

THE UNFOLDING BUD

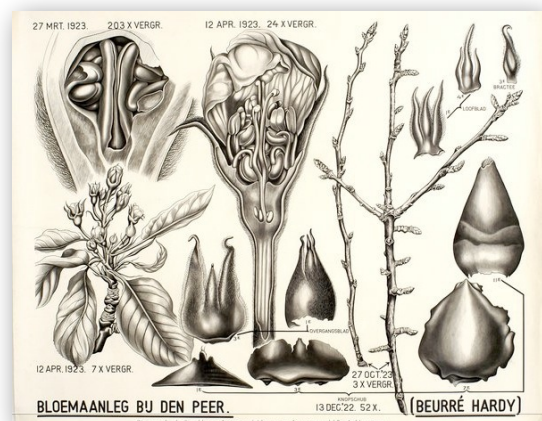
THE EIGHT EXTRA MERIDIANS AND THE ART OF STANDING STILL

by PETER DEN DEKKER

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UNFOLDING

As a boy every early spring I looked in amazement at the sudden opening of buds on the bare branches of beeches and chestnuts. I could visualize the movement of the compressed bud unfolding into the full splay of young leaves. Still, every springtime, I observe the same miniature explosions and feel the same excitement. Recently, I saw a television program showing a speeded-up shot of the growth of a bulb into a flower. It was followed by the reversal of the same shot, so the flower shrank back to bud and bulb. To see both extremes, bud and blooming expression, full flexion and full extension, in this relatively small span of time, was very impressive. The origin and the final creation can be recognized in each other.



Writing an article on the Eight Extra Meridians brings these images strongly to mind. Whereas the twelve regular meridians can be understood in terms of ways the infant body develops, these eight extraordinary seem to serve as masterplan underlying the countless developmental steps we all make. Just like the folded-up intelligence of the bud already holds and hides the complex magnificence of the flower.

HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT

Using the Eight Extra Meridians is common in various acupuncture styles, but in the acupuncture literature the emphasis is strongly on their dysfunction.

There is very little written on the the relation between the EEM and healthy functioning and development. Since in complementary medicine we in the first place try to touch the healthy resources of the body-mind, this aspect of the EEM is of great relevance.



In the past in my acupuncture studies the EEM were presented as a mysterious phenomenon. Although it was said, that their application could be very useful in the treatment of many cases, no insight was offered in the nature of their palpable existence. To some extent, the same was true for the regular meridians. In later years, through practice and teaching, I step by step began to grasp the intimate relation between the energetics and the physical reality of the meridian system. When touching the *Chi* of a meridian, in fact one still touches the somatic body, and not a energetic reality which exist separate from it. The sciences of anatomy and of the science of *Chi* serve as two different languages to describe one and the same human body. Over time I made an effort to understand the EEM in terms of anatomy, *Chi* and the developmental processes.

THE BODY IN THE BODY

*'..... to experience the breathing in the breathing and the body in the body'
Satipatthana Sutra*

This statement in the Buddhist sutra explains, that for the closest possible connection and deepest understanding of our body, we have to observe and study the body from within. The one who studies in a conventional scientific way, sees the object as the object, the one who is merely the therapist approaches the client as a client. They are both outsiders of the process and miss the clue, that the 'body can be experienced in the body'. I remember vividly a moment years ago when in clinic I had my hands on the body of a client, and suddenly realized, that his body was really breathing, and was really inhabited by life. I was shocked by the power of that simple realization. I asked myself if I had slept during all the other treatments I had given before. The heartbeat and the breathing I felt under my hands reconnected me with these of my own. Since then in my development as a practitioner of oriental medicine, I have always have felt that it was the best to learn with and through the body.

