

Cultivating the Body's Information System and Experiencing the Meridians Through Qigong Practice

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The acupuncture meridians are the heart of traditional Chinese medicine, and were recorded in *Huangdi's Internal Classic* (3rd century B.C.) as the foundation of Traditional Chinese Medicine. *Huangdi's Internal Classic* records the conversations between Huangdi and his fellow Qibo during the period of the Yellow Emperor (2696-2598 B.C.)¹⁻². Throughout Chinese history, there were many such documents that recorded acupuncture points and meridians, but most of them contain no information about *how* to discover and identify these points and meridians. The only clue I have found for identifying acupuncture meridians is this statement in *The Investigation of the Eight Extraordinary Meridians* by Shi-Zhen Li (1518-1593 A.D)³: "The internal channels can be identified by internal visualization only."

Even though the acupuncture meridians were discovered at least five thousand years ago, and then later identified during the Ming dynasty by Shi-Zhen Li by means of internal visualization, we have no record of specific techniques or methods related to the process of developing such internal visualization capacities. These techniques and methods have remained a mystery over many generations. Internal visualization has long been considered to be part of Qigong, and while many Qigong practices were passed down for centuries through families and monastic communities, they were not particularly available for most people.

I have studied, for nearly thirty years, the effects of a series of Qigong practices--including different breathing methods, meditation techniques, and internal visualization exercises--in order to be able to identify the acupuncture meridians. According to my experiential understanding, Qigong training is different from learning history or mathematics, or any subject which involves memorization or dependence on resources outside of the body. And why is this? Because Qigong training is a way to explore and express the intelligence and wisdom *already within the body*. It requires internal experiential realization, as well as intellectual understanding. Actually, integration of internal experience with intellectual understanding is key at every step of Qigong training.

The “Information System” and How It Works

Historically, Qigong was viewed as a way for an ignorant person to become a wise one, as a bridge for a vulgar person to become one of virtue, and as a vehicle for an ordinary person to become an enlightened one. Today, Qigong has become a means of developing inherent potential based upon the natural laws involving the communications and interactions between the mind and the consciousness of the body. These cultivation practices and western scientific understanding have a great deal to say to each other, if only their respective practitioners would open up to the conversation.

One well-known figure in the field of energy studies, Dr. Valerie Hunt, writes that “in the body there are two primary electrical systems. One is the well-known alternating current of the nervous system, the brain, neurons, and the nerves The other is a newly discovered electromagnetic system probably emanating from atoms and cells. This energy has been called an aura, though I prefer to describe it as an energy field.”⁴

While the results of many bioelectromagnetics studies reveal that an energy field exists both within as well as surrounding our bodies, we still do not clearly understand very much about this energy field. What some researchers and theorizers describe as an “energy field” is not only an energy field, it is also *an information field*. I think of it as a “bio-energy-information system” which exists around everyone’s body. All of the organs, tissues, and cells can communicate with each other within that system, and they also relay these communications “outside” their own system, and they do this all the time, whether we are consciously aware of it or not. The significance of this phenomenon will be revisited when I take up the issue of identifying the acupuncture meridians, and the organs systems to which they correspond, in the latter part of this article.

The body’s energy field is also very important in how the brain communicates with different parts of the body. The brain uses the energy field to communicate with each part of the body—as well as with other peoples’ bodies. It’s almost like the brain has a radio station for receiving this information from the bio-energy-information system. The brain operates both on the alternating electric current of the nervous system, as it simultaneously operates within the body’s electromagnetic system.

A unique aspect of Qigong practice is that we can become deeply aware of this connection between the mind and the body, and use the information we receive from the body’s communication network to facilitate our own healing process or that of others. The energy field is the body’s system for communicating both with itself, and with others, in healing situations. And this communication is authentic. In other words, once the mind has become

connected to the body's energy field through the Qigong practice, the mind is more peaceful, and more easily hears these signals and communications of the body's consciousness.

