

Contact, Conflict and Commitment

Working with the Shao Yang and Jue Yin Divisions

by Bill Palmer



What are Shao Yang and Jue Yin?

The **Jue Yin Division** combines the Heart Protector and Liver meridians. It tones and strengthens the core musculature (the deep postural muscles and the abdominal muscles). This helps us feel a centre from which to act.

The **Shao Yang Division** combines Gall Bladder and Triple Heater meridians. It holds the body together and coordinates muscle groups to help our actions be supported by the entire organism.

So both divisions are concerned with integration, centring and, as we shall see, dealing with conflict.

This article first shows how these divisions trace the development of particular muscles and muscular skills, which give us the physical experience of integration. It then shows how these physical skills are analogous to emotional skills which help us to integrate our personality and relate to others. The article concludes with an example of how this view is used to work with emotional issues through the development of physical awareness and movement experiments.

The Physical Development of Integration.

A new-born baby is physically disconnected. When he moves one part of his body, the movement is not supported by the rest of the body. Between then and about eight years old, the child develops a series of skills, which progressively integrate his movement. These do not develop in a strict sequence, rather, they all develop in parallel; but a sequence can be made of the ages at which the development of a particular ability is emphasised.

| Age | Ability Developing | Skills Learned |
|-------------|--|---|
| 0-4 months | Finding and strengthening the core | Sitting up, rolling, baby yoga |
| 4-9 months | Coordinating left and right | Crawling |
| 9m-2 years | Balancing | Walking |
| 2yrs-5yrs | Integration of Proximal and Distal parts of body | Throwing, jumping, running |
| 5yrs - 8yrs | Coordination of Flexor and Extensor Muscles | Athletic grace, aiming, hand-eye coordination |

These abilities do not develop all at once. For instance, the strengthening of the core, which allows a young baby to sit up, stabilises the pelvis. This allows a push from one leg to flow into the upper body and create crawling movements. During crawling and walking, the core muscles are still developing and strengthening, allowing dynamic balance without stiffness.

In this article I am not going to go into too much detail about muscles, movements and meridians since I am trying to give a flavour of how this information can be used in practice. However, I would like to give you some examples of how these archetypal movements are linked with the meridians.

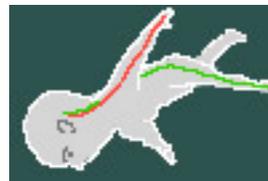
Meridians and Development

Rolling and the Triple Heater / Gall Bladder Meridian

The development of rolling teaches the baby to integrate the top and bottom of the body and strengthens the abdominal and adductor muscles. It also knits together the spine, pelvis and hips. The act of rolling requires extension and reaching using the muscles under the Gall Bladder meridian in the legs and pelvis, and the muscles following the Triple Heater meridian in the arms and neck. The whole Shao Yang Division tonifies the sides of the body to allow the reach of a limb to pull the rest of the body over in the roll. The act of rolling also creates diagonal pathways linking left to right and top to bottom through the centre. These pathways are essential for integrated movement.



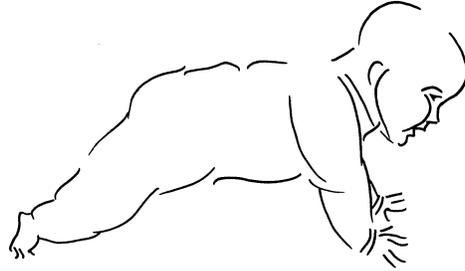
A 14 week baby starting to roll



Seen from the side, Triple Heater meridian in red, Gall Bladder meridian in Green

Baby Yoga and the Heart Protector / Liver Meridians

Babies play with yoga positions, such as The Dog, in which muscles under the Liver and Heart Protector meridians pull the arms and legs into the centre and tonify the deep abdominal muscles such as the Psoas.



Balancing and the Liver / Gall Bladder Meridians

Balancing on the legs requires the abductor and adductor muscles under the Liver and Gall Bladder meridians to be toned and alive. The psoas and deep muscles of the anterior pelvis, under the Liver meridian act as guy ropes, holding the spine vertical. The gluteal muscles stabilise the pelvis from tilting and the sides of the body hold it from flopping over sideways. Both of these areas are tonified by the Gall Bladder meridian. All together, these muscles dynamically respond to pull the body back into balance, while allowing it the flexibility to move.



