

The Joy Divisions

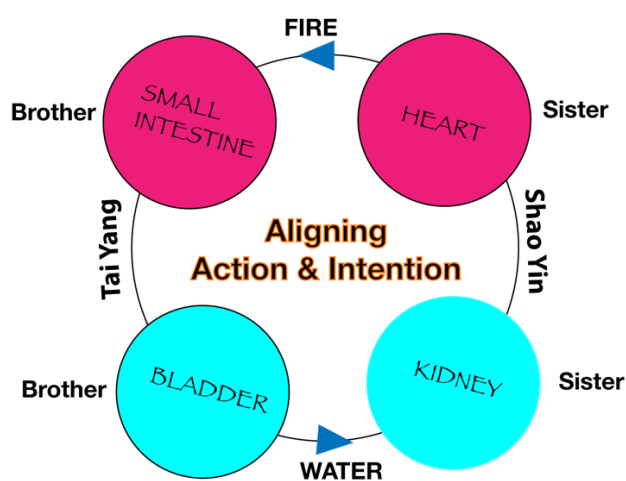
By Bill Palmer M.Sc., FoSS, ADPT

This article is the third in a series describing ways of working directly with the Qi of the Six Divisions¹. They describe how your attitude, your quality of touch and your interactions with the client are just as important as the choice of meridians you work with. In fact, in situations where the condition is deeply embedded in unconscious habits, I find these 'Forms of Touch' to be essential. In these cases working with meridians alone often meets an unconscious resistance to change because changing deep patterns means changing the self, which is scary. However, by working with the Forms of Touch, the client is involved in exploring themselves, experimenting with their patterns and feels in control of their process, so that resistance is not triggered.

The energy functions to which each form of touch relates are often called the Six Divisions of Yin and Yang. The Six Divisions pair a leg meridian with a synergistic meridian in the arm. These pairings are both Yang or both Yin and show how the two Organs work together as part of a deeper function.

Traditional Chinese Medicine doesn't define these deeper functions. However, my research in the 1980's into child development showed clearly that these Divisions guide infant movement development by showing how to join up primitive movements into whole body actions². Moreover, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen's research showed that these archetypal baby movements also form the foundation of the child's personality and develop mental and emotional capacities as well as physical ones³. So effectively, a baby is learning to embody the Qi of the Organs through learning to move.

This article describes the deeper functions embodied in the connection between Kidney and Heart, which is called the Shao Yin, and between the Bladder and Small Intestine, called the Tai Yang. As with the other two groups of four meridians, these form a connected family all of which are concerned with intention, motivation and action. The two divisions also connect the Water Element to the Fire Element, meaning that they transform unconscious motivations into conscious intention and channel this energy into actions which align with the spirit.



The Dilemma of Being Human

Human culture is a vast web of mimicry. As Susan Blackmore points out, we learn by copying more than any other animal⁴. Much of our sense of self is copied, even if we are not aware of it, because we define ourselves largely by what our social groups like and dislike. However, young children copy differently to older ones. Much of a young child's learning comes from spontaneous exploration and play.

Of course, exploration is always a part of learning but, as Erik Erikson pointed out, children after the age of five are progressively more concerned with fitting into their peer groups⁵. Their games tend to have rules and groups of children in this stage often exclude other children who don't fit in. The threat of exclusion often pressures the child to conform to a group norm. This pressure to conform increases in the teenage years and, in addition, secondary school also tends to squash initiative and creativity. By the time we are adults, most of us have all but lost our ability to spontaneously play and to explore. As Pablo Picasso once said: "Every child is an artist, the problem is how to remain an artist as we grow up".

I play the piano and am particularly interested in free improvisation. This is a genre which has no rules, follows no agreed chord structures and is created spontaneously. When I started to play with others I was initially blocked by the desire to get things right, to sound good. But this only had the effect of freezing my creativity and made it impossible for me to really listen to the other musicians. It took years to let go of the fear of getting things wrong and start to let my musical creativity flow.

In order to be really creative, one needs to let go of pre-conception and listen to the subtle messages of the unconscious, because almost by definition, ideas that are new to you come from your unconscious. Most of creativity training in the arts concentrates on the breaking of habits and the process of letting go of our internal critic, which tells us how things should be. But letting go of preconceptions gives space for creativity but is not enough in itself. You also need to make contact with the unconscious and help it to come into consciousness.

The dilemma of being human is how to remain in touch with our authentic, creative spirit while learning to live harmoniously with the society around us. Most of us squash our primal energy down in order to fit in, but this leads to the slow death of the spirit where a person just exists rather than living their life. The deep lesson of the Shao Yin is to value our primal energy as the 'fuel' of our spirit and to make space in our lives for its expression.

