

Turning Points

*Harness the power of your changing body
to transform your life*

督 任
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Suzanne Yates

Discover Your Extraordinary Vessel

I. PART ONE: TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

How can TCM help you?

This ancient way of understanding our body sees us as part of the universe and influenced by our environment. This is especially relevant in today's era of environmental challenges. If we want to tend to our body, we also need to tend to our environment. The ancient Chinese lived in close contact with the natural world and describe our body using images from nature. Like the Earth, our body is a constantly changing entity with different rhythms. Our body's 24-hour rhythm is like night (Yin) and day (Yang). Interestingly, it is only recently that modern science understands the importance of our circadian rhythm, the natural, internal process that regulates our sleep–wake cycle. We are also influenced by the seasons and where we live on Earth. Our journey through life can be seen as a journey through the seasons: winter (in the womb), spring (youth), summer (young adult), autumn (mature adult) and back to winter (later life and death). These inner seasons are regulated by the Extraordinary Vessels. They offer greater potential for transformation than the well-known 12 meridians because they connect us to our origins.

I learnt about the power of the Extraordinary Vessels through working with pregnant women. Wanting to support a woman's connection with her baby, I realised how much the Chinese understood embryological development and how our body develops after birth, without having the scientific knowledge we have today. How they describe the role of the Vessels shows us that they grasped how our genome (DNA) is influenced by our time in the womb and is modified during our life (our epigenome). They understood how the Vessels help us access different phases of our life, including unconscious memories, whether in the past, present or future, and shift patterns which no longer serve us. The Vessels regulate key moments in our life known as 'gateways' or 'turning points' when transformation is easier. These begin with our conception and include birth, puberty, expressing our sexuality for the first time, grieving for a loss and the processes of ageing and dying. Not only do the Vessels help us to connect more deeply with ourselves, they also enhance our connection to others and our world.

You might wonder why, if the Vessels are so powerful, they are not well known. I have often asked that question. In my initial training in Shiatsu they were not taught, apart from the pair running through our vertical midline like the chakras (Governing and Conception Vessels). This is still the case in many Shiatsu and Acupuncture schools. It is partly because they are so powerful with more fundamental, even spiritual connections that they are less renowned. There were times in Ancient China when it was considered 'unwise' to work with them for fear they might change people too much, interfering with their basic constitution and 'destiny'. It was a hierarchical society and the powerful did not want the common people to question their place within it. The Extraordinary Vessels were probably taught to more experienced practitioners, who would have guarded their knowledge. Some believed that 'ordinary people' would not be able to benefit from them. Perhaps they even created the myth that they were dangerous to work with.

The Vessels are less known because the way that ancient Chinese medicine arrived in Europe was mainly through medical doctors. They integrated the more material aspects of the twelve channels which were understandable in a biomedical model. It was not until the 1970s that acupuncture became popular in the USA outside Asian communities, and by then the practice of Traditional Chinese medicine in China had severely declined. When Mao Tse-tung revitalised traditional practices in the 1960s he focused only on material applications. During the cultural revolution, many of the more esoteric texts, which would have referred to the Extraordinary Vessels, were destroyed or taken out of the country.

In the last 20 years the Vessels have become better known within the Acupuncture community. Some of my colleagues say that maybe we were not ready to understand them until now. Whatever the reason, I intend to give you an insight into the power of the Extraordinary Vessels so you can use them to positively transform your life and our world.

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Here I explore our different life cycles I explore the gifts and challenges of each phase of life, from conception to death, with the added perspective of the Extraordinary Vessels of TCM. Commenting on these helps enrich the conversation. You can also let me know of topics you would like me to write about.

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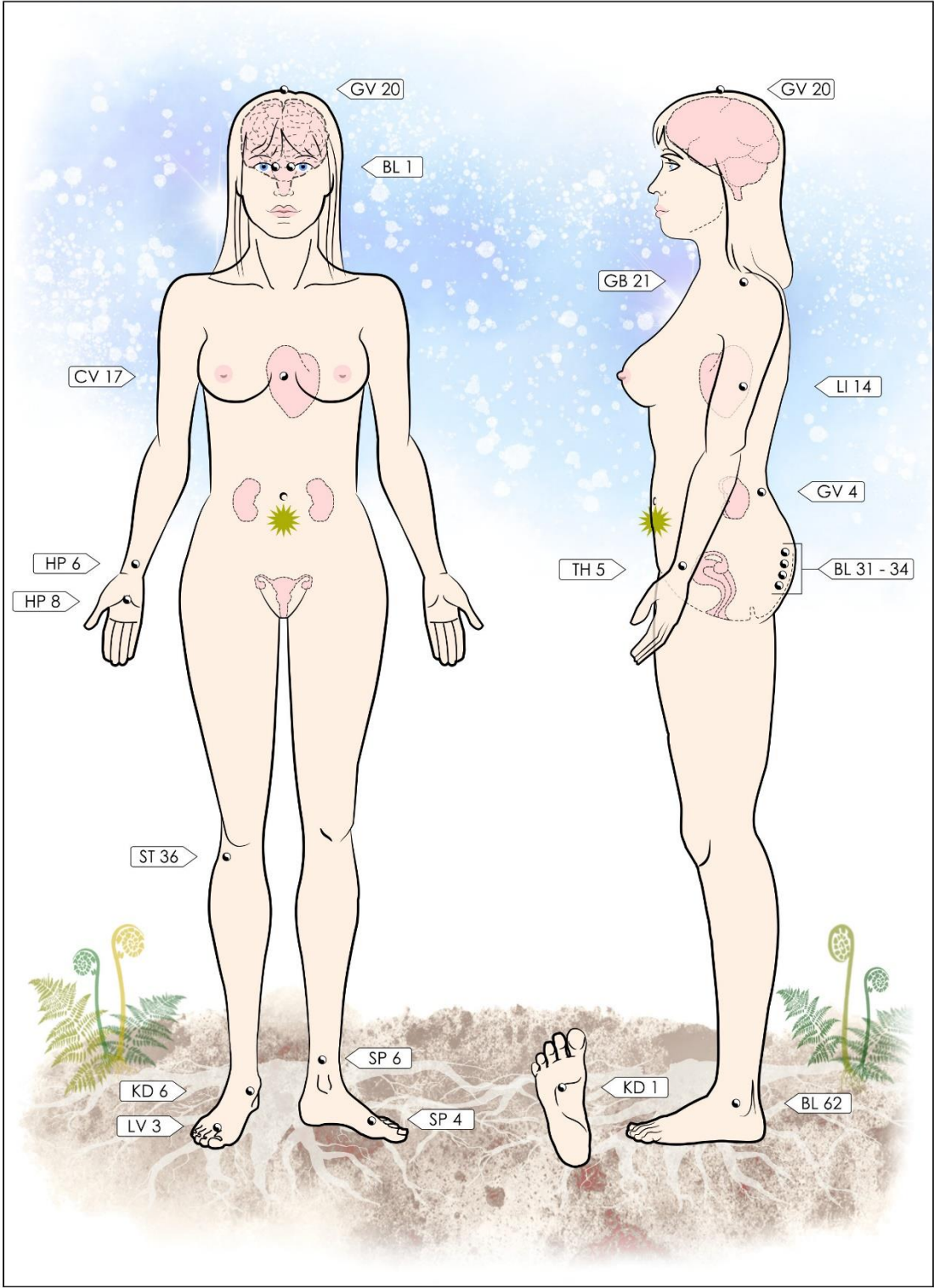
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Empowering Points

OF THE EXTRAORDINARY VESSELS



Chapter 1: The Extraordinary Vessels: the tools to access your potential

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) offers a new way of viewing the world. While some of the concepts may seem quaint, by reading this chapter you will soon appreciate how they can help you understand your life journey and how to use the powerful Eight Extraordinary Vessels. You will become familiar with how the Chinese understood the rhythms of our lives and learn key concepts. These include Daily Nutritive Energy (Qi) created by Air Qi and Food Qi; Defensive Qi; Tao, Shen; Jing (Essence), the 12 meridians, the Eight Extraordinary Vessels, Yin and Yang, Microcosmic and Macrocosmic Orbits. Organs and concepts are capitalised when described in the context of TCM (e.g. Energy, Air, Food, Kidneys, Brain).