Integration of Proximal and Distal and the Liver /Heart Protector Meridians

Young children tend to hold the torso still while moving a limb or move the torso while holding the limbs still. This gives the movements a wild and uncoordinated flavour. In order to develop full-bodied, accurate and graceful movements the centre needs to be stabilised but the movement of the limbs needs to be elastically transmitted into the torso. For instance, if throwing a ball is going to be strong and accurate the shoulder blade needs to follow the extension of the arm, but not too far. The Liver and Heart Protector

Meridians balance the tone of the flexor muscles, which elastically let out the torso into the extension of the limbs.

Coordination of Flexor/Extensor and the Gall Bladder Meridian

Precise and graceful movements need the extensor and flexor muscles to work together. In any movement at a joint there are muscles that perform the movement (the Agonists) and muscles that resist the movement (the Antagonists). If the Antagonists are too strong then the joint is stiff to move. On the other hand, balanced tone in the antagonists controls the movement and smoothes it, creating grace and precision. The flexors and extensors need to work together, not against each other. The Gall Bladder meridian provides a central line of contact between these two groups of muscles where this coordination can be negotiated.

Conclusion

You can see from these examples that the Liver and Gall Bladder meridian flow over muscle groups which **mediate, smooth and control** movements rather than create movement themselves. The abdominal muscles, pelvic muscles and the adductor muscles, tonified by the Liver Meridian, **create a strong core** around which movement is organised and balanced. The Gall Bladder meridian runs along a line between the flexor and extensor muscles and acts as a **mediator** between the muscle groups

The other aspect of this theme is most clearly exposed by the Triple Heater and Heart Protector Meridians which create a **sense of connection** between the arms, the head and the centre. The Liver and Gall Bladder meridians play the same role with the legs.

Thus the key energies for the Shao Yang and Jue Yin Divisions are: connection to centre, strengthening the core, balance, mediation and control. The Jue Yin Division knits the body together to a strong core. The Shao Yang Division mediates and integrates the different parts of the body.

If these energies are over active then movements are over-controlled, stiff and ungainly. If the energies are deficient then the body is not integrated and different parts of the person are working against each other in conflict rather than collaboration.

Integrating the Personality

What does it mean to integrate the personality? Most theories of psychology observe that we are not one, homogeneous person. Instead, we all consist of a group of different people sharing the name 'I'. Most of us are familiar with internal arguments like: "I want to go to the party", "Maybe I shouldn't go, I feel too tired!", "But it will be fun, I've been bored today and I need something to liven me up", "I'll go for a short time and if I feel too tired I can always leave". You can see that there are at least two and maybe three people in this discussion. One is bored and wants some fun, another is responsible and careful, the third might be a mediator, finding a middle ground.

In a fractured and psychotic personality, these different people are not in dialogue; in extreme cases, they are not even aware of each other. In a neurotic personality, the different people are in a conflict that never finds satisfaction. An integrated personality is not one in which there is only one person. Instead, the people in an integrated personality work together, collaborate and resolve their conflicts in a way that honours each aspect of the self.

The skills needed in integrating your personality are exactly the same skills needed to live in a successful marriage or team:

- Listening to what everyone has to say
- No one person dominates all the time
- Each person needs to be willing to give way sometimes
- Each person needs to be committed to the marriage
- Each person agrees to work with conflict through dialogue

This does not mean that everything is harmonious and peaceful. On the contrary, a successful marriage or an integrated personality is often more alive with conflict than not. The key point is that it is **alive** with conflict rather than dead through conflict.

These principles are exactly analogous to those needed to integrate the body:

- Each part of the body needs to be toned and capable of movement
- No group of muscles should dominate the movement all the time
- Each muscle needs to be able to give way gracefully to modulate but not inhibit the movement of others
- Each part of the body should feel connected to the core
- In new or challenging situations, each part of the body can experiment with other parts to collaborate and create smooth movement and ease.

There are two basic principles to all of this, which are in a Yin/Yang relationship to each other. The Yin aspect is the existence of a strong centre (the Marriage or the core musculature). The Yang aspect is the active willingness to make contact and be in dialogue (even when in conflict).