STANDING ALONE

The practice of *Chi Kung* has been a great tool to understand the energetics of the meridians, including the EEM. In fact, many *Chi Kung* schools state that their particular exercises influence directly the EEM. In which way that is done is never written so explicate, since putting in straight words how the body senses its own complex ways is a delicate thing. The tradition I am trained in is called *Zhan*



Zhuang Chi Kung, translated as 'standing like a tree', or 'the art of standing still'. In the training no theory is emphasized, not even the meridian concept. The practice itself, the fact of being involved wholeheartedly, is considered of more value than knowledge or speculation. Nevertheless, being involved in *Zhan Zhuang Chi Kung* has helped me to understand the meridian system more deeply. Step by step the way the EEM underlie the body's energetic potential can be explored and experienced and the often obscure quotes on the EEM in the various different classics and textbooks become easier to grasp. In the practice of *Zhan Zhuang Chi Kung* no movement is applied. Because of that, one can undisturbed enter and observe his or her own body. Lao Tze writes in chapter 25 of the *Tao Te Ching*:

*'Standing alone and unchanging,
One can observe every mystery,
Present at every moment and ceaselessly continuing,
This is the gateway to indescribable marvels.'*

RIVERS AND LAKES

'When there are heavy rains, canals and ditches are full to the brim ... similarly the extraordinary vessels are left out of the channel-system so they can take the overflow from the main channels.'
Classic of Difficulties, chapter 27



In Holland, the country where I live, the big lakes in the center and in the west serve as such reservoirs. They are connected with the main rivers and other waterways, and with a system of sluices the water level in the whole country can be regulated. The lakes form an enormous

buffer in times of overflow as well as drought.

In finances, being it on macro- or micro-scale, moving and stable factors can be distinguished. The money in our pocket is for direct use and even if by accident we



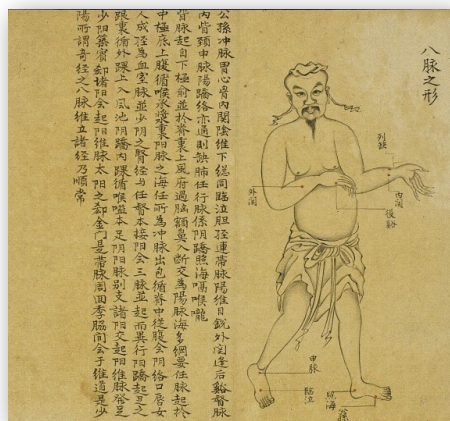
lose our wallet, there is no need for panic. We still have reserves which we use to circulate for daily purpose. The most superficial resources have the nature to come and go, either it be pocket money or *Chi* in the most superficial vessels. It is not even a risk spending: use it or lose it. The reserves to replenish are either in the drawer of the cupboard, on a bank account and the most deep are the value of our house or even our creditworthiness is general. The supporting and storing qualities of *Yin* thus have many layers of which the EEM form the deepest.

SURPLUS

Each movement or action the body undertakes, is supported by *Chi* and by using the *Chi* it will naturally diminish. In sports we use *Chi* and afterwards we need to rest and recuperate. In disciplines like *Tai Chi Chuan*, we let the *Chi* smoothly go round in the channels, freeing up blockages and adjusting good body coordination. But even in this gentle performance the *Chi* will lessen and after we need to replenish it. In the *Zhan Zhuang Chi Kung* training one's energy reserve could be seen like a bowl filled with water. Any action will use a little of that water, thus diminishing the level of *Chi*. Through the practice of standing still it is possible to refill the bowl. With steady practice the water level will reach the rim and eventually the water will overflow. That surplus can be used for action, this time without the danger to empty the reserves. The practice of *Zhan Zhuang Chi Kung* thus will help absorbing and storing the 'heavy rains' for times of need.

SAFE DOOR

Except the *Du Mai* and the *Ren Mai*, the EEM do not have points of their own; they connect individual points of the various regular meridians. The EEM are thus intimately related with the regular channels. In acupuncture literature the EEM are grouped in four pairs, and of each of the EEM an opening point is mentioned.



- *Chong Mai* (Spleen 4) - *Yin Wei Mai* (Heart Protector 6)
- *Yang Qiao Mai* (Bladder 62) - *Du Mai* (Small Intestine 3)
- *Yin Qiao Mai* (Kidney 6) - *Ren Mai* (Lung 7)
- *Dai Mai* (Gallbladder 41) - *Yang Wei Mai* (Triple Heater 5).

To activate one of the EEM, its opening point and that one of its paired channel must be stimulated simultaneously. Be it water, finances or *Chi*, a certain reserve is stored to make life sustainable. The access to the storage must be secured in such a way that it is not used without good reason. Money and other values are kept in a safe and in order to unlock its door, one has to turn two or more buttons onto the right code. So, to protect the body-mind's deeper reserves, each one of the EEM can only be activated by a



simultaneous activation of its opening and coupled point.