TCM is thought to be at least 4,000 years old. One of its core texts is the *Yellow Emperor's Classic* (Neijing) probably written in the 3rd century BC. It continues developing today and includes numerous approaches. Some are more esoteric, concerned with our place in the universe and why we are here. Others are more practical, aimed at treating our daily ailments. In the past the 'doctor' would only be paid when the patient was well. If they became ill, the doctor would have failed. In other traditions, illness was seen as part of our growth and people were supported to come out stronger on the other side. Inherent in its approach is the body-mind-environment connection. Gabor Mate, in *The Body Says No*, wondered why doctors today don't ask their patients what kind of people they are; what kind of environment they live in; if there is something from their past that bothers them; or if they are content with their upbringings, marriages and relationships with society. These questions form the basis of the Chinese approach and are questions I pose you in this book.

The term Chinese Medicine is misleading because it has always been influenced by its neighbours including, what are now: India; Thailand; Tibet; Korea; and Japan. There are many overlaps between Buddhism, Daoism, martial arts (Tai Chi, Qi Gong, Karate), Yoga, Thai massage and other related disciplines. It reached Europe in the 16th century, when Western medicine arrived in China, but only at the beginning of the 20th century did it become more widely known.

Key ideas in Chinese Medicine

TCM understands our body as a microcosm of the universe (macrocosm). We are influenced by the rhythms of the outer world like a plant growing in a garden. A plant is influenced by the quality of the soil (Earth) and the space in which it grows; climate, sun and moon cycles (Heaven). The Tao represents this underlying principle. By accepting that which we cannot control we align ourselves to 'the way'. Most traditional people shared this view. Modern science sees our body as separate from its environment, treating it like a machine, breaking it down into parts. This has enabled great discoveries on the micro level but led to gaps concerning its interconnections and complexities. Recent discoveries of quantum physics are leading medicine back to a more holistic view.

TCM understood the role of our physical structures, organs, blood, bones, muscles, tendons and ligaments, but gave them a broader role including regulating emotions and thoughts. The main organs express themselves through pathways in the body popularly called meridians. Channel is more accurate because they are not simply lines on the surface of the body, but pass like rivers within it. There is an infinite network of channels since infinite connections are possible. However, the most important are the 12 channels and the Eight Extraordinary Vessels. Along the channels lie points, giving access to the rivers. The points were discovered when massaging them produced responses in different organs. Over time, the channel system and needling were developed.

Do energetic pathways, channels, meridians exist?

There have been many attempts to explain scientifically what these pathways could be. Theories suggest that they represent embryological, fascial, neural or hormonal action. Changes in electromagnetic field patterns have been observed around the points. I explore them as the memory of our body's development.

The 12 channels – Air Qi, Food Qi and the 24-hour cycle of Yin and Yang

You may have heard of the 12 channels (meridians) of Lung, Large Intestine, Stomach, Spleen, Heart, Small Intestine, Bladder, Kidney, Heart Protector, Triple Heater, Gall Bladder, Liver. However, have you wondered why some key organs, notably your brain, reproductive organs, bone, bone marrow, and blood are missing? It is because these organs are so powerful they need an additional network of meridians or channels to express themselves. These are the Eight Extraordinary Vessels.

The 12 organs and their channels regulate our circadian rhythms; the 24-hour flow between night (Yin) and day (Yang) - Daily Energy (Qi). Each organ has a peak and ebb flow lasting 2 hours (the Chinese clock) and a broader function than in modern anatomy. Their function includes tissue, orifices, sense organs and fluid secretions. For example, the Lungs relate to our skin, nose, mucous and body hair. They also have a colour, season, taste, sound and emotion. TCM assigned them official roles in society, like the Emperor (the Heart) with his minister (Lungs) to explain them. They draw their energy from the food we eat and the air we breathe (Nutritive Qi created by Air Qi and Food Qi). Like the organs, food and air are seen as more than their molecular components. Food is anything material we ingest from outside. This includes drugs, medicines and alcohol. Eating food, we absorb everything it has experienced, from being planted in the soil as a seed until it goes into our mouth. This includes how it was grown, weather conditions, who looked after it, how it arrived on our plate (perhaps via a supermarket), how it was cooked and then eaten. Food includes our relationships with people.

Eight Extraordinary Vessels – Essence and the infinite

The Eight Extraordinary Vessels regulate the 12 channels in harmonising our day to day energy (Qi). They are a reserve of energy sending more (Qi) into our body if we

are running low or draining excess if we have too much. This is essential in times of major change or turning points. The Vessels connect us to the infinite and why we are here. Before conception our soul (Shen) draws two ancestral lines together. At conception everything happening on the Earth and in the universe is imprinted on the egg and the sperm. This creates parameters for our life. The joining of the egg of our mother and the sperm of our father, our DNA, creates our Pre-Heaven Essence – Jing. Essence is more than our physical heritage. Like food, it is everything that our mother and father have lived since they were conceived, including when they were in the womb. Modern science realises the importance of genetic imprinting on the egg and sperm and how memories can be passed down the generations.

I have lots of videos on my YouTube channel about the Extraordinary Vessels. Use this playlist:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLRyKR6A8Bqdbzvqs9guKvvpHQA4i-02VH>

Our Essence is constantly modified by our environment, past and present, from conception - Post-Heaven Essence – Zong: our epigenome. Modern science has only recently recognised epigenetics. The Vessels store and circulate our Essence, regulating the inner rhythms of our bodies – our development, growth and ageing processes. Essence flows in cycles of seven years for women and eight years for men –often mirroring key hormonal changes or turning points. When Essence runs out, we die.

Yin and Yang

The Universe or the One (Tao) finds different ways of expressing itself. First it becomes two: a more expansive quality: Yang and a more inward quality: Yin. The two become four, then eight and eventually infinite expressions of the whole. Yin and Yang express themselves in the outer world and in the human body.



Yin and Yang in the outer world

The most fundamental expression of Yin is Earth which is denser than space or Heaven which is more Yang. Chinese astrology explores the movement of Yin and Yang within the Heavens. The Yi Jing (I Ching) or Book of Changes was the first written reference (c.700BC) to Yin and Yang. Yin is represented by a broken line and Yang a solid line. The Chinese character for Yin and Yang represents the sunny (Yang) and shady (Yin) sides of a mountain. This elegant image is far from simplistic, representing not only the 24-hour flow of night and day, but also the changing nature and interdependence of Yin and Yang depending on the time of year and the mountain's location. This non-dualistic way of seeing the world is where quantum physics meets Chinese philosophy; w things can only be understood in their relationships.

The daily cycle of Yin and Yang - night and day

This is the domain of the 12 channels, which feed back into the Extraordinary Vessels, influencing them over time.

The annual cycle of Yin and Yang - five elements and four seasons

Like day and night, each season expresses an aspect of the changing nature of Yin and Yang, represented by an element. Earth facilitates the movement between each season. Winter is the most Yin – water with its moist, cooling qualities (night). Summer is the most Yang - fire with its qualities of heat and dryness (day). Spring is Yang rising out of Yin winter – wood with new leaves pushing through the Earth. When expansion is complete (Summer) the process of moving back to Yin (Autumn) begins again. Metal is the gathering in at harvest time - a condensing process creating gold ore and other precious metals. The elements illustrate how nothing is ever purely Yin or Yang.

- Within water there is Yang; steam.
- Within fire there is Yin; a candle burning gently.
- Within wood; there is the Yin of falling leaves.
- Within metal; there is the alchemic fire of smelting gold.

Each of the twelve channels is linked to one of the five elements. The Extraordinary Vessels contain them all.

The seasons of our life

The elements help us understand the movement of Yin and Yang through the different phases of our life. These longer movements are regulated by the Vessels. We are born out of water (Winter) to Earth emerging like a new shoot in the spring. (wood). As we grow, we enter Summer (young adult) passing into Autumn (mature adult) and Winter (old age and death). The movement of the menstrual cycle can also be understood as a journey through the elements.

Directions and the elements

The four directions link to the five elements. Earth is the centre. Since China is in the northern hemisphere, these directions are reversed for the southern hemisphere.

- Water is North; night, cold and the most Yin.
- Fire is South; day, heat and the most Yang.
- Wood is the East; rising sun and increasing Yang.
- Metal is the West; setting sun and increasing Yin.

Within the Extraordinary Vessels, Girdle is the centre which holds above and below.

The North South axis is Governing, Conception and Penetrating, our most fundamental connection between Heaven and Earth.

