of your ankle. Then it crosses the top of your foot and ends out on the second toe. It’s like the Yang side of your body twists a little as your leg becomes your foot. The Spleen meridian goes through the ankle on the inside of your foot. It doesn’t have to cross the foot, though—it just travels through the arch and ends in your big toe.
Meridians, Qi, and Points

Meridians are where the Qi flows through the body and points are places along each meridian where you can access that Qi. So, we can use points to clear up anything in the immediate area.

If there’s any pain present, that usually means Qi is blocked in that area. So, you just rub that point a bit but it’s not just a muscle massage. Hold in mind your intention of moving Qi as you massage the point. Ask yourself: “How do I move Qi?” Let your body answer. Think of it as a moving meditation, a kind of contact meditation. Let your left brain kind of just move to the back and observe what happens. Trust what emerges from your body and it will work. You’ll be moving Qi and issues will clear up more quickly, and you might even be surprised at yourself. “Hey, that really worked!” It’s really an amazing experience. So, I encourage you to take your time and really experiment with it.

One point affects the entire meridian. You can be working down on the toe of the Stomach meridian and it can help ease a toothache. That’s pretty cool.

So, a point affects its immediate location and it affects the whole meridian. They also have broader effects, which took thousands of years for people to figure out. For example, one point might move Qi in general through the body; another point might nourish Yin throughout the whole body. Those are more physiological effects.

Just keep in mind that for almost every point, there are three different potential effects: the immediate area, the meridian and the body as a whole. Don’t make yourself crazy with this. Just keep it in mind as you experiment and contemplate. Then just see what comes up.
What’s the Point?

Way back at the beginning of all this meridian medicine and Chinese healing, the points were given names, not numbers. However, the Chinese language uses images instead of letters, so translating all that was a little tough for foreigners. To make it easier, Westerners gave the points numbers.

However, even that was pretty complicated. First of all, the Chinese characters were translated into something called “Pinyin.” Pinyin was created by Germans, which creates another step in the translation process. So, then we have the name of the point in Pinyin, written in the Roman alphabet.

Let’s talk about Lung point 2, or Lung 2, the second point on the Lung meridian. In Pinyin, it’s “Yun Men.” I think it’s something of a loss that we only use numbers for the point names. The true names were figured out by sages and there’s so much poetry within them that we can’t easily comprehend. For instance, Lung 2’s true name is something like: “Cloud Gate.” If you let yourself think about that for a long time, it can really teach you a lot about the point. If you spend time with each point—touching it, sensing it, contemplating the name, etc.—you can develop a deeper understanding of the points.

Although it is a lot easier to just say Lung 2, isn’t it?

There are 365 points and they’re all numbered. Each meridian has a different amount of points. The Lung meridian has 11 points, the Large Intestine meridian has 20 points, the Stomach meridian has 45 points and the Spleen meridian has 21 points. We’re just going to talk about a few points on each meridian.
Lung Points

Feel your clavicle (your collarbone) and move your fingers out toward your shoulder. Keep your fingers on the underside of your collarbone. That’s where Lung 2 is, right there on the edge.

Here’s a little trick for finding it. Take your thumb and point it right back toward the inner part of your shoulder. If you raise your elbow out in front of you, your thumb will feel a little hollow open up beneath your clavicle, wedged in by the side of your shoulder. You’ve just found Lung 2! Or you can call it Yun Men or Cloud Gate if you feel special.

Here’s another trick. I’m full of tricks. Put your hand straight out in front of you like you’re going to shake someone’s hand. Then feel into the point area (with the hand that’s not outstretched), and you’ll feel this deep, soft indentation. Congratulations, you’ve found Lung 2 again.

By the way, if you hold yourself in a way that keeps the point open on both sides, that’s great posture. It opens up your chest to support strong breathing. Lung 2 is a great point to work if someone has a hard time breathing or even if they’re stressed and just need to take a deep breath (sometimes we breathe shallowly when we’re stressed). Just focusing on opening up this point can circulate a lot of air and energy.

To find Lung 1, just go straight down about an inch from Lung 2. When you’re on the rib cage, you’ve got Lung 1—the beginning of the meridian.

After Lung 2, the Lung meridian goes up and outside of the biceps. And it travels along the thumb side of the forearm.

We’re going to talk about one more Lung point—Lung 10. This is a great point to help relieve a sore throat. I know that contradicts what I told you earlier—that we use Yang meridians to relieve symptoms and this is a Yin meridian. However, Lung 10 is a special Yin point. Over hundreds of years, people recognized that working with Lung 10 also helped to relieve sore throats.

Lung 10 is on the fleshy part of your palm at the base of your thumb. There’s a bone in there reaching from your wrist to your lowest thumb joint. You can find the ends of it with the index finger and thumb of your opposite hand. Find the middle of that bone, where the Yin and Yang skin of your hand meet—so closer to your palm side. If you run your finger along that bone, you’ll feel a little dip. When you press, you may feel a little discomfort there. The physical dip is important because that’s where the point is located.

See, you’re already an expert on Lung 2 and Lung 10.
Large Intestine Points

Now we’re up to Large Intestine 4. Don’t use this point on women who are pregnant, unless you want to induce contractions and labor; it has the tendency to do that.

Large Intestine 4’s big claim to fame is that it relieves headaches. You may already be aware of this. It’s one of those things floating around out there in the general public. Remember, this meridian goes across the jaw and ends at the nose. So, it can help with tooth pain, jaw pain and sinus issues. It’s paired with the Lung meridian, so it can also help with coughs. Not to mention that it’s good for local pain right there on the hand. Open your hand and lightly pinch around in the pad between your thumb and index finger. You should get a sense of it right in the center of that pad. Feel free to press, but it may be very sensitive, so be aware of that.

Then we have another important point, Large Intestine 20. This one helps clear up sinus pain, clears out your nose and can even open up the Qi in the area to ease toothaches. It’s located right next to your nostril. So if you put your finger there and press—and you may have to push your nose out of the way a little bit—you’ll feel a little dip. That’s Large Intestine 20.
Spleen Points

Spleen 6 is another point you don’t want to use with pregnant women. Although it is great for menstrual pain, other PMS symptoms and overall menstrual health. To find Spleen 6, go to the inner ankle bone. Reach down with your hand and place the tip of your pinky finger on the highest point of your inner ankle bone. (You’re using the opposite hand of whatever ankle you choose. So, if you’re touching your right ankle bone, use your left hand.) Where your palm lands is the area of Spleen 6. Press around in that area, right on the inside of your leg.

Moving on to Spleen 15. This one is right on the belly. Spleen 15 is extremely helpful for digestive issues and it also nourishes the Spleen itself—which leads to improved digestion.

Spleen 15 is located straight across from the belly button, right at the edge of one of the abdominal muscles you see if you have a six-pack. If you don’t have a six-pack, you can find the area of Spleen 15 by going straight across from the belly button and straight down from the nipple. Spleen 15 is located where the two lines meet.

I’m going to teach you another method of measurement for these things. Since everyone’s body is a different size, we can’t just say “four inches to the right” because that would mean different things on different people. This measurement is called a “cun,” pronounced “Tsoon.” (It’s spelled that way because of Pinyin; I can’t explain it.) The cun is your thumb width. It translates to an inch, but it’s a personal inch—your inch is going to be different from your neighbor’s inch. No judging.