The Results of Practice

In this article I describe how the mysteries in Chinese medical theories, such as acupuncture meridians, can be revealed when people have become energetically developed by practicing Qigong. In this article, my experiential understanding is based on a series of methods and techniques in Yi Ren Qigong⁵.

During my early years of Qigong practice, when I performed the *Mind/Life Gate Connection Exercise*, I distinctly sensed an electric vibration initiated at the kidneys. This sense of tingling and electric vibration traveled from the spinal cord up to the head, and this occurred repeatedly when the Life Gate (DC-4) point⁶ (see Figure 1) was stimulated by an intent of appropriate degree.

When I performed the *Ventrodorsal Center Meridians Developing Exercise* with regularity and continuity, very interesting sensations occurred in my Qigong practice: a sense of pulsation, like a heartbeat, at the original gate (Guanyuan, VC-4, located in the ventral center meridian--Ren Mai--four fingers below the navel) and the DC-14 point (Dazhui, located in the depression between the spinous processes of C7 and T1). I simultaneously experienced a magnetic sensation of pulling and pushing between the DC-20 point (Baihui) in the top of the head and the VC-1 point (Huiyin) in the bottom of the torso.

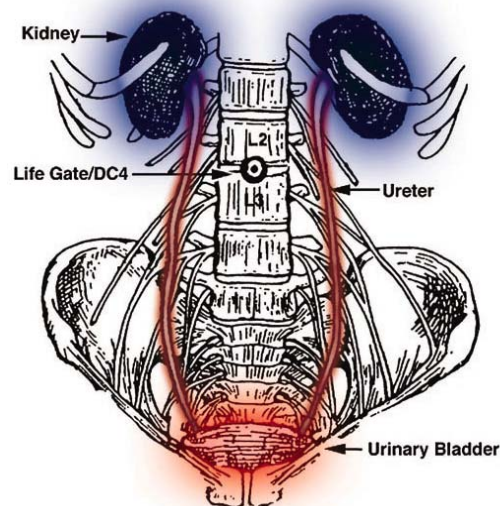


Figure 1. The Life Gate

These sensations were accompanied, with continued and disciplined practice, by warm/hot sensations at the center of the chest and the kidneys, and a sensation of electric vibration at the forehead area and the tailbone area simultaneously. A tremendous electric vibration traveled from the tailbone area along the spine up to the head, then entered into the brain, imparting a tingling sensation over the top of the head. Then, the electric vibration moved from the forehead down the center of the front of the body to the bottom of the torso, forming a circulating and repeating loop around the torso.

This experience allowed me to understand an early description of Qigong practice, in The Jade Pendant Inscription on Xing Qi (6th century B.C.)⁷, which states: *When you practice Qigong, you breathe deeply. When your breathing is deepening to a certain degree, internal refined Qi will be gathered (at the Dantian). When the refined Qi is fully accumulated (at the Dantian), it expands and descends downward (in the lower abdomen area). It settles down and reinforces (in the perineal area). When the refined Qi is reinforced to a certain level (in the perineal area) it begins to rise up (along the spinal cord) to the head, and then falls down (to the Dantian) again. Then you experience the internal Qi circulating (around the Du-Ren meridians) during your daily practice. Furthermore, you integrate the universal Qi, which comes in through the top of the head, with the earth Qi, which enters the body through the feet. (This is a way of self-development.) Thus, you will be healthier and more alive while you follow it. And you will be more subject to aging and death when you don't. (see Figure 2.)*