The Joyful Spirit

What do we mean by our spirit? For the purposes of this article I am not interested in the beliefs that different cultures have about it. Nor do we need to delve into the labyrinth of philosophies about consciousness and mind. There is a common sense, practically useful meaning to spirit: it is the aspect of ourselves which feels alive, joyful, excited, clear and truthful. If we do not feel these then we are not in touch with our spirit, whatever it is. This lack of joy is different to the feelings we have when we go against the rules of our social group. Then we feel guilty or ashamed. But it is perfectly possible to act with joy, to say your truth and at the same time feel guilty for disappointing or hurting someone we love. By becoming aware of the difference between guilt and joylessness we can learn the difference between our conditioned self and our core spirit.

The spirit has a dark side too. It is also our purely selfish side which doesn't care about other people but is energised by primal drives. Freud called this "cesspit of sex and selfishness" the

Unconscious Id⁶, which many religions feel needs to be inhibited. But this suppression also cuts us off from our vitality. Maybe our spiritual challenge is to stay in touch with our spirit while choosing not to act on it when it would harm our social groups.

I think that the solution to this dilemma is to learn to bring the spirit into consciousness. Then we can be in dialogue with it. If society or another person expects us to act in a certain way we can ask our spirit: “Is that OK with you?”. Most often, the spirit says yes, even if it’s not exactly what it would have done. But sometimes it says “No, I can’t live with that” and if you over-ride that message then an essential part of your authentic self dies.

The Shao Yin

Traditionally, in Chinese Medicine, our primal life energy is attributed to the Kidney. I would prefer to say that it is *called* the Kidney because I think that it is not necessary to follow the



medieval Chinese belief that every ‘energetic’ function is the responsibility of an internal organ. To me, a form of Qi is some holistic activity of the organism that applies to both body and mind and the traditional physical organ associated with that function is chosen because it expresses a physical metaphor for the energy. There are many stories about why the kidney was chosen as the metaphor for the primal spirit, but the historical reason is not important, it is enough that we are naming a real aspect of ourselves.

In the same way, the Heart is a label for awareness; it is not saying that the phenomenon of consciousness lives in the heart organ. So the process of bringing primal spirit into consciousness involves making a bridge between the Kidney and the Heart. This combination is one of the Six Divisions, called the Shao Yin. However, simply working with the two meridians is not enough to become aware of our primal spirit. Instead, one needs to learn how to feel the subtle sensations coming from

parts of us that are normally unconscious and how to facilitate their expression.

As with learning to improvise, you first have to learn to let go of inhibition and self-control. Then you can learn to listen to the elusive sensations coming from the movements of deeper, unconscious parts and to allow them to initiate whole-body movements. These spontaneous movements are the natural language of the spirit and both express it and bring it into consciousness. The form of touch we call Amplifying Touch consists of several techniques for helping this process through facilitated movement and through voicework.

Voice is a particularly direct way of contacting the spirit. I don’t mean learning to sing, or trying to sound nice. Alfred Wolfsohn, whose approach to voicework has been a great inspiration to me, observed that the voice is part of us that we squash into tiny limits in order to form our persona⁷. We tend to speak and sing within a small range of notes, and this self-limitation directly corresponds to our limitation of the spirit. He developed many accessible exercises to explore and widen the range of the voice that I find a powerful way of letting the spirit speak in the first person.

The Tai Yang

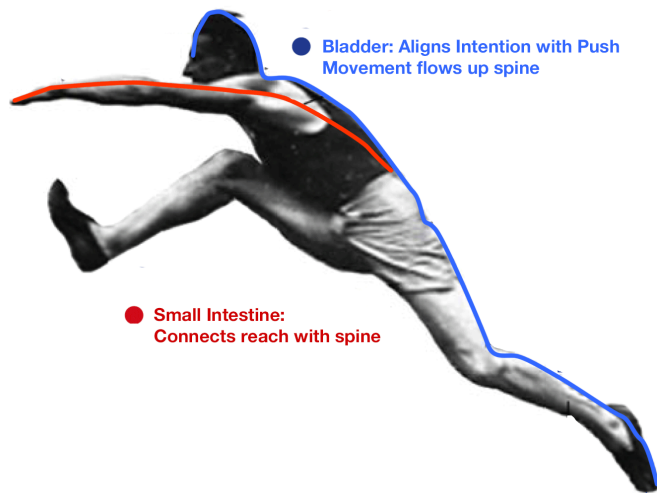
Once you can hear your spirit, the next challenge is how to act in alignment with it. The reason that we squash and inhibit our primal selves is usually that it scares and embarrasses us. Most of us don't speak our truth but express a version of ourselves that is designed to impress others. Being authentic doesn't mean that one always follows the urges of the primal self but that we acknowledge it and don't hide it from others.