So, if you’re working on someone else, just glance at their thumb and see if it’s wider or narrower than yours. That will make it easier to adjust to another person’s measurements, so you can find their points more easily.

Spleen 15 is 4 cun from the navel.
Stomach Points

Stomach 25 is 2 cun away from the navel on the same horizontal line as Spleen 15. If you’re just sitting around on the couch, you can massage these points. They won’t feel anything like Large Intestine 4 in the webbing of your index finger and thumb. However, you’ll be able to notice these points on your stomach with some practice.

Stomach 36 is known as the command point of the abdomen. So, if there’s anything going on in your abdomen at all, Stomach 36 will help. I can’t say enough about how helpful this point is for all things digestion and all things Qi. Do you want more Qi? Work Stomach 36 and you get more Qi.

Stomach 36 is called “Zu San Li,” which means “Leg Three Miles” or “Walk Three Miles.” Let’s say you have no problem running two miles but then you can’t go anymore; massage this point and then you can go for three miles.

Stomach 36 is on the outside of your lower leg, just below your knee. Sit in a chair and wrap your hand around your knee, with your index finger lined up just below your kneecap (so, you’re not actually touching your knee . . . sorry for mixing you up there). Remember, it’s on the outside of the leg, not the inside. (That’s a totally different point and will get you a totally different effect.) Where your pinky lands, on the outside of your shin bone, is the area of Stomach 36.
Wrapping It All Up

Your thinking mind can help you put all this information together, maybe combined with some of the information you’ve learned in other classes. Although your feeling, experiencing, and wondering self is the most helpful when contacting the points. You can use that intuitive sense for figuring out the right pressure, how long to work the points and all that good stuff. Let your linear thoughts take a break—or take notes, if they can’t take a break—and pay attention to yourself or whoever you’re working on. Ask them if they want more or less pressure, or if they need more attention on a particular point.

Go easy on yourself if you’re a newcomer to working with the points and meridians. The best research to help you understand this is your own experience. It’s not something you can master by reading books or looking at diagrams. Learning the meridians also means learning your own intuition, which is a skill that can help in every area of your life.
Class 2
Heart meridian

The Heart meridian is a Yin meridian, and it starts right in the middle of your armpit. If you’re not busy and nobody is looking, you can just stick your finger in the middle of your armpit to find it.

If you hold your arm out, palm up, you can trace the path of the meridian from your armpit, down your inner arm on the pinky side, and over your elbow (the bone of our elbow on the pinky side of your arm), then down through your forearm to the tip of your pinky finger.

This meridian is wonderful for nourishing the Heart itself, and also for calming the mind and spirit. Chinese medicine teaches that the spirit resides in the Heart. So if our mind or emotions are all out of whack, it’s a sign that somethings up with the Heart. If you’re not following your Heart, you can become really unhappy, right? Those are some non-physical signs that you might want to work with the Heart meridian. This is also an example of how Chinese medicine integrates body, mind, and spirit. I just love that!

The Heart meridian starts at Heart 1 in the center of the armpit, and is named “Summit Spring.” If you spend time in contemplation with the names of the points, it can really yield a lot of information. So, I encourage you to do that.

The meridian ends at Heart 9, on the inside of your pinky finger, facing your fourth finger.
Small Intestine meridian

The Small Intestine meridian starts on the other side of your pinky, opposite of the Heart meridian. The pinky is special—it’s the only finger with two meridians on it.

The Small Intestine is the Yang partner of the Heart. Therefore, it mirrors the pathway of the Heart meridian going up your arm, but it’s on the Yang side - on the back of your arm. If you let your arm hang at your side but turn your palm forward, the Small Intestine meridian pretty much just runs down the back of your arm in a straight line through to your pinky finger. If you let your palm turn toward your hip (which it naturally wants to do), the meridian “twists” a little. When you’re looking at diagrams, the lines can seem to get all zigzaggy and twisty, but they’re really not.

The Small Intestine meridian ends up by your ear, but first it crosses your shoulder. So, any shoulder pain should make you think of the Small Intestine meridian. It’s really great for clearing heat from the body, especially in that area.

Small Intestine 19 is by the ear, right in front of the ear canal. Actually, there are three points in that area, but we’ll just talk about Small Intestine 19 for now. If you press your finger in front of that little “flap” sticking up just above your earlobe, and then open and close your jaw a few times, you can feel the joint move. Small Intestine 19 is in between the bone of your jaw and that ear flap (tragus).

You can probably imagine this is a great point to work for ear pain, infection, or stuffy ears. You can try it the next time you’re on a plane and your ears need to pop. Just rub this point, or any points in front of the ear, and open and close your jaw.

The Small Intestine is a Yang meridian, which means it runs through the back of your body. If you hold your arm out, palm up, and bend your elbow, the meridian passes over the bone on the outside of your elbow (not the big bone in the middle). Then it runs up your triceps, the big muscle on the back of your arm. It zigzags across your shoulder blade, touches on the C7 vertebra in your neck, then wraps around your neck and goes up your face. (I couldn’t make this stuff up.)

If you squeeze the tip of your pinky, you’ll work both the Heart and Small Intestine meridians. That trick actually works for all the meridians in your arms. If you forget everything in this class and your dog eats these notes, just remember to squeeze the tips of your fingers around the base of your nail beds, and that way you can activate any of the upper body meridians.
Crash Course in the Five Elements

Chinese medicine focuses on Five Elements; each associated with a different color, different parts of the body, and different things in nature. The elements are Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water. To this day, I can’t figure out why they chose Metal instead of air. I’m just the messenger. All of the Organs and meridians are categorized according to the elements. The Fire element is associated with the Heart and Small Intestine. (When we say “Organs” in Chinese medicine, we also mean the meridians.)

The Lungs and Large Intestine are Metal. The Spleen and Stomach are Earth. The Five Elements come from the theory of Taoist Cosmology. Taoism was the philosophy in vogue in China thousands of years ago when all this theory came about. Chinese medicine is built on this philosophy, which is why we’re talking about it.

Taoist Cosmology teaches that there is an energetic source of everything that we experience in life—everything we see, touch, and taste; all the objects around us, all of the elements in the world, and even our thoughts and emotions. It all comes from this place—call it the source, the Tao, God, or whatever you want—where nothing exists, yet everything exists all at once. All of the energy of the universe is contained within it but that energy is undifferentiated, meaning nothing has any form. Everything is the same; everything is One.

We’ll call it the “One” in these notes. And from that place, something happens. Some kind of energetic trigger that causes a differentiation in all that energy—a primal separation of polarities. So, from One we now have Two, and that’s Yin and Yang.

Yin and Yang are essentially the parents of everything in the universe. They separate into the Five Elements, and from the Five Elements, all the different forms and manifestations in the world arise.

When we separate the Organs and the meridians into Yin and Yang, and into the Five Elements, we’re reminded that human beings are like everything else in the manifested world—we ultimately emerge from the Tao, from the One source of undifferentiated energy.

It might seem like a lot right now, but it can actually be helpful to look at the meridians in terms of the Five Elements. Instead of trying to remember 12 separate things, you can group them into Yin and Yang, and then into the Five Elements.

As you learn and progress in Chinese medicine, it might make sense for you to look at everything through the lens of the Five Elements. Or you might be more comfortable sticking with Yin and Yang.