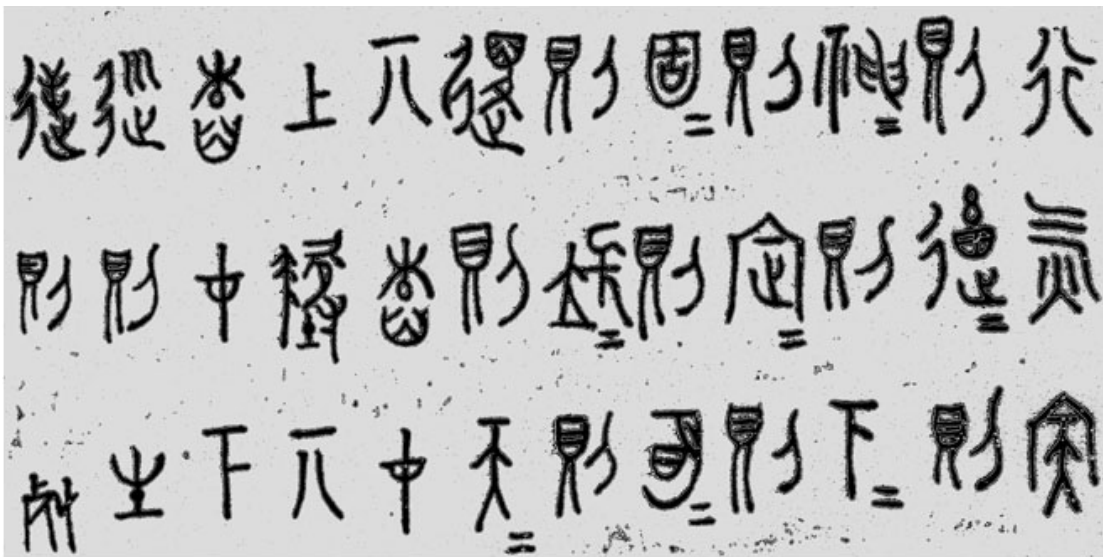


Figure 2 The Jade Pendant Inscription on Xing Qi (6th century B.C.).

I was pleased that the results from my Qigong practices were in alignment with the results attributed to traditional Qigong breathing practice. Even more importantly, however, with this experience of internal Qi flow I began to surmise that the acupuncture meridians can be identified not only by internal visualization, but also by sensory perception.

Over the years, the visualizing and sensing of the energy channels which were occurring in my practice also allowed me to trace the relationships between the meridians and their anatomical counterparts, namely the organs and physiological systems of which they are a part. My findings surprised me, as they sometimes differed from traditional thinking in small or sometimes large ways, and I offer them throughout the remainder of this article.

Detection of the Pancreas Meridian

With continued practice of the *Internal Organ Meridians Developing Exercise* over the course of about six years, my sensitivity and awareness levels upgraded and stabilized. During my Qigong practice, my chin, pancreas, and big toes all simultaneously felt electric vibration. And now the same feeling occurs naturally between 9:30 to 10:30 am every morning, even without doing Qigong practice.

The route of this channel proceeds as follows, and differs from the traditional spleen meridian in a couple of noteworthy ways. The internal Qi flow begins at the tip of the big toe, flows along the medial aspect of the foot, and the medial side of the ankle. It rises up along the medial side of the lower leg, following a line to the rear of the tibia bone, and continues up, past the patella, along the anteromedial aspect of the thigh to the lower abdomen. It then meets the ventral center meridian at the original gate (Guanyuan, VC4), then comes out and continues up, *entering into the pancreas*. Finally, it continues up, passes *the front of the spleen* and diaphragm to the outside of the nipple and then up to the chin, terminating at the base of the tongue. A branch comes out from the pancreas, ascends the diaphragm, and flows to the center of the heart. Another small branch comes out from the pancreas, ascends the spleen, and flows to the center of the spleen.

In traditional Chinese medicine, this internal Qi pathway is called the spleen meridian and has been used in medical application for about five thousand years. But according to my internal observation, even though there is a small branch of internal pathway between the spleen and pancreas, this internal Qi pathway flows directly into *the pancreas*, not into the spleen; thus, I refer to this internal Qi pathway as the "pancreas meridian," as shown in Figure 3.

When it comes to the various emotions and the internal organs to which they correspond, there has all too often been more confusion than clarity. This situation, has come about, I believe, from the imprecision of translating terms describing emotional states from Chinese into English. To add to the confusion, there is not always unanimity of opinion regarding any particular organ and its corresponding emotion. Nonetheless, there seem to be some *generally*

accepted correspondences along these lines. In the case of the spleen, there seems to be some consensus in the TCM tradition that this organ corresponds to anxiety⁸ and mental stress. However, for the purposes of this discussion, as noted above, these emotions attributed to the spleen, according to my experiential understanding, belong to the pancreas.