The energies of the Jue Yin and the Shao Yang embody these two principles in a way that is practically helpful in resolving physical, emotional or relationship problems.. The wonderful thing about bodywork is that it allows you to get a direct physical experience of these skills, which you can then apply to your emotions or your relationship with others.

Working with the Jue Yin and Shao Yang

This section gives three different examples of working with these Divisions. Since all three of them were in the same family they show how working with the physical aspect of these energies also transform interpersonal dynamics and the emotional ecology of the individuals.

Jo and Graham came to see me together because I had previously been working with their two year old son, Damian, who was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. One of the common themes of working with families of disabled children is helping the parents to let go of the obsession of making their child 'normal' and to accept them as they are. Jo and Graham, who were both involved with my work with Damian, had come to realize that this was particularly challenging because they had difficulty accepting each other. Jo felt disappointed and critical of Graham for not giving her more support in Damian's exercise regime. He, on the other hand, felt resentful that Jo did not appreciate the work that he did to finance the family and his (different) ideas of how to deal with Damian. His response was to withdraw, which made Jo all the more angry and Graham more depressed. This sort of conflict is a typical indicator of possible work with the Jue Yin and Shao Yang.

The big positive feature of this was that both of them realized they had problems and both wanted to sort them out. Working with these divisions needs awareness, willingness and commitment.

My starting point in work like this is not common in couple work. I work with the individuals first, with the other present, helping each one to be aware of their internal vulnerabilities and conflicts. I find that this helps mutual compassion to develop rather than stimulating the expression of grievances.

The development of compassion, for yourself as well as others, is a key principle in all work with the Shao Yang and Jue Yin.

Jo

Jo felt that she was the responsible one in the family and that she carried the heavy weight of caring for Damian. Physically she was extremely tense. Emotionally, she was highly strung and became easily irritated when things didn't go the way she expected.

Her energy was tense and controlling, rigid and reactive, which is the result of trying to take responsibility for too much. She wanted Graham to take more responsibility, but was not able to allow him to do it in his way. The principle I worked with in her case was of "**Learning to release while remaining in contact**".

To do this, I asked her to lie down and suggested to Graham that he pull her limbs in various directions which would roll her over. At first she resisted the pull and then after the strength of pull became greater, she pushed herself over like a solid log rolling. I then suggested that Graham start with a gentle pull on an arm and I touched the side of her ribs where the pull was starting a stretch. I instructed her to just be aware of that place and to try to find a way of releasing it, helping her sensation by gently pushing the ribs in the direction of release.

After a short while she said: " I don't know how to let go. I don't want to let go!". I suggested that she actively resist the movement. Sometimes, if there is internal conflict, positively affirming the resistance does more to help it release than trying to force oneself to let go. It's like the principle of martial arts applied to bodywork. Firstly go with the direction energy is moving in - in this case resistance. By making that energy alive and conscious the person can more easily choose to do something different. In Jo's case, actively resisting the pull on her arm made her able to feel the muscles which allowed her ribs to release. We did repeated the process a few more times, each time in more detail until she could almost release one rib at a time.

The stretch then extended to the side of the abdomen and into the hip. She found this more difficult so I did some work with the pelvis, mobilizing all the movements of the pelvis, spine and legs. Returning to the experiment, she was able to follow the release into her hips and to experience how to slowly pay out her body along the Gall Bladder meridian like letting out a rope.

Even in the first session she realized that her problems with this exercise felt strongly connected to her emotional inability to let go of control. Graham expressed his feeling of love and contact, which he felt when she managed to release. She still felt tense but also felt the contact between them increase when she let go and was motivated to continue with this experiment in further sessions.

Graham

Graham's issue was that he felt he couldn't stand up for himself. Jo was expert at putting her point of view in such a way that he felt he had no answer. When he initiated something, he was too easily pulled off balance by her stronger power.

The principle I used with Graham was "**Strengthening the Core**". I started by using a physio-ball, suggesting exercises which threw him off balance. His response was to use his back and limbs to force himself upright. I then gave him exercises where he could not use these parts of his body and, at the point at which he moved out of balance touched points on the Liver and Gall Bladder meridians to give him awareness of the pelvic and abdominal muscles. By moving him slowly in and out of balance I showed him how to use these muscles to maintain equilibrium.