We’ve already covered two elements: Metal and Earth. We’ll cover Wood later. Right now, we’re just finishing up Fire. It’s the only element with four meridians in it, so it’s special. Now, let’s move on to Water.
Meridians by Element

- **Fire**
  - Heart
  - S. Intestine
  - Pericardium
  - San Jiao

- **Wood**
  - Liver
  - Gallbladder

- **Earth**
  - Spleen
  - Stomach

- **Water**
  - Kidney
  - Bladder

- **Metal**
  - Lung
  - L. Intestine
Kidney meridian

The Kidney and Bladder meridians are a pair, and they’re connected with the Water element. Chinese medicine makes a big deal out of the Kidneys, so this is an important Yin meridian. It supports the male and female reproductive organs and it has a lot to do with creative force. It’s the most Yin part of the body, and therefore supports the Yin part of us that really nourishes our entire being—our overall vitality, health, longevity, and happiness . . . so we want to pay extra special attention to the Kidneys.

The point Kidney 1 is right below the ball of the foot in the very center, at the base of the big thick pad that takes most of your weight when you stand on your tippy toes. It runs up behind the inner ankle, then up the leg on the inside. It dives through the pelvis, then comes up through the stomach, very close to the belly button—just half a cun away. Then it travels straight up the chest, veers a little to the outside, goes between all of the ribs, and ends beneath your collarbone, close to your breastbone.

Put your fingers on your breastbone, spread them, and feel out for the grooves between your ribs. Where those grooves meet your breastbone are many of the Kidney points. They may be a little sore when you press on them.
Bladder meridian

The Bladder is the longest meridian in the body, and it’s the Yang partner of the Kidney meridian. There are 67 points on it, which is more than any other meridian. We’ll be studying them all. (Just kidding.)

Bladder 1 is at the inside corner of the eye. If you put your finger there and press gently toward your nose, you’ll feel it. It goes up across the head, then down the back. This meridian tries to confuse you because it splits. It travels in two parallel lines down the back. If you touch halfway between the edge of the shoulder blade and the center line of the spine, you’re in the area of one of the meridian’s lines. Most of the important points are on that line.

The other line passes right over the edge of the scapula. Don’t flip out about that scapula line though—we won’t be focusing on it here. Even when I was in acupuncture school, we barely talked about it. Most of the time you’ll be working with the inside line that is closer to the spine.

Anyway, the outer line comes to an end on the sacrum. The inner line continues by crossing your gluteus muscles (your butt) and moving down the center of the back of your leg. In the middle of your calf, it veers toward the outside of your leg. It hugs the outside of your Achilles tendon (it’s a Yang meridian, remember?) and travels to your pinky toe, where it ends at Bladder 67.

The Bladder meridian is particularly helpful when you remember that we can use the meridians to clear up any pain that occurs in their path. This one has a really, really long path! We can use this Yang meridian to resolve pain and move out old energy, and then we can use the Yin, Kidney meridian to restore balance and nourish.
Heart meridian Points

I chose to focus on Heart 5 and 7 here, even though they both have the same function. To tell you why, first I have to talk about the Heart in Chinese medicine a little bit more. I mentioned that the concept of the Heart includes the Spirit, mind, and emotions. You want your Heart to be a calm, peaceful, healthy, and happy environment. That way, your spirit and mind can rest there. If your Heart is agitated, then your spirit might not be comfortable there and might take a little vacation. So when we say, “I’m losing my mind!” — in Chinese medicine, the idea is that you actually are. Your mind isn’t comfortable in your Heart.

Anxiety, stress, manic depression, sleeplessness, and the jitters (or anything related to emotional or mental upset) falls within the realm of the Heart. When we work with the Heart, we’re not just nourishing and healing our physical Heart; it includes all of the intangible good stuff. When we work holistically with body, mind, and spirit, it’s a big undertaking. I love that Chinese medicine is up to the task.

We are back to Heart 5 and 7. When we get agitated or stressed out, and we’re having a hard time calming down, then we can work with Heart 5 or 7. They’re both on the inside of the wrist. I don’t spend a lot of time worrying about which one to use. They’re both good. I use my intuition to tell me which is right for me in the moment.

Heart 7 is right on the wrist crease, on the Yin side of your hand. If you turn your palm up, it’s on the pinky side of your arm. There’s a small bone at the base of your palm on that side, where the skin of your palm becomes the skin of your wrist. That bone is the marker for Heart 7.

Heart 5 is one cun toward the elbow from Heart 7.

Neither of these points are going to shout their location at you. They’re more subtle than that. (They are Yin points, after all.) So when you seek them out, get quiet and feel into them with a kind of reverence. Just be very honorable and present when working with these Heart points.
Small Intestine Points

The Small Intestine meridian is Yang. Therefore, SI 9 and 10 have a very different energy than the Heart points, although they’re still related to the Heart.

They’re very much associated with physical shoulder pain, and they connect the energy from the torso out to the arms and back. This means these points help to move Qi from the core of the body out through the limbs; and then back again, and then out again, and then back again . . . it’s like a cycle and the Qi can get jammed up at any point.

Remember where Lung 2 is located? If not, go read about it again and then come back. I’ll wait. Okay, do you remember Lung 2 now? Small Intestine 9 and 10 are on the other side of the body from Lung 2. When working with Small Intestine 9 and 10 for shoulder pain, take your time. Don’t force anything since Small Intestine 9 can be especially sore. However, once you’ve felt your way into the point, you can get a little more rigorous with it. Ask your patient to move their hand and fingers as you work the points; that helps to move the Qi around.

To find Small Intestine 9, look at the crease of the armpit from the back. Go up about one cun. You’re now in Small Intestine 9’s territory. To find 10, go up a bit diagonally from 9 toward the front of the shoulder (but still on the back). Small Intestine 10 is behind the bones of the shoulder there. If you put your hand over your shoulder, so your fingers are wrapping around the top, you should be able to feel a more bony area. This is the area of Small Intestine 10. It’s basically right on the shoulder joint back there.

So, Small Intestine 9 should feel squishy and soft, and Small Intestine 10 should feel bony.
Kidney Points

We’re going to cover Kidney 1 and 3. Kidney 1 is on the bottom of your foot—we already mentioned how to find that. It’s the lowest point on the entire body. It connects us with the earth, so this is a great point to focus on when we need grounding energy or to calm our minds.

Here’s another way to find Kidney 1: Place your thumb between your big toe and second toe, then draw your fingers straight down, just past the fleshy, callused pad on the ball of your foot. Tada! That is Kidney 1!

If you’re stressed out or overwhelmed, you’ve probably got a lot of energy moving around in your head. Kidney 1 can counteract that. It’s like throwing water on a fire. (Remember, the Heart is the Yin Organ of the Fire element.) So, if you’ve got all this crazy-making Heart Fire energy in your head, you can douse that Fire with Kidney 1 (the Kidneys are the Yin Organ of the Water element). Cool, right?

Kidney 3 is right next to your ankle—positioned behind it on the inside of your foot. It’s basically halfway between your ankle and your Achilles tendon, but it varies so don’t just assume it’s always right in the middle. Kidney 3 is an important point, called “Taxi Xi” or “Supreme Stream.” If the Heart houses the spirit, the Kidneys house the life force. You’ll remember that we said the Kidneys are very important in Chinese medicine because they’re the seat of your vitality, happiness, health, and overall wellbeing. Well, Kidney 3 is a great point for helping the Kidneys consolidate the life force.