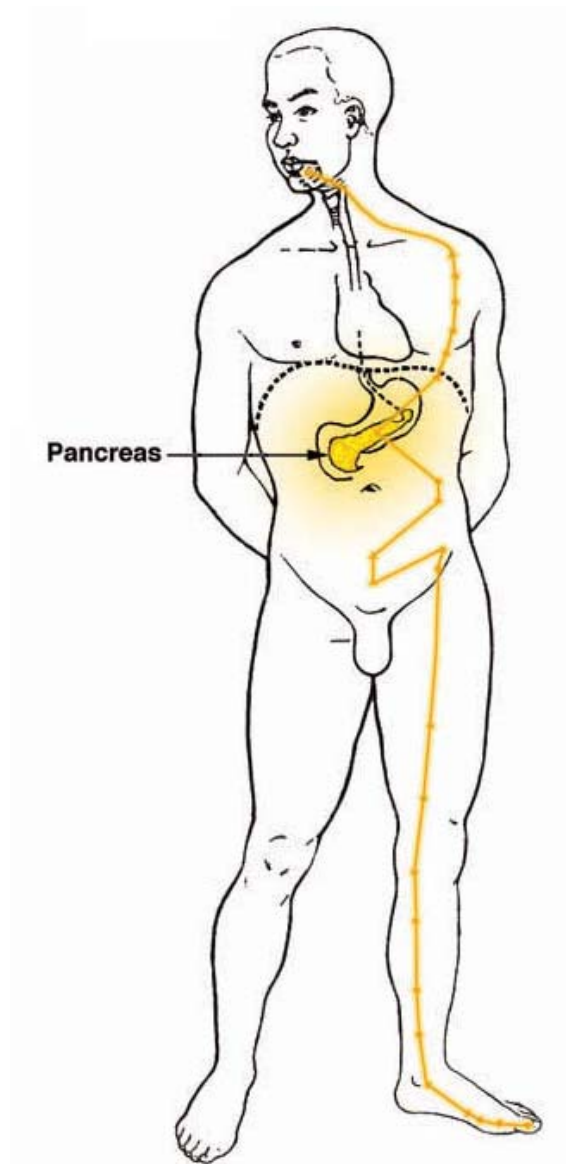


Figure 3 The Pancreas Meridian

Once the internal Qi flow in this pancreas meridian is increased with Qigong practice, the pancreas naturally functions at its emotional and “informational” levels. For example, during Qigong teaching sessions from November, 1997 to April, 2003, when I communicated with students experiencing excess anxiety my pancreas had a feeling of buzzing and jumping. I observed this phenomenon repeatedly, in excess of one thousand two hundred incidents. Additionally, my pancreas felt pain in over seven hundreds cases when I communicated with

students in a mentally stressful state. These experiential records indicate that the pancreas is responding to anxiety and mental stress. My experiential records lead me to believe, and to suggest here, that the spleen has been mistaken as the pancreas in traditional Chinese medicine for about five thousand years.

In the view of Western medicine, *the pancreas* is involved in extracting and assimilating nutrients from food and fluids by providing the digestive enzymes. It also plays an important role in the endocrine system, coordinating with the liver to regulate the quantity and quality of blood, and secreting the hormone insulin for operating the blood sugar level. However, *the spleen* has been described in traditional Chinese medicine as follows: "the spleen is located in the middle warmer below the diaphragm. Its main physiological functions are: (1) to transport, transform and send up the nutrients, and (2) to keep the blood flowing in the vessels. It is a chief visceral organ of the digestive system⁹."

Western scientific understanding has shown the pancreas to be part of the digestive system, whereas the spleen does not belong to the digestive system at all. This also supports my finding that the spleen has been mistaken as the pancreas in traditional Chinese medicine.