THE CONSTITUTION

'The EEM all derive their energy from the Kidneys and all contain the Essence which is stored in the Kidneys.'

G. Macioca: *The Foundations of Chinese Medicine*

The foundation of our western democracies is the constitution. It is giving rise to all the individual laws. The constitution is not active on an everyday level. It expresses the most basic values of the state, while the individual laws regulate the details. The regular meridians, like the laws of a country, guide the everyday dynamics of the body-mind and are rooted in the 'constitutional' EEM. The constitution forms the essence of the nations organization. Changing any article of the constitution can not be done lightly. In order to protect the inner values of the society, many procedures must be worked through, like the



simultaneous implantation of both houses of parliament.

In analogy, to activate one of the EEM, one has to stimulate its opening point and that of its paired channel at the same time.

ARMS EN LEGS

Within any pair of the EEM the energetics of upper and lower extremities are related in a specific way. If the opening point of one of the extra meridians is located on the hand (or wrist) its coupled point is on the foot (or ankle), vice versa. To open and activate any extra meridian pair needle impulses are thus given to both arms and legs. When performing the basic *Zhan Zhuang Chi Kung* stances legs and arms are trained simultaneously. Through

instruction and correction the position of arm and legs is adjusted and in a later stage, one will be able to correct the posture oneself by inner awareness. The purpose of attaining a 'correct' posture in the training, could be compared with



finding the correct localization of an acupuncture point.

Remaining in the correct posture means continuously stimulating the two points. By diligent practice the body will recognize the vital importance of the area's of the four EEM opening points on the foot, and those around the wrist. The intimate relation between the EEM opening points and the bodies natural structure can be discovered.

TWO STAGES

The *Chi* in the regular channels serves, like the money in our pocket directly spendable. To get acces to deeper reserves some time is required. The safe is secured with a time lock! We need to stay some time in the basic *Zhan Zhuang Chi Kung* postures, before we can relax the body-mind's surface and reach its core structure. Unless a practitioner is very experienced, it will take ten, fifteen or twenty minutes for this proces to unfold. Initially the details of the posture have to remembered and put into practice. The conscious mind is active in scanning the whole body in order to detect any tension, in giving orders to release these found tensions, and to adjust the posture in the best possible way. Than after, the bodies intelligence has to take over this role in order to prevent, that the continuous action of the conscious mind will give rise to tension

itself. These two stages of the *Chi Kung* practice can be paralleled with the roles within a therapeutic setting. The therapist possesses the insight and know-how and takes the lead, whereas the client has the capacity to receive and let things happen. It is this very capacity to receive, which will allow, that the given impulses can reach the right places and allow healing to take place. Once the 'correct' posture is found, the area's of the EEM opening points are activated, and time and further relaxation will do the work.

THE MOTHER

The *Chong Mai* can be considered the mother of the EEM and the whole of the meridian system. Its name can be translated as Penetrating Vessel, which refers to its central localization and

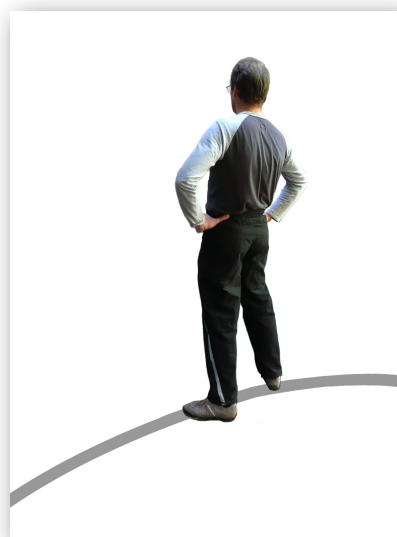


probably to the fact that its influence spreads throughout the whole body. The *Chong Mai* has few points. ST30 and KI11, KI21 and KI27 and its opening point is SP4. Both Pre-Heaven and Post-Heaven *Chi*, resp. Kidney and Spleen-Stomach energy, are represented in its course, reflecting the *Chong Mai*'s life supporting and nourishing character. SP4, *GongSun*, the opening point has a central position in the arch of the foot, between the heel and the ball of the big toe. When we stand straight with our weight mainly on the heel, the body attention will go to the hard tissues of the spine. Our posture will feel sturdy, but quiet inflexible. Standing with the weight on the front of the feet, will shift the body's focus to the soft tissues of the inner organs - a more bouncing experience. Having the weight