Okay, what the heck does that mean? Let’s say you have six cups of life force. You don’t want to spill it. By “consolidate” we mean contain or prevent it from running all over the place so you have none left. Where would your life force go? Oh, I don’t know. Maybe you overwork. Maybe you’re burning the candle at both ends. Maybe you’re getting a little freaked out trying to do your job, raise your kids, have a good relationship, eat organic food, exercise, save the planet, and learn all the meridians at the same time. You might start to feel exhausted or find you just can’t “bounce back” the way you could years ago.

We all have to overwork sometimes; it just happens. Paying attention to Kidney 3 helps to consciously compensate for those times when we’re stretched too thin. It can really help people do what they have to do and get done what they have to get done.

If you want to consolidate your “bounce back,” then work Kidney 3. It’s really nice to have somebody hold that point for you, as though they’re holding and nourishing your life force. It’s very easy to integrate a little Kidney 3 love into any massage or body work you do.
Bladder Points

Bladder 57 is on the back of the leg, right on the calf. When you feel around on the calf, you should feel the hard length of the Achilles tendon reaching up into the leg. Eventually, it’s going to meet muscle, and that feels soft and squishy. Where the firm tendon meets the squishy part, is in Bladder 57 territory. Press around in there but not too hard. This point can be full of Qi and it can hurt when you press.

This is a very powerful point for relieving back pain. (Remember, the Bladder meridian runs all the way up and down the back of the body.) I like to think of working this point as opening a faucet. You open the faucet and all the blocked energy just runs right on down the meridian. It just pours right out.

Speaking of bringing the energy down, let’s talk about Bladder 60. This point is on the other side of the foot from Kidney 3. A good trick is to just take your thumb and forefinger and just pinch these two points at the same time—right on opposite sides of the Achilles tendon. Both points are connected with the Water element; one is Yin and the other is Yang, so they work really well together.

Bladder 60 brings the energy down so hard and fast that you shouldn’t use it with pregnant women (unless they’re actually in labor or giving birth—then Bladder 60 can be helpful). As long as you’re not working with a pregnant woman, you can use Bladder 60 to release stuck energy and relieve pain anywhere along the Bladder meridian.

By the way, you’ll see the Bladder meridian referred to as UB (for urinary bladder) or BL in different sources. It’s just something to keep in mind so you don’t get confused.

Now, we’ve gotten through 8 of the 12 meridians. Look at that! That was not too painful at all, right? Next time, we’re going to do the Liver and Gallbladder, and the San Jiao and Pericardium meridians. It’s going to be very exciting.
Class 3
Pericardium Meridian

Let’s start with the Pericardium meridian, which is a Yin meridian. Anatomically, the pericardium is the sac that surrounds and protects the heart, which is why it’s also called the “heart protector.” Because of this close relationship to the heart, you’ll notice that its functions are very similar to the heart itself. In fact, the two are often used interchangeably. We can use the Pericardium meridian to nourish the heart and to calm the Spirit, mind, and emotions. The Pericardium meridian starts on the chest, half an inch or so from the nipple, toward the outside of the body. It runs all the way down the center of the arm, through the palm, to the third fingertip. It only has nine points, so it’s a nice, simple meridian to learn.

Its Yang partner is the San Jiao meridian, a.k.a. the Triple Heater or Triple Burner (“San” means “Three” and “Jiao” means “Burner”). It begins on the fourth finger, goes up the Yang side of your arm, and travels over your big elbow knob (the big bone that protrudes when you bend your elbow). It then continues up your arm and across the back of your shoulders, goes up the side of your neck, and ends on the outer tip of your eyebrow. In keeping with our previously established Yin and Yang meridian tradition, we can use the San Jiao meridian to clear things out of the body.

The Pericardium and San Jiao meridians are part of the Fire element (along with the Heart and Small Intestine meridians). If we just keep in mind that they’re part of the Fire element, and the San Jiao meridian is Yang, it makes sense that we can use San Jiao to clear heat or fire from the body. If you don’t feel like memorizing what all of the meridians do, you can get the picture by remembering whether a meridian is Yin or Yang, and what element it’s associated with. “Oh, this is a Yang meridian in a big Yang element—Fire. So, I can use it to clear heat.”

When we talk about “heat” in the body, we’re talking about anything that literally generates too much warmth—like inflammation, a fever, or an abscess. A person who gets angry over little things might have a red face, right? Some of us even use the phrase “fired up.” By working on the San Jiao meridian, you can bring some of that energy down.

Due to its location, we can use it for issues in the shoulder, neck, head, and ear. It’s especially great for earaches. If you gently press behind your earlobe, you’ll feel a soft spot. That’s a big San Jiao point. The meridian wraps really tightly around the back of the ear, loops over in the front, and then moves up to the outside of your eyebrow.

I just want to make the point again that in diagrams, the meridians can start to look really twisty and turny on the arms. That’s because you can flip your palm every which way, but your upper arm doesn’t move with it. The bottom half of your arm (forearm) moves, but not the upper half. So, when you’re tracing meridians yourself, just make sure you’re dealing with the correct side of the arm—the Yin or Yang side. If you try drawing the meridians on your own arm, you’ll really get to see this effect in action.
Qi Stagnation

The meridians have a lot to do with clearing Qi stagnation, so we should definitely talk about what that means.

When Qi is flowing freely throughout the body, everything is great. I’m feeling good, I’m healthy, I do some skipping, and I sing a little song. However, if something happens and the Qi gets blocked in one of my meridians (or in multiple meridians) then the Qi isn’t flowing. It gets all backed up and I’m no longer having such a good time. That’s called “Qi stagnation.”

There are different levels of Qi stagnation. At first, it’s just blocked energy. We might feel that as tension, tightness, or pain. If we can just unblock the meridians and get that Qi flowing again, then the discomfort disappears. That’s one reason why Meridian Massage, acupuncture, and anything that consciously works with the Qi, can dissolve muscle pain so quickly.

If we don’t remove those blocks early on, the Qi stays blocked in there for years or maybe even decades. Then it can physically manifest into something more serious like a lump. Emotionally, Qi stagnation manifests as anxiety, irritability, and unhappiness. Imagine you’re driving your car and you get stuck. Okay, that’s one thing and might not sound too bad. But if you sit there for too long, you may get upset. Now, you’re mentally and emotionally stuck, as well as physically.

What causes Qi stagnation? There are three broad categories. First, you can have a physical impact—walking into a door, bumping your leg on the coffee table, falling, etc. Then you have a bruise as a result of that physical trauma to your body. In Chinese medicine, the bruise is just a manifestation of blocked Qi.

The second cause of blocked Qi is climatic factors, a.k.a. “external pathogenic factors.” Here, we’re talking about the weather. If it’s too damp, cold, hot, or dry, that can interrupt the flow of Qi. When we bundle up against the cold, we are protecting ourselves from external climatic factors invading our body and hindering our Qi flow. Chinese medicine recognizes that almost any kind of weather can do this: wind, cold, humidity, etc. Sleeping with the window open on a cool, humid night might cause you to wake up with a stiff neck. Any kind of excess in weather is really not ideal.

The third thing that can cause Qi stagnation is “internal pathogenic factors.” Now, we’re talking about emotions. Too much fear, anger, worry, or hyperactivity is also not a good thing. If we’re trying to be polite and smiling, but inside we’re flipping out, then we’re blocking that emotion, right? It’s the same thing if we’re pretending not to be afraid or denying our own unhappiness. And sometimes we have to do that. I’m not saying we should freak out on someone at a dinner party when we learn that they don’t recycle. We can restrain our true emotions when the need comes up. However, it’s also important to express our emotions in a healthy way as much as possible.
Qi Stagnation (cont.)