Which Meridian *is* the Spleen Involved in?

As suggested above, the pancreas meridian appears to have been taken for the spleen meridian in traditional Chinese medicine. So, which meridian *is* associated with spleen?

In my experience of Qigong practice, a feeling like warm steam is generated at the spleen and flows to the cisterna chyli. It comes out and rises up, passes through the diaphragm, and goes to the center of the chest, where it meets the ventral center meridian at the Sea of Qi (VC17, Tanzhong). It comes out and enters into the middle of the breast, then comes out again at the ribs near the nipple. It rises up and reaches the bottom of the armpit, travels the medial surface of the upper arm, enters the elbow, emerges at the forearm, follows between the two tendons, enters the middle of the palm, and goes to the middle and ring fingers, ending at the tips.

This Qi pathway matches most of the traditional pericardium meridian. However, according to my sensory perception, it belongs to the lymphatic system, and thus would more aptly be called--instead of the pericardium meridian--the "lymphatic meridian." And the spleen is the head of this meridian, as shown in Figure 4.

Once the internal Qi flow in the lymphatic meridian is increased with Qigong practice, the spleen naturally functions at its emotional and “informational” levels. For example, during Qigong teaching sessions from November, 1997 to April, 2003, when I communicated with students suffering abuse, my spleen experienced a sensation of being squeezed tightly. I observed this phenomenon repeatedly, in excess of six hundred separate incidents. Additionally, my spleen felt pain in over eight hundred cases when I communicated with students fighting cancer. These experiential records suggest that the spleen responds to issues involving safety, and to protective and defensive feelings.

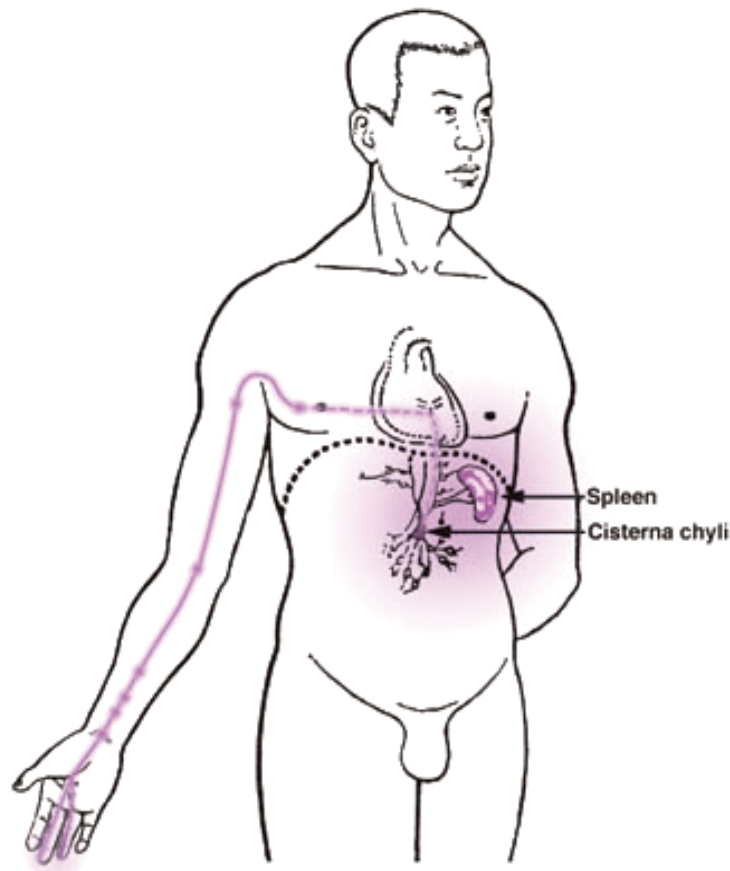


Figure 4 The Lymphatic Meridian

In the view of Western medicine, the lymphatic system functions in surveillance and defense, and is designed to protect the body from any kind of pathogen such as foreign microbes, cancer cells, etc. The lymphatic system has specific resistance power to disease, which has been termed immunity. This suggests more than a passing connection to the spleen’s emotional and informational functions, and further indicates the spleen’s belonging to the lymphatic meridian.