The East West axis is Linking and Stepping, which are more connected with the daily and seasonal influences.

Yin and Yang in our body

The front of our body is Yin and the back Yang. As a fetus, our front is inside and our back outside. From age one our upper body is closer to Heaven (Yang) and our lower body closer to Earth (Yin).

Yin

inside of the body

front of body

feet (closer to Earth)

below navel

inside of limbs

Yang

surface of body

back of body

head (closer to space/Heaven)

above navel

outside of limbs

Essence - how our DNA changes through life

Essence is our blueprint for life, determining the time and place of our birth, the nature and length of our journey and what we can change. We cannot increase our Essence, but we can use it less quickly and improve its quality if we support ourselves with healthy Food (Qi) and Air (Qi). Essence is the quality of the seed we plant in our garden and how it grows in response to the outer rhythms of the world.

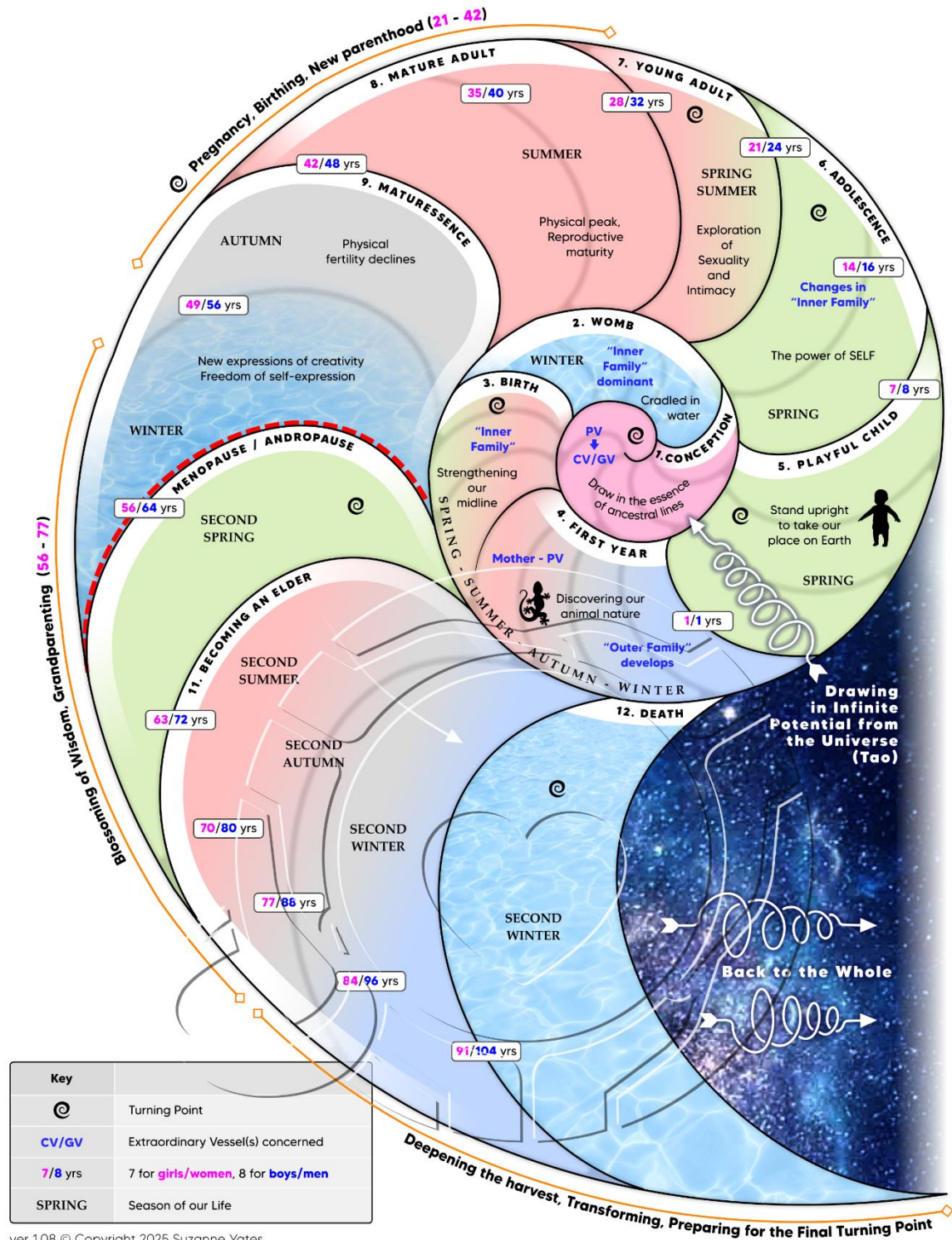
The seven and eight year cycles of Essence mirror hormonally driven changes in our development, which happen later for men than women. The first seven to eight year cycle is childhood. During the second cycle we shift into becoming adult, and, by the time girls are 14 and boys are 16, the first stage of this shift is completed. By the end of the next cycle (21, 24) we are at peak physical fertility. After five cycles, (35, 40), our fertility declines but we can remain fertile throughout our sixth cycle. After seven cycles, (49,56) our Essence shifts to support us in the second half of our life. The Chinese considered our natural span of life to be 100 years meaning that the latter cycles last as long as the earlier cycles of growth. This is why we need to use our Essence wisely.

Turning points

Some phases during these cycles are known as turning points, which offer opportunities to transform ancestral or past patterns, although new blocks or trauma may be created. Many of these are times when our neuro-endocrine system

changes. The Vessels, unlike the 12 meridians, directly connect with our brain and reproductive organs.

Our Life Cycles and Turning Points



It is fascinating there are eight main turning points, showing the infinite (∞) potential of our eight Vessels. However turning points are not only those generated from within our body, but any major time of change like moving house, changing career, or losing a loved one or a health crisis.

Our reservoir and regulator of Qi

The Vessels exist before our physical form and all form, including the 12 channels, emerge from them. They are our reservoir and regulator of Energy (Qi). Qi includes all forms of energy, both within our body and the world outside. The Chinese character for Qi shows rice cooking over a fire and producing steam. Qi is a process in which material, uncooked rice, is transformed through cooking. A similar process of constant transformation of material and immaterial aspects happens in our body. We cannot see Qi, yet it regulates everything.

Our reservoir of Qi contains: Source Qi; Essence; Nutritive Qi; and Defensive Qi

Source Qi is the imprint of the whole on our body at conception. This includes the position of the stars and planets, the season of year, time of day, place of conception, how we were conceived. Essence comes from the egg and sperm joining at conception to create our DNA. Nutritive Qi and Defensive Qi is produced by the 12 channels through the daily cycle of transforming the food we eat and the air we breathe into a useable form. The 12 channels also eliminate anything we can't use. Nutritive Qi (blood) is more than blood and nourishes every cell and space in the body emotionally and physically. It is created from Food Qi and Air Qi with the support of Source Qi and Essence and is stored in the Kidneys. Blood flows through the blood vessels as well as through the Eight Extraordinary Vessels and the 12 channels. Defensive Qi is part of our immune system and our capacity to adapt through illness. It warms, moistens and nourishes skin and muscles and regulates body temperature through sweating and protects us from 'exterior pathogens'. As the Chinese didn't know about bacteria and viruses they defined pathogens as being Wind, Cold, Heat and Damp. These concepts remain important in Chinese diagnosis. If our daily life provides enough energy then extra Nutritive and Defensive Qi are sent to our reservoir. However, if we are not eating, sleeping, or breathing well then the Vessels need to send more from our reservoir to make up the deficiencies. If we draw upon our reservoir excessively we drain our reserves, and the Vessels have less energy to regulate our turning points and confront challenging and stressful situations. Ultimately we become weaker.

The Pathways of the Vessels

Qi Jing Ba Mai is the Chinese name for the Vessels – a network. Of the Eight, four lie along the front of the body (Yin) and four lie along the back of the body (Yang) forming a continuous flow. The Chinese character for channels is Jing (tracks) Luo (network). The Jing (tracks) tend to run north to south and the Luo (networks) east to west. Channels are like silk with Jing the warp and Luo the weft. The Vessels, like the 12 channels, mostly run north south although some run east to west. The pathways of the Vessels are broader and more powerful than the 12 channels.

Traditionally diagrams represent the pathways as lines connecting points, but they are multi-dimensional – especially the Extraordinary Vessels.