Although, if it gets to be a habit, or a way of living and being, then that really blocks our Qi flow. So, this emotional and mental aspect of Chinese medicine is as important as any other. It really requires a lot of self-awareness and self-cultivation to be a happier, healthier person. So, when someone says that something hurts, that’s Qi stagnation. It’s fascinating when someone has different areas of pain and we notice they’re all on the same meridian.

If we can unblock the Qi, the manifestations in our mind, body, and emotions become harmonious again. There are different ways to get the Qi moving: pressure, needles, stretching, applying heat, Yoga, Qigong, or Tai Chi; those are all good methods of moving Qi. I like to encourage people to feel out what works for them because there’s no limit to the possibilities of getting your Qi in gear.

People come up with some really innovative ideas and techniques. If you use the tools you have, set your mind and intention to moving your Qi, then things will start to change and arise. When you’re working with someone else to move their stagnant Qi, you can set your intention, connect with your own Qi, and let yourself feel into the energy of how healing happens.
Liver Meridian

Now, we’ve made it to the Liver meridian, which is a big deal in terms of Qi flow. The Liver is a Yin meridian. Along with its Yang partner, the Gallbladder meridian, it has the primary job of keeping Qi moving through all the meridians (that’s not all it does, but it’s a big part of its job description).

I think of the Liver as an internal fan. On a hot, stuffy day, a fan keeps the air moving and it feels much more comfortable. You don’t want it going too fast but a nice airflow can make all the difference. That’s how I think of the Liver moving Qi through the meridians.

The Liver meridian starts on the inside of the big toe (on the opposite side of the Spleen meridian, nestled up against the second toe). It runs up the top of the foot. If you flex your foot, you’ll feel a big tendon connecting the top of your foot to your leg. The meridian passes between that tendon and your inner ankle bone. It travels up the inside of your leg and circles tightly around the external genitals. So, this means it has a lot to do with sexual function and health. After that, it moves up, crosses the abdomen, and ends on the chest.

Stagnation in the Liver meridian can manifest as menstrual cramps. If it progresses from the energetic to the material, it can become a condition like endometriosis or ovarian cysts. Basically, the longer the issue goes unresolved, the more severe it becomes and then there may be even more things contributing to it. So, there’s more than one cause for longstanding stagnation and physical illness. That means it’s going to take more work to unblock that Qi.

The idea is to keep the Qi flowing, so the issues don’t arise in the first place. The best of the ancient, Chinese doctors could prevent conditions from happening. We can look at it from a different point of view, and try to remember how the body functions or which symptoms are caused by which conditions—there are a million different things we can come up with; but I just keep my mind on smooth, abundant, flowing Qi. It’s the answer to healing many ailments and can prevent many conditions from escalating.
Gallbladder Meridian

The Gallbladder is the Yang partner of the Liver meridian. Its big claim to fame is that it’s the only meridian that travels down the side of the body. If pain crops up on one side of the body, like a one-sided headache, that’s a clue that the Gallbladder meridian might be involved.

It starts on the head, at the outside corner of the eye. It goes back toward the ear, then it moves up the head, dips back behind the ear, then loops back around over the top of the head to the center of the forehead, and turns around again. (It can’t seem to make up its mind where it wants to go.) Then it comes back down the side of the head on the back. It helps to imagine the Gallbladder meridian just covering the side of the head (on both sides) in a zigzag, looping way. Clearly, a lot of stagnation can happen in the head.

From the head, it moves to the top of the shoulder. This is also an area that frequently gets blocked. If someone comes up behind you for a surprise shoulder massage, they either do it just right and you’re happy, or they send you flying. This Gallbladder point on the shoulder is a powerful one for moving Qi down, so don’t use it on pregnant women. It moves internally at your shoulder where it dives into your body. Then it emerges and moves down the flank. It zigzags along the waist and pelvis, travels down the outside of the leg, and ends on the fourth toe.

The Gallbladder meridian is famous for its zigzag movements. Gallbladder emotional issues can manifest as indecision, not knowing what you want, or getting frustrated because you’re going back and forth on an issue. If we can nourish the Gallbladder, we can clear up that wavering mind.

The Gallbladder and Liver meridians are connected, so when Qi starts to stagnate—maybe because the Liver gets a little overworked—it can manifest within the Gallbladder meridian.

Pain that might crop up along the Gallbladder meridian can be in the head, jaw, shoulder, knee, the side of your body, or your ankle; it covers a lot of area. It’s also a big meridian for sciatic pain. There are many big joints along this meridian that frequently get blocked up, so be gentle working on it. You can’t sink in as deeply as you might with some of the Yin meridians.

Just to review, the Gallbladder meridian travels through the center of the leg along the outside, and the Liver meridian travels through the center of the leg along the inside. Both the Gallbladder and San Jiao meridians wrap around the ear. The difference being that the San Jiao is wrapped much more tightly; it’s very close to the ear. If you wrap your fingers around your ear and feel where the cartilage meets the ridge on your head, that’s the San Jiao meridian. Now, widen your fingers a bit away from your ear, and you’re closer to the Gallbladder meridian.
Guess what? We’re done with all 12 meridians and you’re still here! Give yourself a pat on the back.

Now, keep reading because there’s still more to learn.

Since we’re done with all 12 meridians, you can see that by simply squeezing all the toes together, you can activate all of the meridians. Then go underneath to contact the Kidney meridian. The only toe that doesn’t have a meridian is the third one. (Actually, it has a “secret” meridian—an internal pathway from the Stomach meridian—but remember, we’re not focusing on the internal pathways here.)

If you scrunch all of your toes together and do the same to the tips of your fingers, you’ve stimulated all 12 meridians. If you try this on yourself or maybe on a guinea pig who will let you experiment on them, just pay attention to the feelings and changes within your body. You can really gain a lot of experience.

Now, on to the points!
Pericardium Points

We’re going to look at Pericardium 6 and 8. Remember, these points can have the same effects as Heart points—calming the heart and calming the spirit.

P6 is on the center of the inside of the wrist, two cun from the wrist crease. This isn’t a point that’s going to be very obvious when you press on it. It’s best to get used to measuring for it, and over time you’ll notice the profound effect it has on people.

P6 is perfect to work on if we’re anxious or upset. It helps settle anxiety in the chest and open up the breath. Think about when you’re stressed out—your breathing gets shallow and your chest tightens. P6 helps us inhale deeply and let everything go on a nice, long exhale. That’s definitely one way to calm your mind and spirit. We can also use P6 for seasickness and nausea.

Pericardium 8 is on the palm of your hand. You can find P8 by curling your middle finger down until it touches your palm. There you are! You can also just look straight down between your index and middle fingers.

This is a huge point for giving and receiving Qi, so it’s a big deal for hands-on body workers. You can practice with this point to see what experiences come up for you as you work on yourself or someone else. It’s a great point to help calm the spirit, and it’s easy to massage. Occasionally, people don’t want to be touched in too many places, but they’ll let you massage their hands. Working P8 can help soothe their worries.
San Jiao Points

Okay, next up is San Jiao 5. That’s on a Yang meridian, so it’s on the outside of the arm. It’s two cun proximal (toward the body) from the wrist crease; it’s basically on top of Pericardium 6.