The Triple Burner's Association with the Reproductive System

As mentioned above, the pericardium meridian would be more properly regarded as the lymphatic meridian, and is headed by the spleen. But to back up for a moment, in traditional Chinese medicine the pericardium meridian is understood to be in a complementary relationship with the rather mysterious triple burner--"rather mysterious" both because its correspondence in the organ system has remained vague, and because of its importance in the tradition of internal alchemy. Tracing this triple burner meridian to its physiological basis, I have come to question whether the triple burner has remained somewhat "mysterious" perhaps because of a Chinese cultural sense of reticence in speaking of the reproductive/sexual organs, or perhaps because the relationship between the triple burner and the reproductive organs just wasn't clear.

With continued practice of the *Internal Organs Meridians Developing Exercise*, I experienced a sense of warm steam moving from the tip of the ring finger, going up between the little finger and the ring finger, then to the back of the wrist, and coming out on the lateral surface of the forearm between the two bones. It then passes through the elbow along the lateral area of the upper arm, and goes up to the shoulder, where it meets the dorsal center meridian at the junction point of the three yang meridians (DC 14, Dazhui). It goes forward to the middle of the breast, and comes to the center of the chest, where it meets the ventral center meridian at the Sea of Qi (VC17, Tanzhong), meeting up with the lymphatic meridian. From the center of the chest, it then passes through the diaphragm, continues down behind the ventral center meridian, passes over the urinary bladder and enters into the prostate gland, ending at the testes. One branch of this pathway (back up at the center of the chest) goes up the neck, behind the ears, continues straight up to come out at the upper angle of the ear, then bends down towards the jaw and reaches the cheek.

This internal Qi pathway matches most of the traditional triple burner meridian. However, according to my observation, it is clearly rooted in the prostate and the testes, the reproductive organs in the male (the uterus and ovaries in the female), and thus I believe this internal Qi pathway would be more clearly regarded as the "reproductive meridian," as shown in Figure 5.

Once the internal Qi flow in this reproductive meridian is increased with Qigong practice, the reproductive system naturally functions better in its physiological capacities, as well as at its emotional and "informational" levels. For example, during Qigong teaching sessions from November, 1997 to April, 2003, when I communicated with students experiencing crises in personal relationships, such as divorce, my prostate experienced a feeling of cold, my ring finger felt painful and my chest heavy (particularly the area around the nipple). I experienced

these phenomena repeatedly, in excess of three hundred separate incidents. However, when I communicated with students who were falling in love, my prostate felt warm, my ring finger felt itchy, and my chest (particularly the area around the nipple) felt light and electrical. These experiential records suggest that the prostate and its meridian respond to issues involving personal relationships and love.