Their organs and internal pathways

The organs were already written about in the 3rd century BC in the *Yellow Emperor's Classic*. The ancient Chinese, like the ancient Greeks and Egyptians, carried out dissections of animals and humans. They also understood the body through treating war injuries. Unlike the 12 channels, which each regulate one organ, the Eight Extraordinary Vessels share eight organs, including the: Brain; Reproductive Organs (Palaces); Heart; Kidneys; Blood Vessels; Gall Bladder; Bone and Marrow.

Core four organs

Your four core organs, include your: Brain; Heart; Kidneys; and Reproductive Organs. The Chinese did not identify hormones, but clearly understood the function of the neuroendocrine system. These four organs express the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis (HPA – Brain-Kidneys)-and hypothalamic-pituitary-gonadal axis (HPG-Brain-Reproductive Organs). Their pathways between the Heart and Brain pass through our throat (thyroid) and link with our hypothalamic-pituitary-thyroid axis. The neuroendocrine system, like the Vessels, not only regulates our growth and reproductive cycles but is a control system for all our organs. TCM recognises the close relationship between the Brain and Heart. They nourish each other and interact to regulate our spirit, mental activity, emotions and physical body. Our Soul (Shen) resides in both our Heart and Brain, which connect to Space (Heaven). Our eyes show the quality of our Shen which we express through our tongue and throat, important areas for the Vessels. The core organs create a potent internal pathway, the microcosmic orbit, which we use in visualisations and meditation. Touching these organs offers a simple, yet powerful way to work with all of the Vessels.

I have a video on both the microcosmic orbit and the macrocosmic orbit on my YouTube channel

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nox4Uia1hEQ&t=127s>

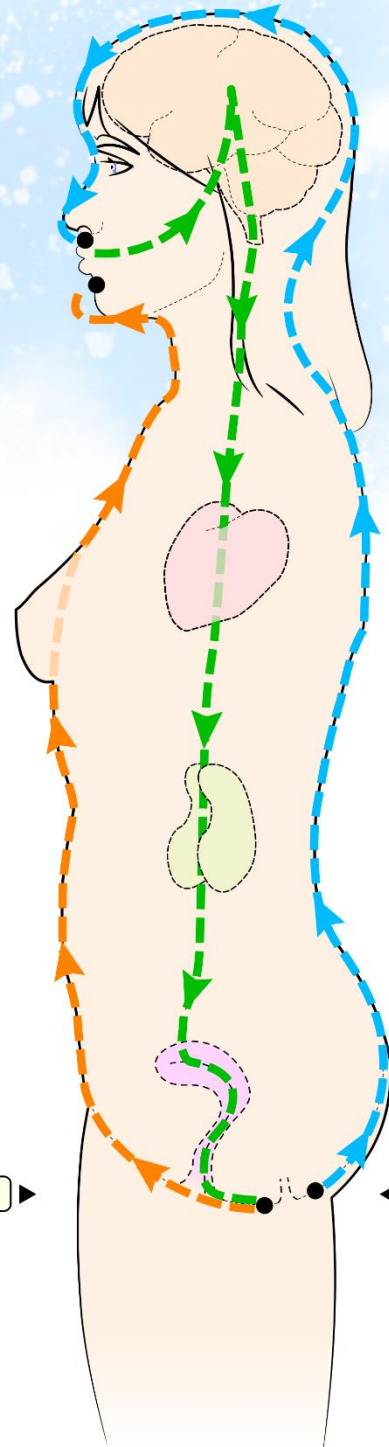
MICROCOSMIC ORBIT



GV 28 ▶
CV 24 ▶

CV 1 ▶

◀ GV 1



Brain – the whole and space

The Chinese understood the importance and complexity of the Brain. They described it as regulating all energies; present, past and future, having both Yin and Yang functions, controlling memory, concentration, sight, hearing, touch and smell. They did not understand the nervous system as we do, but felt the connection between the Brain and vertical midline of the body. This is the pathway of the Governing Vessel (Yang – back) and Conception Vessel (Yin - front); the continuum of control between the sympathetic (Yang) and parasympathetic (Yin) nervous systems. The Sea of Marrow flows through the Brain and spinal cord. Marrow is probably how they related to the cerebrospinal fluid and meninges.

Reproductive organs – Palaces (Bao) of Essence – creativity and sexuality

Known as Palace of the Child for women and Palace of the Sperm for men, I call them Palaces of Essence because children and sperm are expressions of Essence. Female Palaces include the: womb; fallopian tubes; ovaries; cervix; vagina; inner parts of clitoris; external genitalia (vulva, clitoris); and the breasts. Male Palaces include the: vas deferens; epididymis; prostate; seminal vesicles; the outer testicles; and penis. Men's Palaces are more external (Yang), and women's more internal (Yin) but derive from the same tissue and are similar in nature. The testes and ovaries contain Essence – sperm or eggs. The womb and prostate contain potential.

Men's Essence matures sperm and links to sexual expression through ejaculation. Women's Essence matures eggs and links to the menstrual cycle. The flow of Essence within our Palaces changes depending on where we are in our cycle of growth, fertility and ageing.

Kidneys and Heart

You may wonder why these two organs are part of the Extraordinary Vessels circuit when they each have their own channel in the 12-channel system. The reason is that they serve a dual purpose regulating day-to-day circulation of energy, as well as longer underlying cycles.

The Heart – Soul and our unique destiny

Our Heart houses our Soul (Shen). It is the overall regulator of Blood which nourishes and roots our Soul and Brain. Sudden changes in the flow or movement of Blood affect our Soul.

The Kidneys – ancestral connections past and future

The Kidneys store our Essence (energetic DNA). They are situated each side of our lumbar spine, lower than our physical kidneys. This is fascinating because our early sets of kidneys form lower down in the pelvis, near the sacrum, only ascending out of the pelvis around ten weeks. Embryologically the kidneys are related developmentally and anatomically to the reproductive organs. It is amazing that the Chinese sensed this. The Kidneys include our adrenals which produce hormones in response to signals from the pituitary gland. Along with our ovaries and testes they are the main production sites for progesterone, oestrogen and testosterone – key

hormones for male and female reproduction. The Chinese recognised the role of stress and its effect on the Kidneys. The adrenals also regulate cortisol which is important for our sleep and wake cycles, regulation of body fat and our stress response.

In between the Kidneys is our Gate of Life (Ming Men) – a point between the second and third lumbar vertebrae (Governing Vessel 4). This is the origin of all energies and structures -the foundation of Yin and Yang, Essence and Qi. All Vessels emerge from and return to Ming Men. Its character is an oil lamp. The flame is Fire, Yang, the spark of Life Qi. The oil is Water, Yin, Essence. Many embryologists talk of ignition to describe the moment of conception.

Blood vessels, Bone, and Bone Marrow

Penetrating Vessel is named the Sea of Blood and is the overall regulator of Blood. This includes menstrual Blood which is an expression of Essence. Blood is formed within Bone Marrow which is regulated by Essence.

Gall Bladder

This is an interesting organ to include. It is probably because they considered the Gall Bladder to be like the general – the ultimate commander of the body's daily functions, having an overview of the outer environment.

Two Groups of Four – Inner and Outer Families

The Inner Family are the first to develop and are present in physical form three weeks after conception. They all flow through our midline and form the Microcosmic Orbit. The Outer Family are present in physical form when our limb buds start to develop four to eight weeks after conception. They flow in our shoulders, arms, hips and legs connecting us with the outer world. They form the Macrocosmic Orbit. Each family has two Yin and Yang pairs. Apart from Conception and Governing Vessel, their points are those of the 12 channels. However, since the 12 channels and their organs arise out of the Eight Extraordinary Vessels, the points exist first in the Vessels.