This one has a little more zing to it than the Pericardium points. The Yang points are often a little more vocal, and we can use this point to reduce heat or hot emotions like anger. SJ5 is also good for relieving earaches and shoulder pain. So, if you’re working this point on someone, you can just feel the energy. Contemplate the movement of Qi and communicate with the other person. Since Qi is energy, simply directing our emotions and thoughts to it can effect and stimulate the flow.

San Jiao 21 is right in front of the ear, in the soft groove just over the cartilage (“ear flap”) that sticks out. If you open and close your jaw, you’ll feel it. There’s a big groove in there. There are actually three points in this area and San Jiao 21 is one of them. Don’t worry about finding the exact point of the three in here since they all have similar functions. Just take your time and pay attention to whoever you’re working on. They can probably tell you where the touch feels most relieving.

We use San Jiao 21 for ear pain, ear pressure, to get water out of our ear, jaw pain, TMJ, and other issues in this area.
Liver Points

Liver 2 is on the webbing between the big toe and second toe.

Remember, the Liver meridian goes up to the head, so it’s frequently used to relieve headaches. Headaches often come with a lot of heat, right? Especially if someone’s face or eyes are red, that’s a sign that there’s too much heat in the Liver meridian. In that case, I’ll come down to work points on the feet and bring that heat down. I’ll work Liver 2 and 3, and maybe throw in some Gallbladder meridian points to balance everything out.

If you get headaches, you might be able to relate to this; sometimes it just feels like all your energy is stuck up in your head. There’s a feeling of distention; the word “distention” is actually a big clue that Qi stagnation is taking place. The Qi in your whole body just feels like it’s all wrapped up in your head. For this reason, working points on the feet can help bring that energy back down.

Liver 3 is a little more proximal (toward the body) from the webbing, and between the bones leading to your big toe and second toe. Do you remember how Large Intestine 4 is in the thick webbing between the thumb and first finger? Liver 3 is in the same place but on the foot. So, find Liver 2 right on the webbing, and slide your finger proximally until you’ve passed the ball of your foot on the bottom. This point may be sensitive because it gets blocked up a lot.

I use Liver 3 frequently. It’s great for helping the “liver fan” run at the right speed without getting overworked. It just has a very nourishing, soothing, and balancing influence over the liver; whereas Liver 2 is more about clearing jammed up energy and bringing down heat. Someone with high blood pressure, a really explosive personality and anger issues, a child who throws tantrums, genital herpes, or any hot inflamed genital issues—those conditions are all examples of when to work on Liver 2.

You might find the Liver points (especially Liver 3), have more of a Yang feel to them even though the Liver is a Yin meridian. Here’s how I think of it: The Liver and Gallbladder are associated with the season of spring. They have a very bursting, eager, active energy to them. It’s a young energy, associated with birth and forceful growth—think of the energy it takes for sprouts to push up through the cold earth. That’s big energy. If we see that energy in a person, we call them angry or aggressive; but if it’s a plant, we say: “Oh look, the crocus is coming up.” It just takes a lot of force to move through obstacles and that’s what the Liver meridian is associated with.

If you find Liver 3 on someone, they might get cranky, and tell you it’s uncomfortable or say something similar to that; then you know you’re on the point. In that scenario, just lighten your touch and focus on getting the Qi moving.
Gallbladder Points

Gallbladder 21 is on the big muscle on your back, between your neck and your shoulder—the trapezius. It’s that area where most of us just love be massaged. It’s kind of got a reputation for stagnation because a lot of people get knots, tension, or tightness there.

Again, that’s stagnant Qi. Sometimes it is stagnant there for decades. It can be a “hurt so good” experience to have all that old Qi worked out in a massage. Sometimes it’s been there so long that when you massage it, it feels hard, almost like a rock.

Gallbladder 21 is great for headaches, neck pain, shoulder pain, and just working periodically to keep the Qi moving through the entire meridian. It’s a strong point for moving Qi down. (So, you already know the warning I’m going to give. Don’t use it on pregnant women!)

Gallbladder 34 is on the outside of the leg. (We’re on a Yang meridian, remember?) This is another one of those points that I chose to focus on because it’s such a big deal. It helps the flow of Qi throughout the entire meridian. It’s also important for healing ligaments and tendons anywhere in the body. Therefore, whiplash, wrist and ankle sprains, and shoulder cuff injuries are all influenced by GB34. It’s also great for sciatic, hip, shoulder, and head pain. In fact, if I’m working on someone with head pain; I’ll use Liver 2, Liver 3, and Gallbladder 34. It’s just great to open up the entire meridian and draw the energy down.

This point can be complicated to find. First, find the head of your fibula. Your fibula is one of the bones in your calf. It stretches from your knee to your ankle, and it’s more connected on the outside of the knee and ankle. If you feel for the big bone on your outer ankle, that’s actually the bottom of the fibula. It’s part of your leg bone. The head of the fibula is up by the knee; on the lower, lateral (outer) side of the knee.

If you start at the big ankle bone and follow it up, you’ll feel muscle all the way up, then the hard knob at the top of the bone. Once you find the head of the fibula, go down one cun and forward one cun. That’s the area for Gallbladder 34. This is one of those points that can be pretty tender and will probably alert you when you’re on it. If you’re working on someone, they might twitch a little or tell you that you’ve hit it. And that’s how you find Gallbladder 34.

So, there you have it.

There are six leg meridians—Liver, Gallbladder, Kidney, Bladder, Spleen, and Stomach. And there are Six arm meridians—Lung, Large Intestine, Heart, Small Intestine, Pericardium, and San Jiao

Yay! We’ve just got one more lesson to tie it all together.
Class 4
Beginnings and Endings

One of my favorite quotes about the meridians is “The 12 Channels are where beginners start and masters end.”

“Channels” is just another word for meridians (but you probably figured that out). This quote comes from the Spiritual Pivot, one of the oldest Chinese Medical texts we have. It’s part of The Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Internal Medicine. It goes on to point out that for beginners, this stuff doesn’t seem that difficult. However, masters know how hard it really is.

This quote always gives me pause. I know that for many of you taking this class, it’s been your first encounter with the meridians. It’s far from my first encounter, but I’ve still learned so much by putting this class together. I’m always amazed at how much more there is to learn about something that seems so simple. In a real sense, we’re all beginners together.
Meridians by the Clock

Qi flows through the 12 meridians in an orderly way. Think about the way blood flows through arteries and veins. It pumps away from the Heart and back in a closed system, very regularly. That’s similar to the way Qi moves through the meridians.

There are 12 meridians, and there are 24 hours in a day. Qi moves to a different meridian every two hours. So it starts with the Lungs around 3:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m., then moves to the Large Intestine from 5:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m., etc. We actually learned the meridians in the order that the Qi moves through them.

It’s so interesting to hear someone say that every day at 3:00 (or whatever hour) certain symptoms regularly arise for them. You can look up what meridian is active at that hour, and it often gives you a few clues as to what’s going on.

We can really organize the meridians in a circle, as though on a clock, and in the center we can put Yin and Yang giving rise to all of them. It’s important to remember that all of the meridians are really connected—they communicate and flow into one another, like the systems of a body.

When the Qi is flowing through the Lungs from 3:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m., what’s going on with the other meridians?

The Qi is actually just more full and prominent in the Lungs at that time. It’s not like the other meridians have no Qi in them at all. It’s just like it burns the brightest and strongest within the Lungs at that time. The same goes for the other meridians at their peak hours.