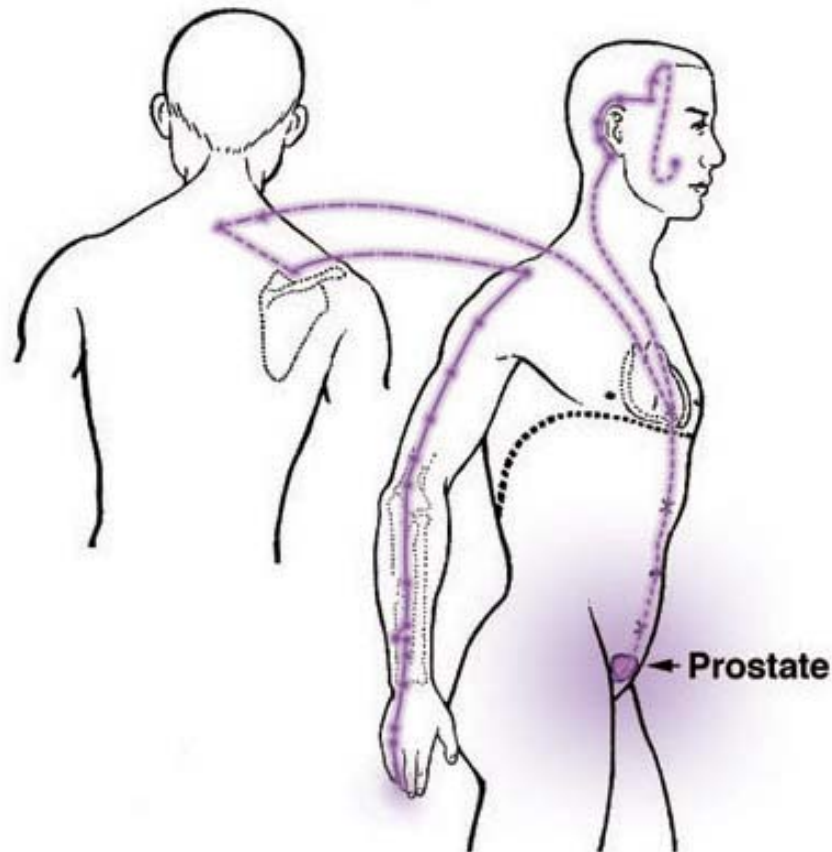


Figure 5 The Reproductive Meridian

The reproductive system not only has these emotional and “informational” responses, but according to the tradition of internal alchemy, it also has a more comprehensive and higher-order function. In the Qigong tradition we hear of a phenomenon called “Fan Lao Huan Tong” which, in Chinese, means “reversing the aging and getting younger again.” This process of reversing the aging comes about as a result of transforming the reproductive energy into a form of somatic energy which is then available for regenerating the strength of the body and the internal vitality.

These claims would appear to be backed up by current research. Modern medical studies have found that one of the consequences of aging is that sex hormones levels change in

unfavorable directions. For example, the female hormone (estrogen) level tends to increase in men and decrease in women. However, studies indicate that this trend can be reversed by Qigong exercise¹⁰. The results of these sex hormone studies, and the reversal of the aging trend, support the ancient notion of "Fan Lao Huan Tong." The ancient tradition of Qigong/internal alchemy practices, as well as modern research, suggest that the aging process may be directly related to the vitality of the reproductive system.

Conclusion

The two electrical systems of the body, both the nervous system and the system emanating from the cellular level, allow communications of information to pass from the consciousness of the body to the consciousness of the mind, and comprise the communication function of the body's energetic field.

The acupuncture meridians may be detected by internal visualization, and also by sensory perception. Both of these capacities can become developed by Qigong practice. Three acupuncture meridians--the pancreas meridian, lymphatic meridian, and reproductive meridian--have found new correlations between internal organs and their Qi pathways. The internal organs, in addition to their physiological function, also function at emotional and "informational" levels, giving emotion-specific responses.

In the case of the pancreas meridian, which I contend has been misidentified as the spleen meridian, it is my hope that this finding may provide new perspectives to traditional Chinese medicine practitioners in the treatment of diabetes and obesity, and other diseases which are directly related, not to the spleen meridian, but to the pancreas meridian. In the case of the lymphatic meridian, which I contend has been inaccurately regarded as the pericardium meridian, it is my hope that this revised correspondence can allow for new considerations in treating allergy, cancer, AIDS, and other conditions and diseases of immunity. In the case of the triple burner meridian, it is my hope that the correct identification of this meridian as the reproductive meridian, rooted in the reproductive organs, fosters new perspectives on treating prostate cancer, breast cancer and other diseases, as well as on studying aging and longevity.

Qigong practice, the acupuncture meridian system of traditional Chinese medicine, and the western scientific tradition are not necessarily mutually exclusive or contradictory. Taken together, they offer opportunities for a thorough and synergistic understanding of the anatomical, physiological, energetic, emotional, and "informational" bases of the body, one which is humane and soulful, with regard for the wholeness of individuals--even at the level of the most local symptoms.

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