distributed evenly between front of the foot and heel will bring the attention to an entire different part of the body. In the standing posture the arch of the foot, the locality of SP4, is directly connected with a tube-shaped area stretching from the perineum up to the fontanel. It can be localized between the hard spine and the soft organ tissues. This is the area of the deep musculature of the iliopsoas and diaphragm crura, the pelvic diaphragm, the kidneys and adrenal glands, the aorta and vena cava. In state of health they all possess a quality of strong inner pressure, giving the body support from its very center. The *Chong Mai* area as a whole can be seen as the body's core structure.

GROINS

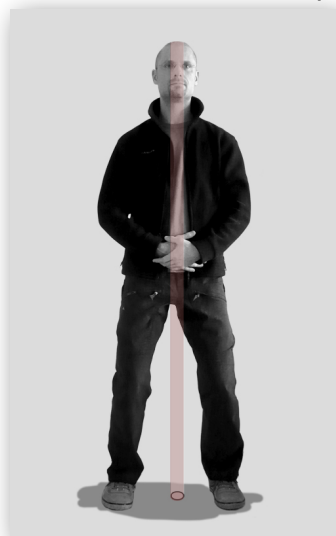
The three Kidney points are the surface reflexion of the central supportive tube, at level of the so-called Lower, Middle and Upper Heater. The first and probably most fundamental aim of the *Zhan Zhuang* practice is to stand into this core structure and experience, how the *Chong Mai* is capable to support our body's posture, both in stillness and in movements. To get access to it ST30, *Chong Chi*, is of great importance. (Note that the points name carries the same name as the *Chong Mai*: *Chi* flushing, *Chi* passing through). Often when we stand the groins, the region of ST30, are tensed up, causing the hips to tilt forward or backward,



thereby misaligning the spine. The weight will be either too much on the heels or on the forefoot. Therefore in *Zhan Zhuang Chi Kung*, the art of standing still, it is crucial to first of all

learn to release the groins and hips. Before our daily training we always do three simple warm up exercises, of which the first two take tension and pressure of the groins and hips. After that we try to keep and deepen this relaxation while practicing the *Chi Kung* postures. The release and opening of ST30 will allow the weight of the upper body enter the legs and finally it will reach SP4, between forefoot and heel. Note that SP4 is also the Spleen-meridian's *Luo* point, where the down-going, gravity-leading direction of the Stomach-meridian connects with the gravity-reflecting, up-going character of the Spleen-meridian. In any natural standing posture the relation between SP4, ST30 and the inner *Chong Mai* tube can be experienced.

When the posture is well aligned, both SP4 points will be right under the perineum-fontanel tube, so unifying the



inner 'mother channel' with the greater Mother Earth.

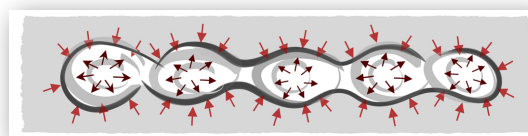
This cannot be experienced without the deep release of ST30. Also take notice, that SP4 is localized in the adductor hallucis, which has the function of giving the big toe the proper alignment. Spleen 3-4 and Liver 3 are located at each side of the metatarsal of the big toe, respectively in its abductor and the adductor. There must be a certain balance in their tonus in order that the big toe is properly aligned for standing postures and for pushing off in forward directed movements.