If you pay attention to what’s going on in your life and with the people around you, you can often notice the “peak” meridian or element at work. For example, Fire’s peak hours are from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. (the Heart), and then from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. (Small Intestine.) That’s all Fire time; that’s when the sun is highest in the sky, people are eating or chatting, and it’s just in the thick of everything. That’s not to say Fire isn’t present throughout the rest of the day though.

That’s the best and only answer I really have for this. Chinese medicine is like that—it can be confusing and seemingly contradictory; especially for Western minds that like to keep things orderly and in neat, separated, little categories. It doesn’t really work like that.

We should also remember that the meridians all have internal pathways, but it’s not hard to understand why we focus on the external pathways. Those are the points we can really influence, and those affect the internal pathways as well.
All Roads Lead to Yin and Yang

The meridians are all paired up into Yin and Yang partners:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yin Meridian</th>
<th>Yang Meridian</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lung</td>
<td>Large Intestine</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spleen</td>
<td>Stomach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heart</td>
<td>Small Intestine</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pericardium</td>
<td>San Jiao</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kidney</td>
<td>Bladder</td>
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<td>Liver</td>
<td>Gallbladder</td>
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Let’s think about winter and summer. They’re strong polar opposites—the Yang of summer and the Yin of winter. At the peak of summer, the summer solstice, the days begin to get shorter. At the peak of winter, the days begin to get longer. The idea is that when Yang hits its peak, Yin begins and vice versa.

If you spend some time thinking about summer and everything that goes along with that season, including the way people behave and feel (People are more active in the summer, right? They get outside and run around more.); the you can get a good feel for the strong, hot, fiery, Yang energy.
Big Yang - Summer

We know there are four meridians associated with the Heart (Fire and summer). But only two are Yang—the San Jiao and the Small Intestine.

Think about how you sweat a lot in the summer. That sweat is your body’s way of dealing with too much heat. You could say you’re purging a lot of toxins then. You’re expelling lots of blocked Qi, like when you sit in a sauna for a while. That’s the Yang action of working through heat, brought to you by the San Jiao and Small Intestine meridians.

You can continue to observe nature and life as the seasons pass, and match it up with the meridians that way.

I do want to mention the Heart and Pericardium (especially the Heart), because they’re Yin meridians; but they’re associated with the biggest Yang season of all, which is high summer. What’s that about? Well, it means the Heart has a lot of Qi. It’s a deep Qi, that is continuously pumping through our being. It’s the seat of our mind, Spirit, and emotions. A lot of energy is happening there. And to work with it, we have to go deeper than just working up a sweat outside or getting a hot stone massage in a sauna. We have to be gentler and go very, very deep. The Yin equivalent of a three mile run in the hot sun. The San Jiao is also associated with Fire and summer. Most of the San Jiao points are used for clearing out heat.

Let’s say you’ve had a big summer party. You’re active, happy, running around, and talking with all of your friends. You’ve got all this high Yang energy and we need a deep Yin to support that, which is the Heart’s job; but when it’s time to go to sleep, your mind might still be hyperactive and bouncing with so much energy. That’s when you need the San Jiao points that actively clear out that heat, to calm your Heart so you can replenish.
Big Yin - Winter

Bravely on to talk about the Kidney. This is another big, important Yin meridian; but its season is winter. (So it’s a Yin meridian in a Yin season.) This goes deeper, in a way, than the Heart meridian. If the Heart is our life, the Kidney is the source of that life. The Kidney is very connected to the Tao—the One source of everything. So, the Kidney holds our life force and is associated with overall well-being and longevity—your general constitution.

Let’s talk about cars because they get us everywhere (like our bodies). You have this car and what makes it go? The engine. That’s your Heart. But what makes the engine go? Oil. This thick, heavy liquid that comes from very deep within the Earth. When you run out of oil, the car can’t go anymore, no matter what condition the engine is in. The oil is the Kidneys . . . or rather, the life force contained within them.
Do you have problems with different seasons?

Some of us get seasonal allergies. Allergies are more associated with the Lung and respiratory related meridians. Although different allergies arise in different seasons, right? If you always get fall allergies, that’s pretty straightforward—fall is the Lung’s associated season. If you get allergies in the spring or summer, that’s a hint about what might be out of balance in your system.

Remember that we’re not talking about your physical lungs. We’re talking about your Lungs as a form of energy. Your Lung Qi is out of balance. Some people love summer; they can’t wait for it to get hot so they can finally feel warm. They have a little too much Yin going on and need to balance it with the Yang of summer.

Others are a little uncomfortable in the heat and crank the air conditioning up. They have a little too much Yang, so when the summer heat sets in, they’re just overloaded with Yang from all directions.

Pay attention to yourself at different times of the year. It can tell you a lot about your relationship with the seasons.

Spring is a season of warming and expansion, so it’s Yang. Spring is connected with the element Wood, and the Liver and Gallbladder. What does it mean for the Gallbladder to be a Yang meridian associated with spring? Just slow yourself down; pay attention to the energy and goings-on in spring. You’ll see the parallels with the Gallbladder.

What about the Liver? The Liver is a Yin meridian in spring when everything is growing; but Yin isn’t about expansion. So what’s up? Well, think of spring cleaning. There’s a lot of old energy to shed in spring, to make way for new growth. That’s the Liver’s role. In both Western and Eastern medicine, the Liver is associated with detoxifying and clearing things out.

Gallbladder 21 and 34 really get the Qi moving. Spring energy particularly doesn’t like to get blocked up. If it does get blocked in a person, they can get overloaded with cranky, aggressive, and forceful energy. If you put your hands on someone’s shoulders, your thumbs will land around Gallbladder 21; it can be a powerful experience for them. That’s the stagnant Qi. So you can bring more movement and activity to this point, and you can work it with Liver 2 and 3. We see that working with the Gallbladder, which helps add more Qi movement in general to the Liver meridian; even though it’s a Yin meridian and it doesn’t like quick, active attention.

Now we are moving on to fall. Fall is connected with the element Metal. It’s the polar opposite of spring, so everything is falling away and contracting. Now the Lungs and Large Intestine become more prominent, as the Liver and Gallbladder lose the spotlight.
Do you have problems with different seasons? (Cont.)

Take the time to nourish the Organs associated with each season when that season comes about. The relevant Organs are important all year, of course; but during their seasons, they’re especially receptive. Therefore, take those Organs out to play when their season rolls around but also take extra good care of them. Whatever season an Organ is connected with, is also the season that can injure that Organ.

So in fall, our Lungs need special attention. That’s when the air dries out in many parts of the world, and that can be tough on our respiratory systems.

In summer, too much heat can injure the Heart. We can get heat stroke or faint.

In spring, our Liver can get overwhelmed by all the clearing out that needs to happen. Now, we’re not talking as much about physical issues—remember, the Organs are more than clumps of tissue.

In winter, our Kidneys can get too cold and our life force can start to stagnate.

Chinese medicine can get crazy because the theory basically applies to everything—in your body, in your emotional life, and in the world. So, we’re constantly making connections between things; it’s never-ending. At the same time, things don’t always fall into one nice, neat, little category. It’s all connected. We just try to keep ourselves focused on a few aspects for beginners.
The Position of the Earth

As fall set in, back in ancient China, people started to sleep more when the nights grew longer. If you don’t have to live by an alarm clock, your body adjusts its circadian rhythms to the natural cycles of day and night. In summer the nights are shorter, so people would sleep a little less than in winter, when the nights were so much longer. But that was all right because they were in harmony with nature and the entire cycle of the seasons had balance. So, winter balances summer and fall balances spring. If you’re only doing one thing all the time, then you’re a little off balance, right? However, if you’re letting yourself change with the seasons, that’s a better balance.