The Eight Regulating Points - Key Point

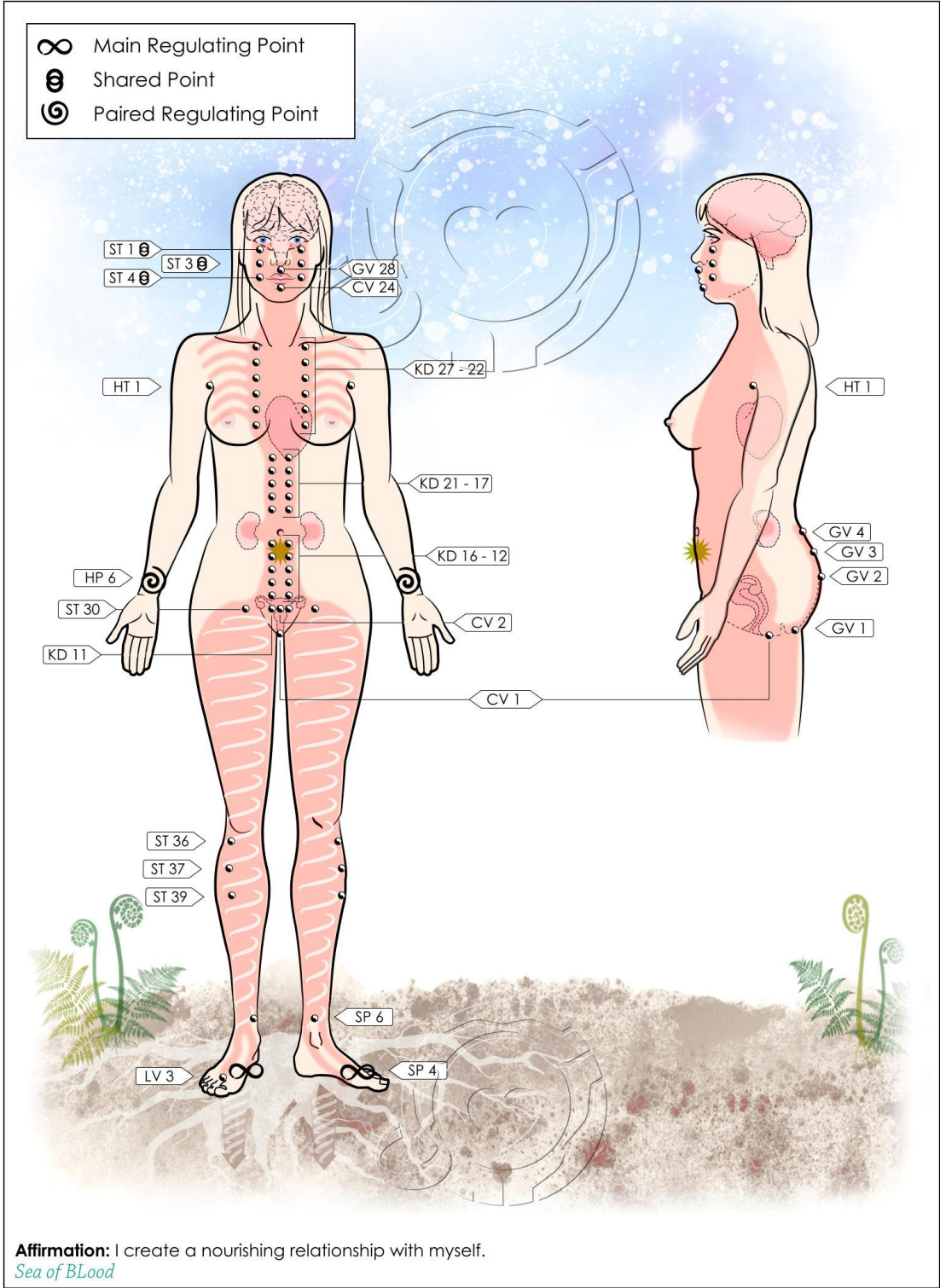
Each vessel has a point on either the wrist/hand or ankle/foot which regulates its whole pathway. Holding this point is a simple way to work each Vessel. The hand points indicate that the Vessel has a closer relationship to our Heart/Brain and Space. The foot points indicate a closer relationship to Earth, Kidneys and Reproductive Organs (Palaces). There is balance within the families with two of the regulating points for each group connecting more to Space and two more to Earth.

The classical combination of these points is given in the chart. One of the Inner Family is paired with one of the Outer Family in a Yin/Yin or Yang/Yang pairing of a hand point with a foot point. Working a pair engages the Vessel in a deeper way than only working its regulating point.

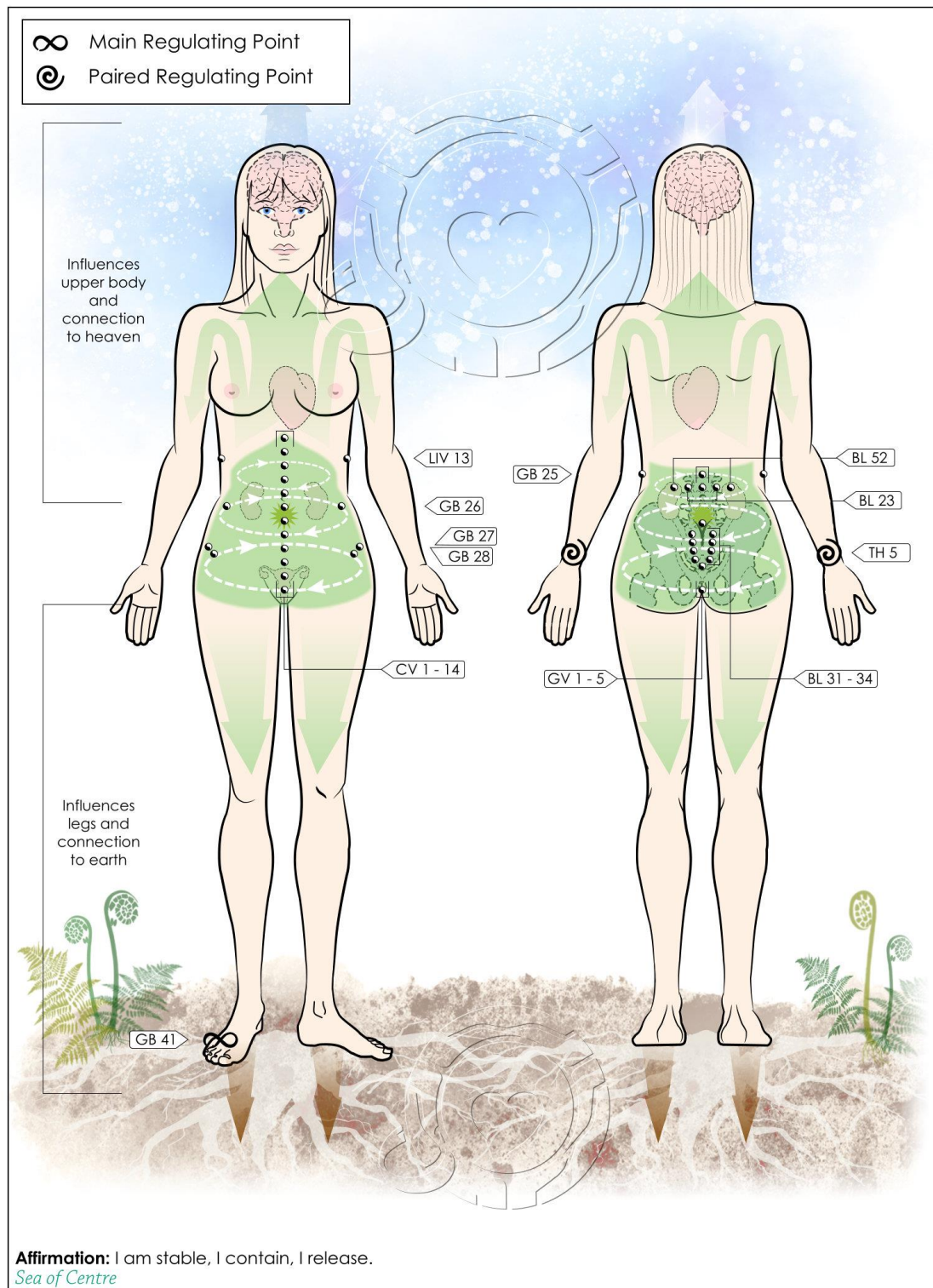
Vessel Inner Family	Regulating Point for Inner Family and paired point for Outer Family	Paired Point for Inner Family and Regulating point for Outer Family	Vessel Outer Family
Conception Vessel (Ren Mai) Yin CV	LU7 (metal) hand Heaven	KD6 (water) foot Earth	Yin Heel (Yin Qiao)
Governing Vessel (Du Mai) Yang GV	SI3 (fire) hand Heaven	BL62 (water) foot Earth	Yang Heel (Yang Qiao)
Penetrating Vessel (Chong Mai) Yin PV	SP4 (Earth) foot Earth	HP6 (fire) hand Heaven	Yin Linking (Yin Wei)
Girdle Vessel (Dai Mai) Yang GDV	GB41 (wood) foot Earth	TH5 (fire) hand Heaven	Yang Linking (Yang Wei)

“Once I started working with these Vessels, I began to tap into parts of my being which I had not been able to do before. They seemed to open to another layer. I began to understand some of the feelings I had about my parents and grandparents and why I reacted to them in the way I did. I even felt memories being stirred around my birth and early childhood. I continue to be fascinated by these Vessels.” (Helena, 32, Shiatsu student)

Penetrating (衝脈 Chong Mai)



Affirmation: I create a nourishing relationship with myself.
Sea of BLOOD



Creative Activities

Affirmations for all the Vessels

I connect to the fullest expression of who I am, my potential and my creative power.