CAVITIES

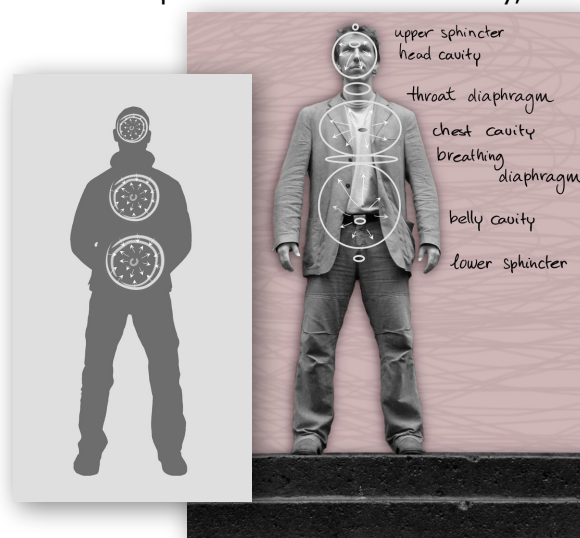
Early in evolution living creatures with a relative simple organization appeared. A sea anemones for example has its whole



body formed around one central, pulsating cavity. In the body of earthworms the cavity became long and therefore segmented. Inner movement of nourishment was



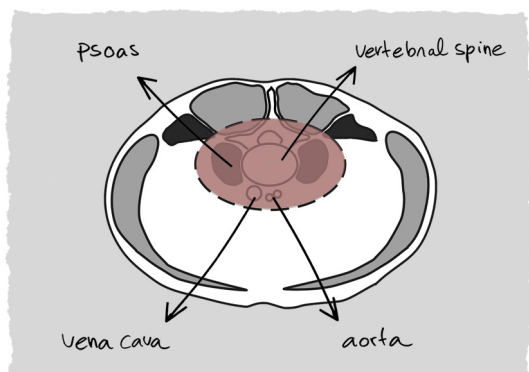
made possible by a particular muscular pattern and a number of sphincters. In the human body this organization of pulsating cavities, connected by sphincters, can be recognized. In a schematic picture of the human body, the



three major cavities of head, chest and abdomen can be distinguished.

Exchange between them takes place by two diaphragms: the throat and the breathing diaphragm and the lower abdomen is supported by a belt of supportive tissue and the pelvis. When all the points of the *Chong Mai* and the *Yin Wei Mai* are put in one picture, this cavity-sphincter organization is shown. The *Chong Mai* – *Yin Wei Mai* pair traces the complexity of the inner cavities and their pulsation. It is hard to be very

specific about which organs and tissues are involved, but the *Chong Mai* embraces the function of the food absorbing membranes of the small intestine, the major blood vessels in the torso (aorta,



vena cava) and the deep abdominal postural muscles of the iliopsoas.

The *Yin Wei Mai* in turn dominates the diaphragms and the regulating function of the autonomic nervous system.

In the Chinese medical and martial traditions the three *Dan Tians* is a common concept. Each of the *Dan Tians* serve as the center of a pulsation cavity. The *Dan Tian* of the middle cavity of the chest is localized exactly in the center of it: its reflection on the bodies surface in the center of the sternum. The upper cavity has its *Dan Tian* somewhat higher than the center: its reflection between the eyebrows. The *Dan Tian* of the lower cavity, the one which is strongly

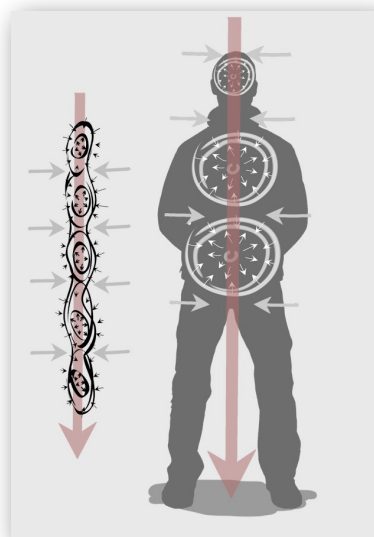


emphasized in the martial traditions, lays a little lower than the center.

STRESS

In a state of excitement the circulation within the body-mind will be increased by

a tightening of the diaphragms and sphincters. Imagine a water hose which is



squeezed - the water will spurt under greater pressure and with more speed. As the *Chong Mai* defines the space of inner cavity or tube, the *Yin Wei Mai* controls the inner pressure and the speed of the metabolism. A state of hyperactivity and stress is often felt in the areas of the throat, hypochondriac area and lower abdomen. The breathing diaphragm, the throat, and the inguinal area in the lower abdomen are connected within the course of the *Yin Wei Mai* and



are regulated by its opening point HP6 *Nei Guan*.