At first he found this hard, his core musculature was under-used and weak. Over a period of weeks, he used specific exercises to strengthen his core and was able to maintain balance in increasingly challenging positions.

As the core became stronger, I started doing bodywork, which took up the slack in all four meridians of the Jue Yin and Shao Yang, to give him a sense of how the limbs and the head were connected to the core. This enabled him to feel how his distal actions were supported and stabilised by the centre.

We then brought Jo into his work by asking her to push or pull him off balance. She could sense how his strengthened core gave him a flexible stability, which she instinctively respected. Once the pull or the push reached his centre, she felt her motivation to fight him dissolve. Instead she wanted to feel the support of his strength. They did some good wrestling, which turned into laughter and mutual closeness.

As the therapy continued, Jo and Graham devised exercises they could try in their relationship using these principles. When Graham felt Jo was over-controlling he was able to ask her to let go and allow him to take responsibility. She was able to use the physical experience of releasing muscles to let go of her control. For Graham, he was able to use his growing sense of core strength to notice when he was being pulled off balance by Jo and to maintain his position without becoming hard and tense.

Damian

Damian's back was continually over extended and he was starting to develop hyperflexion of the wrists. A baby's brain develops through feedback from sensations. The automatic movements, called primitive reflexes, which are hard-wired into the lower brain, teach the motor cortex how to move the muscles.

If the parts of the brain which control some primitive reflexes are damaged, as is the case with cerebral palsy, then the cortex does not learn to activate certain muscles. This means that the muscles on one side of a joint will progressively become more dominant because they are not balanced by their antagonists, so extreme hyper-extension or hyper-flexion slowly develops.

Damian had been prescribed a regular system of exercises by his physiotherapist which Jo took him through several times a day. The point of the exercises was to keep some mobility in the joints, which were becoming spastic. If they are done often enough, these type of exercises can, to a certain extent, teach the cortex how to move the muscles. However, to do so, they need to be done very frequently and it's a hard regime. Graham felt that Jo's obsession with these exercises turned the family into an army training camp.

I am not criticising the physiotherapy but I feel it needs to be mixed with forms of work that are warmer and softer, which also activate the muscles, but give the baby a sense of being warmed rather than challenged. Continual challenge is likely to create a feeling of not being good enough.

The principle I used with Damian was "**Listening to the underdog**". For instance, I asked Jo to lie down and place Damian face down on her chest. He was arching his back so much that it was hard for him to balance. His flexor muscles in the front of his body were the 'underdog'. I suggested to Jo that she expand her breathing to press against him as she inhaled and to make a humming sound as she breathed out, trying to focus the vibration of the hum into the point to contact with Damian.

Immediately, his extension reduced. I showed her how to stroke him along the sides of the body and to touch him on the side of the ribs, giving his nervous system a sensation

of a place mediating between the flexors and extensors. He actually curled forwards and cuddled into her. Jo burst into tears.

“This is awful”, she sobbed “I feel so guilty. When Damian arches away from me it’s like he’s rejecting me and I get angry. All I want is to cuddle my baby”.

This work used the energy of **contact and warmth** to stimulate the muscles rather than the energy of **control and challenge**. In terms of the integrating skills we listed earlier, this type of work is the physical aspect of "Listening to what everyone has to say". Listening is often more empowering than challenging. Combining contactful touch with mobilizing exercises gives the baby a sense of being accepted for who he is as well as stimulating the 'underdog' muscles.

Conclusion

This family has real difficulties that will not go away because Damian's cerebral palsy will probably mean that he will always be, in some sense, disabled. However, the great work that they did gave them a physical experience of the skills in the Shao Yang and Jue Yin. Jo learned to release control, Graham learned to stand up for what he believed and Damian learned that even his 'deficient' parts were loved and respected. Instead of dealing with difficulties in a hard, tense fashion, they have learned to be flexible and remain in dialogue, They are focusing on *enabling* each other rather than criticising their disabilities. I hope this allows them to knit into a contactful, warm family, which has the resilience to deal smoothly with the challenges ahead.