I contain the energy and power of the whole cosmos within my body.

I am Heaven and Earth.

I connect to my ancestors, welcoming in their wisdom and releasing what no longer serves me.

I navigate my way between my outer and inner worlds.

I protect, guide and support myself.

Journal prompts

Think about the different energies described in the last chapter.

How do you experience your daily flow?

Are there times of day when you have more or less energy?

Does this change according to the seasons?

How do you experience the annual flow of energy?

Is there a season you prefer? Why?

Are you in a season of growth, reflection, rest, or renewal

In your life cycle, which season are you in?

Do you experience the energy pathways in your body?

Do you find the concept of seeing Food as more than simply food and Air as simply more than air helpful?

How do you relate to your core four organs?

How do you relate to the cycles of seven and eight years in your life?

What major events have happened around the ending or beginning of a cycle?

Are there other length cycles which seem to be more significant for you?

Which turning points do you feel have been most transformational? Empowering?

Are there any which created challenges or blocks?

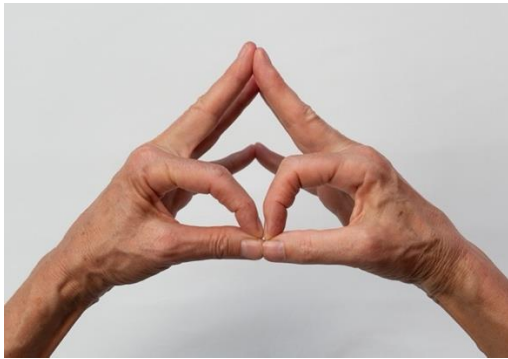
Touch

Hold the regulating points.

Touch your core four organs.

Mudra: hand gesture

This mudra links all Eight Vessels.



Place your thumb and index fingers of your two hands together to form a figure of eight.

Touch the tips of your remaining fingers (middle, ring and little) together and extend them.

You can point the three fingers outwards, upwards or downwards.

Point them down when in front of the Palaces, to connect with Earth.

Point them away from your body when over your lower back or Ming Men to connect with the past.

Point them outwards when in front of your heart to connect with others and the future.

Point them upwards in front of your brain to connect with space.

Visualisation: connect with your core four organs

Place your hands on your lower abdomen, resting along the edge of your pubic bone. You can place them in the mudra, and change their position when you connect with each organ, or simply let them rest.

Invite your awareness down into your pelvic bowl. Become aware of your perineum, the area between your pubic bone and tail bone, resting on or close to the Earth.

As you breathe out feel like you are sending roots down into the Earth.

With each out breath feel your roots burrowing deeper down into the water of the Earth.

With each in breath, feel you are like a tree drinking this nourishing water.

Draw the water upwards to your perineum.

Your Palaces

Feel the water meeting the outer gates of your vagina or the glans of your penis. Journey through the gates to arrive in a tunnel.

Crawl through the walls of the tunnel until you arrive at the opening to the cave of your womb or your prostate.

Crawl through and enter the soft darkness of your cave.

Know you are safe in your cave. It is your space. It is the source of your creativity. It can only ever nourish and support you. Receive what you need.

Two glimmers of light emanate from two small tunnels, at each side of your dark cave – your fallopian tubes and your vas deferens. You see the glimmer of golden seeds at their ends. Your two ovaries/testicles with their seeds.

Journey through one of these tunnels to stand in front of the light of your ovary/testes. Bathe in this light, receiving all it is giving you.

Behind your ovary/testes is a door.

Move through it to connect with the origin of your life in this body, your destiny and perhaps your ancestors.

Kidneys

Journey deeper within yourself until you reach a landscape with two large pools of water. Between the two pools is a fire. Hanging over the fire is a cauldron. You have reached the gate between your kidneys.

Within this cauldron is your life force. This sustains you on your journey through your life. Let your fire warm you and connect with your life force and your destiny.

Feel your fire warming the two pools of water which extend back into time, carrying this fire within them.

Look into these pools and journey backwards to connect with all those who come before you.

Receive their support and wisdom.

Feel the warmth of the fire in your lower back.

Heart

A stairway leads up from your fire to your heart.

Feel the warmth and light of your Heart radiating from the top.

Climb up to your heart until you can bathe in her warmth.

Listen to the rhythmic beats of your heart.

The fire of your heart is your destiny – the path you choose in this life.

Receive the wisdom and love of your heart.

What song or creative expression wants to come through your heart?

See your heart's warmth and light shining out to the people in your life – your circle of friends, family and allies.

Receive love from the people in your life, those you know and those you have yet to meet.

Brain

Feel your heart's flames dancing and carrying you upwards to a giant dome whose top is open to light and air.

Feel the movement of breath in the space of your brain.

With each breath feel your dome opening up to the light and air of space, into the infinite.

Draw the infinite into your whole body and being.

Bathe in light and space.

When you are ready to return, journey back to the fire and wisdom of your heart, back to the ancestral fire between the pools of water to arrive back in your ovaries and testes and through the tunnels of the fallopian tubes and vas deferens to arrive in the cave of your womb and prostate.

Feel these four organs supporting each other and you.

Feel the connections between them.

Receive your body's wisdom.

There is a YouTube video with this visualisation if you would like to listen to it.

<https://youtu.be/668ieKMHZPs>

II. CHAPTER 6: BIRTH AND BEGINNINGS; GATEWAY INTO A NEW WORLD

How you make the movement from water to earth, profoundly influences your future experiences of new beginnings and relationships. Explore how different types of birth imprint memories in your body. Learn how the different Vessels are activated during birth, and understand which ones you may need to work with now. New born babies are extremely adaptable and, if they can be supported to integrate their birth experience soon after birth, will be more able to access their potential in life.

Birth imprints you deeply. The ancient Chinese valued a calm atmosphere for a baby's arrival because they understood that it marks us profoundly. Only recently psychotherapists have understood this. You leave the watery space of the womb to arrive on Earth, literally passing through a gateway – your mother's cervix. You have been primed through millions of years of evolution to make this journey. In many traditions birth is seen as mirroring the volcanic shifts and eruptions which signal the emergence of life on land around 400 million years ago. Birth enables you to experience this monumental shift, facilitating huge shifts in your body and perception. You experience a Yang movement out from the watery Yin of the womb to arrive on Earth facilitated by all the Vessels, especially Governing and Conception. .

Birth is called labour because it involves strong physical and emotional challenges for the baby. A baby's body must be strong to survive and for a few babies it may be too much. There is a fine line between birth and death. You say goodbye to your mother and the fusional relationship you had. If your relationship was nurturing and loving it can be challenging to leave it behind, even though you will, in most cases, continue it. If this relationship was challenging or suffocating, you may be relieved for it to end.

Birth has changed immensely since the 1950s. Before then, there was little intervention and sometimes women and babies would die who do not nowadays. Today many babies experience some medical intervention. These new birth experiences imprint differently on your body and you need support to process them. The Chinese understood how to support the underlying energies of the baby, but clearly did not have to consider the effects of medical interventions. My understanding of this is based on my own, and my students, work with babies. Different types of birth (e.g. Caesarean) tend to imprint different types of patterning, but each baby experiences the same type of birth differently. If the baby is stuck, vaginal birth may be more stressful than Caesarean birth.

Life in the womb prepares a baby for birth. Spiralling down the narrow fallopian tube and emerging into the larger space of the womb to implant prepares you to move into the narrow birth canal and spiral out into the world. Folding from the flat midline of the two-layer (bilaminar) disc into the fetal position prepares you for the opposite movement of unfolding which begins during birth and continues during your first year.