HP6 is famous for its effectiveness in regulating the peristaltic of stomach and intestines and the free movement of emotions, especially in the area of the upper abdomen. It is able to directly regulate the looseness or tightness in these sluice area's. This very function

could be paralleled with the regulation of the sympathetic/parasympathetic nervous system. In a society where we are exposed to a continuous bombardment of all kinds of stimuli, parasympathetic life is usually pushed to the back. Nowadays it is hard to organise moments where we really can relax deeply and feel really nourished. If we understand the strong pressure of our society and the necessity to counterbalance it, the importance of the *Chong Mai – Yin Wei Mai* couple will be clear. HP6, *Nei Guan*, lays in between the tendons of the flexors of the wrist and fingers. These form one myo-fascial chain with the biceps, pectoralis minor, intercostal muscles and diaphragm. By connective tissue continuity there is a direct link between HP6 and the diaphragm, the diaphragm and the iliopsoas, and the iliopsoas and the middle arch of the foot, thus the area of SP4.

FORWARD MOVEMENT

Out of stillness movement is born. Whereas the sea anemone is glued to a rock and thus depended on the movement of its seawater environment to bring nourishment along, the early vertebrates developed a spine to make effective forward propulsion possible, and as will go for food search. This is the

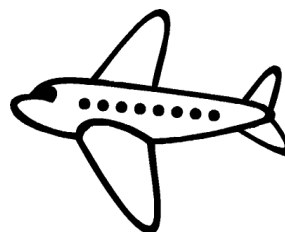


theme of the two *Tai Yang* meridians and the *Du Mai – Yang Qiao Mai* pair. This pair is associated with straight forward action, will power, courage and clear intention and articulation. The spine in fish is the direct physical connection between eyes and tail, as well as the



protection for the delicate central nervous system.

In another sophisticated modern organization - the airplane - the engines on wings or tail are similar to the fish's tail, receiving all impulses from the



cockpit area between BL1 and BL10 as they propel the plane forward.

In our body the forward propulsion no longer comes from a tail at the far end of the spine. Whereas the water resisted the tail, the earth gives support to our feet. When walking all pushing forces are directed through the structure of two alternating legs, through hips and spine, still led by the eyes. Those forces have to be precisely aligned in order to make



forward movement effective and effortless.

The eyes-tail connection in fish is relatively simple. In the human body the once direct connection between eyes and feet is interrupted by several joints in neck, spine, hips, knees, ankles and feet. All these have to be aligned and coordinated to allow us to move forward in a smooth and effective way. The regular *Tai Yang* meridians guide simple arm and leg extension, but the *Yang Qiao Mai – Du Mai* pair mirrors the whole orchestration of forward movement. It gives direction and stability to the exploding and driving force of the *Tai*

Yang muscle chains. The tensor fascia (Gb29), its long tendon and the peroneus group (BL62 is near the bend in its tendon) connect the spine with the knees and ankles and earth, thus providing sideways stability to the central spinal structure. This dynamic can be observed



clearly in the crawling movement of young infants and reptiles.

FOOD

In the so-called homolateral movement of infants and reptiles the three joints of one leg flex and the hip joint rotates outward. This is the essential preparation for leg extension. Only if the hip is opened sideways and the foot everted correctly, will the big toe will find stable ground to push against. When this movement is done alternately left and right, you experience homolateral crawling. The legs help to move the body, in the direction of mouth and eyes, in the direction of food. The arms and hands assist the mouth even more directly in this food searching.

The body of the sea anemone or the jelly fish has tentacles which act like arms and help guide food to its mouth. Babies suck on their thumb. Later they bring everything in their direct environment to their mouth to discover if its eatable or to push it away and turn their head if they dislike it. Out of these reflexes a very fine

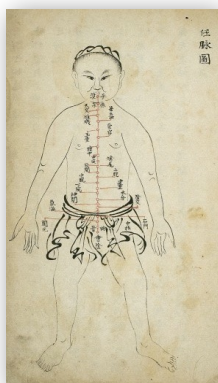


coordination is established between the sense organs and the hand and fingers. As soon as there is the awareness of something attractive in the distant the hand reaches out. Note that GB20 is the origin of the *sternocleidomastoid*, the muscle which can turn the head and thereby direct eyes and mouth. ST4 represent the oral reflexes, ST3 the reflexes of the nose. The connection between ST1 and BL1 represent the transition from the earlier reflexes of the mouth and nose to the more recent reflexes from the eyes. Anything interested viewed by the eyes will activate flexor muscles in the back, arms and legs and will eventually give rise to some forward directed movement.