When we look at diagrams of the Five Elements, we often find four of them circling around Earth. That’s because Earth is where we live, and it seems (from where we’re standing) as though the seasons circle around us. So, the Earth is our center. Its associated body system is digestion, and the stomach is kind of in the center of our body, isn’t it? It’s Earth’s job to take in all of the seasons and all of the nourishment they have to offer.

We can think about Earth in two ways. One is that it’s the transition period between each season; some say that’s five days, while others say ten. The idea is that in this period when things are changing from one phase to another, Earth is active. It makes sense because Earth is what everything else revolves around. So, when that revolution is happening, we stay grounded and process it all with Earth.

Another way to think about Earth is as a fifth season—late summer. So, it would wedge right in between summer and fall. This is harvest time, when the plants have ripened throughout the summer, but they’re not drying up and dropping their leaves yet in fall. It’s when the food is ready.

The Earth Organs and meridians are the Stomach and Spleen. Stomach energy has a downward motion; when you eat your food, its first path in the body is down. Stomach 25 and 36 are geared toward aiding digestion. Then Spleen 6 and Stomach 36 are about gathering more Qi from our food. After that food makes its way down to our Stomach, the Spleen helps send the nutrients back up and out through the body. Now, we’re full of good healthy food and drink Qi.
Common Ailments

I’m going to touch on some meridians and points we can use for common ailments, but please don’t take this as any kind of definitive list. This is more like a starting point. There will be more things you can do than are listed here, and you may even be surprised by what you find effective in your own practice. Healing in this tradition goes back a long way, but it leaves room for experimentation and innovation. So, feel your own way into this energy.

Let’s start with digestive ailments, since we were just talking about the Stomach and Spleen. Stomach 36 is the big point for helping digestive complaints, being the Command Point of the abdomen. The combination of Spleen 25 and 15 helps with digestion. We can actually use the Small Intestine meridian points to help with digestion too, since that’s all about clearing away heat. So, if someone has an ulcer or hot diarrhea, you might use the Small Intestine.

Menstrual cramps: The Spleen meridian is a big one for menstrual pain; and because they occur in the abdomen, we can go back to the Command Point for the abdomen and work with Stomach 36 again. That’s really a great point for anything going on in that area of the body. Liver 3 is helpful because it keeps the Qi moving, and so is Gallbladder 34. We can also spend a little time just massaging the uterus—that area between the pelvic bone and the belly button. Even that kind of massage is moving Qi around.

Headaches: The first meridian that comes to mind for headaches is the Gallbladder, with its back and forth track along the side of the head. Gallbladder 21 is the faucet tap that can release all of that stuck Qi. Large Intestine 4 is the Command Point for the head, so that’s a big one.

Remember, that’s the point in the fleshy webbing between your thumb and first finger. Liver 3 is great; if the headache is associated with heat in any way (even if it’s just a hot day or the person you’re working with is feeling a little hot tempered), Liver 2 is great as well. The San Jiao meridian, wrapping around the ear, is another reliable point.

Lower back pain: Bladder 57 and 60 are important points for low back pain. The Bladder meridian is that big, long meridian running down the back. There are plenty of helpful points on there but these two can get you pretty far.

Shoulder pain: The Gallbladder and Small Intestine are the big ones for shoulder pain. SI 9 and 10 are right there behind your shoulder. Large Intestine 4 can help get Qi moving throughout the arm itself—the Large Intestine meridian goes right over the shoulder joint. Gallbladder 21 and 34 move right across the shoulders.

Sciatic pain (yikes!): The Bladder and Gallbladder are great for working with sciatic pain. If the pain goes down the side of the leg, it’s more Gallbladder. If it goes down the center of the back of the leg, it’s more the Bladder meridian. But really, why not work both meridians for sciatic pain? You can work Gallbladder 34, Gallbladder 21, and really just working the whole side of the leg is a good idea—all the way down to the fourth toe.
Common Ailments (Cont.)

Don’t think of it as just one little spot but as a whole system. I especially like Gallbladder 30 in this circumstance. We didn’t go over that point but it’s right on the sciatic nerve; it’s on the side of the glute, where the hip bone meets the pelvis. This area is often tender, especially if someone has sciatic pain. So, go gently.

Insomnia: We can work the Heart meridian for insomnia, and the San Jiao, Pericardium, and Kidney. With insomnia, we’re going to be thinking about the Heart and Yin energy. Night is a Yin time, so if you can’t release your Yang energy, there might not be enough Yin to balance it out. Therefore, we’re going to nourish the Yin of the Heart, and the big Yin Organ (Say it with me!)— the Kidney. Kidney 1 and 3 are great points for this.

Fatigue: The other side of the coin of insomnia. We’re still dealing with a Yin-Yang imbalance. In this case, it’s like Yin is drowning out the Yang. So, we need to boost the Yang and boost the Qi. Lung 2 helps because the Lung is about inhaling Qi. Spleen 6 and Stomach 36 are also about absorbing more active Qi (through digestion). Kidney 3 is about consolidating the Yin, so it doesn’t run all over the place. With fatigue, it’s a good idea to really pay attention to yourself because it can show its symptoms in different ways throughout the day. Daily stress is a common factor, as is tension. If tension is present, we can use meridians that ease tension to ease fatigue.

The points LV 3 and LI 4 are called the “Four Gates.” It’s an ancient point combination that really gets the Qi moving throughout the body. It’s great when we’re overwhelmed from the ongoing stress of daily life or when we’re supposed to be multitasking a thousand different things. That can really overload our Liver, and the Four Gates can help release that energy.

So to support the general movement of Qi throughout the whole system, you can use LV 3, LI 4, Stomach 36, and Kidney 3.

Colds and flu: We can use the Lung meridian and Large Intestine meridian. LI 4 and LI 20 are great for these issues. San Jiao 21 is good to help clear up heat and stuffy ears. To improve breathing and just support the entire system, use Gallbladder 21 and Lung 2.

We could go on and on looking at different complaints and the many meridian points that can ease the symptoms. But I’ll let you get some ideas yourself and conclude our class notes here.

We made it all the way through all 12 meridians and then some! Time to celebrate and have a good old Yang time. Or maybe you need to rest up and replenish your Yin. I don’t know what you need right now, but I do know I’m grateful to have you studying with us.

Thank you!
Cindy
Points by the Element Chart

**Wood**
- GB 21
- GB 34
- LV 2
- LV 3

**Fire**
- SI 9, 10
- SJ 5, 21
- HT 5, 7
- P 6, 8

**Earth**
- SP 6
- SP 15
- ST 25
- ST 36

**Metal**
- LI 4
- LI 20
- LU 2
- LU 10

**Water**
- BL 57
- BL 60
- KD 1
- KD 3
Fire Element

Heart Meridian

Small Intestine Meridian
Hand Tai Yang
Pericardium Meridian  

Fire Element  

San Jiao Meridian
Lung Meridian

Metal Element

Large Intestine Meridian
Kidney Meridian  

Water Element  

Bladder Meridian
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To learn more about Meridian Massage, check out my book on Amazon.com.