Learning authenticity is difficult and often brings up old feelings of shame but, even within the context of body therapy, there are ways of safely helping a person to develop it. The most important is modelling. Being genuine yourself gives the message that it's ok for the other to express their truth. When someone's true spirit starts to appear after years of being squashed, the energy is often highly emotionally charged. This is not the nature of spirit but is the result of letting off the pressure of being contained. If the therapist is frightened by the energy and tries to calm the client down then they give the client the message that they need to keep that energy hidden. On the other hand, if the therapist can choose to facilitate and hold space for the strong energy then the client feels that it's ok to show it. The ability of the therapist to contain their own fear and give space for the client's spirit gives them the message that they can do that for themselves.

Inhibition and control is performed by the muscles, so another effective way of contacting our primal energy is to help the client to get in touch with aspects of the body that are not in the business of control. Two body systems are particularly potent doorways into this realm. I have already mentioned Amplifying Touch which helps the *internal organs* to express their authentic energy. Once someone can sense the energy of their spirit, touching *the bones* stimulates awareness how it can flow clearly through the body without triggering the emotions surrounding its imprisonment.

The Tai Yang joins the Bladder to the Small Intestine. I have written in other articles² how infants develop the ability to crawl by using muscles along these meridians. Through this archetypal movement they learn to align their actions with their intention and learn to be proactive in the world.⁸ In adults, activating this connection helps to develop clarity and authentic action. The Bladder connects our excitement (for instance: seeing something interesting) with our ability to act and move towards it through the use of our legs and spine. The muscles along the Bladder meridian align the skeleton to clearly channel energy rather than control it with muscles.

But unless your motivation is aligned with your spirit then any amount of skeletal alignment won't resolve that deeper conflict. Many of our urges come from our conditioning and from the expectations of others. Some of these 'outer impulses' are in alignment with our spirit and some are not. So we also need the ability to discriminate between outer motivations that our spirit can accept and those which would squash it. This function is metaphorically called the Small Intestine, because it is that part of the body which discriminates between the nutrients from the outer world that can be assimilated and those that need to be excreted.



The muscles along the Small Intestine meridian have a dual role. In contraction, they tighten the neck and shoulders, stopping the free flow of energy up the skeleton and inhibiting the spirit. On the other hand, if they are energised but not tense, then when you reach with the arm, they connect it into the spine and thus connect the reach of the arm with the push of the legs. The eyes see something exciting, the arms reach for it and the legs push us towards it. The whole action is channelled by the muscles along both

the Bladder and the Small Intestine meridians and the combination of the two channels forms the Tai Yang Division.

So the Tai Yang division is the expression of our authentic spirit in action. It needs the consciousness of our primal impulses that the Shao Yin gives and provides a completion to those energies, bringing them into the world.

The Form of Touch associated with the Tai Yang is called Clarifying Touch, It involves all the approaches I have mentioned above. Modelling authenticity, supporting expression of spontaneity, helping the client to feel the flow of excitement through the skeleton and working with the Bladder and Small Intestine meridians to channel this energy clearly through the body.

Being authentic, acting from spirit and speaking our truth lets energy flow freely and the experience of this is the emotion of Joy. Both the Shao Yin and the Tai Yang are intimately connected in this process, so I call these two divisions the Joy Divisions. Maybe it was my unconscious that made the connection with the 1980's band called the Joy Division. In any case, it is appropriate. Their music broke many of the rules of rock music and I think we need some of that anarchism to free ourselves of our inhibiting conditioning and learn to act through choice rather than by convention.

Bill and Teresa are running a workshop on how to work with the Joy Divisions in Totnes 13-15 March. www.seed.org for details.

¹ *The Six Forms of Touch* – Bill Palmer. Shiatsu Society Journal 147 & 149.

² *The Development of Energy* – Bill Palmer, Journal of Shiatsu and Oriental Body Therapy 1993-1994

³ *Sensing, Feeling and Action* – Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, 1994

⁴ *The Meme Machine* – Susan Blackmore 2000

⁵ *Childhood and Society* – Erik Erikson 1950

⁶ *The Theory of the Unconscious*, - Sigmund Freud, Octave Mannoni, 1971

⁷ *Jung and Alfred Wolfsohn: analytical psychology and the singing voice.* P Newman, *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 37