As your arms and legs develop, they push and move against the womb. You develop muscle tone, particularly through your back (Governing), abdomen (Conception,

Penetrating and Girdle) and hips (Girdle). As your mother moves, you move. A physiological (natural) birth draws upon and strengthens these movements, but is not the only opportunity to integrate them. During your first year you continue to strengthen them. From around six weeks, the womb gently contracts around you. In the weeks leading up to birth, these contractions strengthen. They stimulate your immune system and tone your tissues and organs for life outside the womb. It is especially important that your diaphragm is ready for its strong contraction with your first breath which will inflate your lungs.

In the last couple of months, there is less space, so you move your head down towards your mother's pubic bone, readying yourself for birth. Stronger contractions support this process. If your mother is physically active, most babies position their spine towards the abdomen enabling their head to curl forward, giving more space to move through the pelvis. If your mother sits a lot, you tend to sit back with her, moving your spine to her back which gives less space. As birth approaches your head descends below the pubic bone and enters the pelvis. The stimulation of your head on your mother's perineum helps stimulate the hormonal changes necessary in her body to start labour. Your hormones also change. This is thought to be a maturing of your hypothalamus- pituitary- adrenal axis which involves the Brain and Kidney organs of the Extraordinary Vessels. Stress and emotional states hinder these hormonal changes. During birth, levels of catecholamines (adrenalin and noradrenalin) are high. These help keep your blood circulation strong, maintain glucose supply to your heart and brain, and prepare your lungs for their first breath.

Some babies position their bottom down. They can be born naturally or need intervention. The Chinese call this "clutching at your mother's Heart," rather than "breech." There are many reasons why babies choose this position. Something physical like cysts or fibroids in your mother's womb; the shape of her womb, or your cord being too short; stops your head moving down. It could be more emotional. You or your mother could fear birth. Perhaps the world outside feels unsafe, for example if your mother is in an abusive relationship. It may be that you are happy in the womb and neither you nor your mother want the pregnancy to end. You may simply want to be born bottom first. Whether you change position or not, both mother and baby need to realise that it is the end of their symbiotic time together and let go.

Birth is the Yang Wood dynamic energy of spring. Yin and Yang are regulated by Conception and Governing Vessel supported by the Stepping Vessels. Penetrating Vessel supports you to let go of your mother's Heart, whatever position you are in, and prepare for arriving on Earth.

"Elsa, 27, 37 weeks pregnant with her first baby, had been burning moxa on her little toe (BL67), a commonly indicated point for stimulating Yang, for a week, on the advice of her acupuncturist because her baby was breech. Her baby hadn't changed position. I decided to focus on the Penetrating Vessel, especially the connection between Elsa's and her baby's hearts. I worked with Elsas on all-fours for some of the session because this helps the baby change position. On all fours, I encouraged Elsa to rock to support flow in her Girdle Vessel. We worked with her breath and visualising her baby's head moving down as we palmed down from Elsa's heart to

her pubic bone. We talked to her baby using their name. I worked down mum's legs to the Penetrating regulating point (SP4), encouraging anchoring and massaged her little toe (BL67), to support the Yang. The baby began to move and that evening turned head down. He stayed that way until his birth, which flowed easily for them both." (Elsa, 27 Shiatsu client)

It doesn't always work this way. I have had women whose baby didn't turn but who gave birth at home in water as well as women who had a Caesarean.

The impact of different births

Our "blueprint is a vaginal birth with no intervention. You can get stuck at any stage. Sometimes you work your own way out. Sometimes you need help. Sometimes you get stressed and tired, and your heart rate goes down. The journey may become life threatening for either mother or baby. Modern medicine can help. However, each intervention impacts the natural process. Its impact depends on how it was carried out. Was it rushed? Did your parents communicate with you about what was going to happen? Did you feel it was necessary?

I am amazed how easily babies can process a difficult birth. They often release through crying or wriggling. Many parents understand the nature of these cries and movements and intuitively know how to support their baby. Much of what parents do with their baby after birth, like having skin to skin contact and feeding them, helps their baby process birth. However, the parents may themselves have been traumatized by the birth, or find it difficult to connect with their baby. The baby may not then be able to release what is stuck.

"One of my students took home a video I showed of natural birth. Her 4-year-old daughter, who was born by Caesarean, watched it with her. During the following weeks, she often crawled down into the neck of her mother's clothes, emerging at her pelvis. At some point she stopped doing it and her mother told me that she seemed a lot more alert and present.

When I teach parents to massage their toddler, I have a soft pelvis and some toys. Quite often the toddler puts a soft toy into the pelvis, banging it against the sides, showing where they got stuck in birth. They finish the "game" by helping their toy emerge from the bottom. Afterwards the parents tell me that their child seems to have released something from their birth. It could be a stuck emotion or a physical release in part of their body " (Suzanne)

Birth "blueprint"

You feel stronger compression around your head and your whole body is squeezed intensely. You sense being pushed out of your home towards a new opening which enlarges – the cervix. After each squeeze there is a pause, and you rest. Sometimes during the squeezes, you change position. You advance towards the cervix which is now an open door. As you pass through it, headfirst, you enter a new, narrow space,

like a tunnel. The pressures intensify. You are aware of your mother. Your head leads the way as your body advances. Even as you rest you feel strong pressures all around you. Sometimes you feel you are going backwards. Finally your head meets a new doorway, which you push against. This is your mother's perineum. You might push against the doorway and then rest back in the tunnel. When you finally push the doorway open, you pause, feeling air around your head. Another squeeze of the tunnel pushes your head further out. You become aware of your mouth/nose.

Your head arches and then rotates. Your shoulders, chest and arms spiral out of the tunnel. As you emerge into space you feel a strong release in your lungs, heart, chest and ribs. This spiralling movement continues down into your spine and pelvis, then into your legs and feet. You give a final push with your feet and the rest of your body is squeezed and pushed out of the tunnel. You feel the pressure release as you meet the earth – either your mother's body or a soft surface.

These movements strengthen all the Extraordinary Vessels, preparing them to meet the forces of gravity. Your midline from head to pelvis is strengthened: Governing and Conception Vessel. Girdle Vessel connects your upper and lower body. The movement down your legs activates the Penetrating leg branch. As your feet push against the womb, the Stepping Vessels are activated.

Your hands and arms are not as involved. They will be activated later as you explore the Earth and the space around you. Your Linking Vessels become your "wings" when you stand around age one.

" My baby didn't turn enough and with each contraction kept pushing to one side of the perinium, not finding the birth tunnel. It was incredibly painful for both of us. Later, when visiting playmates she found it difficult to pass over the 'threshold' from me to her playmates. However, once she was over the threshold and I left, she was fine. I realized that each baby brings her own history. My husband's family find new beginnings frightening – their response is: fear, resist" (Elena, Shiatsu student, age 39)

Breech

Your bottom (pelvis) leads: everything is reversed. Your bottom emerges first. Your legs and feet emerge next and, like your arms when your head comes first, your legs are not as activated. The rotational movement begins first in your lower back, moving into your upper back followed by your shoulders. Sometimes a hand and arm emerge before your shoulder. Your head is last to emerge.

This movement activates the midline in a rotational way, integrating between your upper and lower body. Does it affect you differently if your head emerges first ? It's hard to say. Your head and chest experience similar compressions and stimulation. Your arms and legs are stimulated differently, but the movements babies naturally do after birth can rebalance between the two.

Beginnings-starting (induction) or speeding up: increasing Yang

Sometimes labour doesn't begin, and a decision is made to initiate it medically. Induction can be a relatively gentle process involving manual stimulation of your mother's cervix, which you may feel. It may involve inserting prostaglandin hormones into her cervix. Your amniotic sac may be broken, and you feel the changes in pressure. Artificial oxytocin may be injected into your mother's blood which may create strong contractions. Sometimes artificial oxytocin is given after your journey has started – to speed it up if it has slowed down.

This hormonal stimulation adds in Yang. Your response depends on how ready you are to be born. If you are ready, it probably feels like a gentle, supporting push. If you are not ready, it may feel like a forceful, brutal push. If the contractions become more intense with short spaces in between it can be difficult to find your rhythm. It may be hard to rest. You may become overstimulated and go into distress. Strong contractions may cause your mother pain and distress and an epidural may be needed to slow labour down. This change of rhythm may confuse you and you may sense she is less present. A high dose of artificial hormones may affect you after birth and increase your risk of jaundice. You may need phototherapy and be separated from your mother: increasing feelings of separation.