SUPPORT

'Yang leads Yin, Yin support Yang'.

The *Yang* meridians are lines of movement and each movement and active function needs to be braced and supported. The *Yin* channels provide this quality in many ways. In the course of the *Yang Qiao Mai* the search for stable ground to push against is expressed in the eversion of the foot and the resulting rooting of the big toe. The *Yang Qiao Mai* outlines the forces of the external extensor muscles. This line of external forces need to be supported by an internal component, the *Yin Qiao Mai*. We have already discussed *Chong Mai*'s SP4, but the beginning and opening points of the *Yin Qiao Mai* are very near. These two points are in the arch of the foot and near the deep muscles which allow the foot to spring forward (flexor hallicus, tibialis posterior, soleus). The *Yin Qiao Mai* couples with the *Ren Mai* and they converge at the upper chest and throat. The course of the *Ren Mai*



represents of course the line of support for the more external *Du Mai*.

In the practice of *Zhan Zhuang Chi Kung* we visualize supportive balloons at various places of the body. These places



are always at the inside of the limbs and torso.

The visualization of the balloons help to awaken and activate the internal, structural musculature. This will eventually will lead to a deeper relaxation at the external, movemental muscle groups. The localization of the balloons follows roughly the points and course of the *Yin Qiao Mai* and *Ren Mai*. (For a more detailed description of the supportive balloons and the practice of *Zhan Zhuang Chi Kung*, see *Way of Energy* by master Lam Kam-Chuen and *The Dynamics of Standing Still* by Peter den Dekker).

TURNING

One of the essential functions of the *Dai Mai* - *Yang Wei Mai* pair is rotation and turning. Without the ability to rotate and turn, even the most stable structure becomes breakable. Turning and rotation are the movement patterns belonging to the self-protection and immunity theme.



If the *Chong Mai* is the axis of the earth, The *Dai Mai* is the equator, half way between head and toes.

Its course overlaps the Gallbladder meridian in the lower abdomen (GB26-27). These points are in line with ST30 and KI11 in the groin. Releasing both left and right groin will lead the body, and also any force or stressor given to the body, towards the feet. Releasing one of the groins at a time will do the same, but only towards one foot, thereby rotating the body. In the oriental martial traditions and in *Chi Kung* practice mastery over the *Dai Mai* area means, that any push, any attack or stressor can be led to the feet and into the earth, and can so be neutralized. But as the body rotates the feet are easy destabilized. GB41, the activation point of the *Dai Mai*, localized at the outer rim of the feet, serves as a stabilizer of the feet, thereby allowing a full rotation at the *Dai Mai* area. Proper rotation requires the outer rim of the feet 'nailed' to the ground, as advised by many martial art teachers.

A straight pushing force against a ball will let him rotate, and thus will not influence and move the axis of the ball. Rotation is a necessity for an undisturbed center. The wheel turns, but the axis remains still within the framework. In the most

common *Zhan Zhuang* posture, Embracing the Balloon (the arms form a full circle. TH5, *Wei Guan*, is at the outside of the circle, which defines our personal sphere, and the core of the body. In the circling of a dancer or the whirling of a dervish this full circle of the arms can be clearly seen, as well as the stability of the center.

A similar relationship between the *Yin Wei Mai* and *Yang Wei Mai* exists, as we have seen between the *Yin Qiao Mai* and *Yang Qiao Mai*. The *Yin Wei Mai* gives support to the outer defense of the *Yang Wei Mai*. The compression inside a balloon defines its shape and also its bouncing quality. In the self-protection gesture of the



Embracing a Balloon Posture *Wei Guan* defines the circle shape, *Nei Guan* the inner buoyancy.

Further Reading:

The Dynamics of Standing Still - Peter den Dekker

The Way of Energy - master Lam Kam-Chuen

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