Postnatally parents can support their baby/child by giving them space to initiate movements/actions and find their own rhythm. Parents can notice how their baby responds to over-stimulating situations and enable them to have appropriate resources to calm and slow down. As an adult, you may find beginnings are stressful and you can easily get overstimulated.

A slow Yin touch may help a baby's and an adult's energy to regulate. The Yin Penetrating Vessel which nourishes Blood, emotions, our connection to our mother and the Earth can help. Yin slow, broad touch along the spine (GV) can calm overly stimulated Yang.

“Allegra’s Penetrating Vessel felt raw and open with a wiry tense feeling. Her back was also tense. I palmed down her legs to bring in slowness. Then I gently began to touch the heart branches of Penetrating Vessel. The tense feeling softened. I palmed slowly down her back (GV) and felt that easing too. She began to cry gently, remembering how she hadn’t felt ready for birth, and how she always felt speeded up and disconnected when she had to begin something new. Using slow versions of the Penetrating and Governing Vessel exercises, she gradually began to be able to slow down when she was beginning new things. She found focusing on her legs and feet, particularly KD1, helped settle her, especially in overstimulating situations.”
(Allegra, 41, shiatsu client)

Slowing down-increasing Yin: Epidural

Epidurals are given for pain relief for the mother at any stage of labour. They can also be used to slow down labour if it is going too quickly, both during a natural labour and one in which artificial hormones have been given.

An epidural introduces anaesthetic, often combined with opioids, into the epidural space between the two protective tissue layers (dura mater) around your mother's spinal cord. This is usually in her lumbar spine either directly around GV4 (Gate of Life – L2/3) or close by. It numbs her womb and upper part of vagina as well as her legs. This is an overstimulation of Yin within all the Yin Vessels. Although anaesthetics do not enter directly into a baby's blood, they affect Blood's nourishing energy. You may feel cold, numb and less aware of your mother. You may feel the contractions slowing down, affecting your blood and oxygen supply, lowering your heart rate. You feel less stimulation from the womb squeezing you which makes your movements slower. You sense your journey slowing down. You may feel your mother disconnecting from you.

The effects continue after birth. Studies suggest that epidurals interfere with the release of oxytocin which, as well as causing the let-down effect in breastfeeding, encourages bonding between a mother and her baby. You may feel listless and less alert. You may find it hard to recognise the new connection with your mother. You may be less alert, quicker to cry when disturbed, and less able to settle yourselves. Some research even suggests that as an adult you can be 4.7 times more likely to become addicted to opiate drugs (Jacobson 1990).

Penetrating Vessel is the main support for breastfeeding and bonding. The extra Yin of the epidural cools Penetrating Vessel which will benefit from a warming and lightly stimulating touch. The simplest way to achieve this is through skin-to-skin contact between mother and baby - chest to chest, Yin to Yin. As your mother holds your back (GV – Yang) you receive warmth. With adults whose mother had an epidural, PV may feel cold, flat and slow. They may find it hard to connect intimately with others.

“ I always felt a dampening down feeling when I became close to others, like a cold fog enveloping me. I would feel tired and disconnected. When I did the more dynamic Penetrating Vessel exercises, especially when I included my lower back (Gate of Life) and my spine (GV) I felt my body warming up. Like I was being woken up. I noticed when I was with others I didn't feel quite so tired and cold. I was more able to open up. ” (Damian, shiatsu student 58)

Endings - a quicker release of the head: Episiotomy

Sometimes your head gets stuck at the perineum. If this is cut, your head suddenly releases and your journey speeds up. You may feel shocked. Or you may be relieved to have the doorway opened. With a sudden release, there is less time to assimilate the spiralling movements through your body. These can be integrated with the movements of your first year.

Endings - being pulled out : forceps and ventouse

Forceps and ventouse are used to pull a baby out if they get stuck or they or their mother are too tired to finish their journey. Forceps are metal tongs which can reach higher inside and are used when baby is stuck further up. They are not used as often these days because they put a lot of pressure on baby's head and can cause trauma. Caesareans are used instead. Ventouse is a suction cap and used when a baby's head is on the perineum. It is less intense because the baby doesn't need to be pulled as much. Depending on how high the baby is, and how effective the contractions are, an episiotomy may be needed.

These tools often cause some bruising to your head, even though it usually is mild. Even without bruising, your head will feel sensitive. Since it has been pulled, you have not experienced the same rotational movement through your neck, shoulders and into your hips and feet. There is less integration within the Vessels. The pulling through your neck and spine may cause trauma to your vertebrae and pelvis.

Postnatally parents can support their baby/child by giving them space and time to complete actions, and allowing them to initiate movements.. Gentle palming down the spine helps integrate the movement into the pelvis and legs, although, depending on the level of trauma, a baby may need to see a specialist infant bodyworker. Girdle Vessel holds help a baby integrate between their upper and lower body as well as easing trauma in the pelvis and supporting rotational movement through the body. These same actions can help an adult process too.

Your head is often sensitive, but it is important to help a baby release the tension, through gently getting them used to touch, otherwise tension may stay, even into adulthood. I have often worked with adults with chronic headaches or jaw tension, related to birth. Even someone with little training can help a baby release the tension.

“ An eight-week baby came to a student clinic with her two parents. She was red in the face and screaming intensely. Her brow was furrowed. Her parents were stressed and exhausted because she had been crying almost non- stop since she had been born by ventouse, after a long and stressful birth. My students showed some exercises to relax them before guiding them to work on their baby. Mum sat with baby while dad held baby's feet (GB41 (Girdle), BL62 and KD6 (Stepping Vessels), Kidney 1 (Penetrating)). This settled her a little. Dad palmed down her legs and then held around Girdle Vessel. As he held GV4 baby settled more. With dad holding Girdle, back and front, mum held her hands about a foot away from baby's head. Baby stayed calm. As mum approached her hands closer, baby started screaming again. Mum moved her hands away a little. Over the course of 10 minutes mum was able to slowly approach and finally gently touch the head. Baby's face was now a normal colour. Her brow softened. She smiled. The whole family relaxed.”
(Suzanne)

Finding points on babies is easy because their feet are so small. If you are close to a point, they let you know if it is helping.

C section (LCCS: lower section Caesarean section)

A Caesarean is usually done with an epidural. A cut is made into the womb, the amniotic sac ruptured, and the baby's head or bottom (whichever comes first) is delivered by slipping a hand below it and applying pressure to the top of the womb. Sometimes a vacuum or forceps is used. Next, the shoulders are eased out and the baby held head down at the same level as the placenta while their mouth and pharynx are cleared of fluid. The cord is clamped and divided.

You are pulled directly out from the womb, through your mother's abdominal wall, often by your head. Your spine and body do not experience the same compressions as in a vaginal birth. This makes it harder for your diaphragm to contract and for fluid to be forced from your lungs. You have released fewer of the hormones (catecholamines) which support your lungs and breathing. You may find it difficult to expel fluids and suffer from breathing and congestive problems after birth. It is important to receive compression type touch, which gently replicates the compressions around your head down through your spine, shoulders, arms, hips and feet. As with forceps and ventouse, you have missed the rotational movement from head to toe and the integration between your upper and lower body. You receive beneficial bacteria from your mother on your way through the birth canal and, after birth, from breast milk and your environment. Breastfeeding helps transmit bacteria as does having lots of skin-to-skin contact. Your mother could insert a vaginal swab a few hours before birth and then swab your skin, with these bacteria, if she has no infection.

A Caesarean can happen before birth for a number of reasons: mother's choice, placenta covering the cervix, baby lying in position where it can't be born, or because mother or baby aren't considered to be strong enough for labour. Neither mother nor baby have gone through all the physiological, including hormonal, changes which initiate birth nor any of the process of the birth blueprint. Birth probably comes as a surprise, unless your mother has prepared you for this journey.

If a Caesarean happens during labour it is usually because mother or baby are in distress or there is a potential emergency which aggravates stress. If it is earlier on during birth you may feel your rhythm disrupted and your journey, or you may be happy someone is helping you. If you were stuck in the birth canal or you may experience it as a relief, or frustration that you weren't given more time.

You may have experienced all the other interventions before the Caesarean. In extreme emergency, your mother may have had a general anaesthetic. This introduces more extreme Yin than an epidural. While your mother is under anaesthetic you may feel abandoned. If your mother is in pain, this may affect how she bonds with us.

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