

## The Practice of Yoga Part 5: Seven Zone Hatha Yoga\*

Seven Zone Hatha Yoga is a method for accessing the deepest levels of prana (vital energy, or Qi). These zones are considered among the subtlest and most powerful levels of energetic functioning. They are also areas where the flow of prana can easily become blocked or restricted. The asanas and breathing practices of Hatha Yoga, when properly done, frees blocked energy, brings balance in the body and mind, and has a profound effect on our physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

\*The Seven Zone system of Hatha Yoga was developed by Reverend Jaganath Carrera. Reverend Jaganath is the founder and spiritual head of the Yoga Life Society, and holds a Masters Degree in acupuncture. This method of Hatha Yoga is a comprehensive system combining the postures, breathing practices, deep relaxation, and meditation of traditional Hatha Yoga with the knowledge of powerful Japanese acupuncture therapeutics as taught by master acupuncturist, Kiiko Matsumoto.

### Zone One: Purple Palace

The Purple Palace is on the center of the breastbone beginning about 1 inch below the sternal notch and extending for 3 or 4 inches. It is the storehouse of Yi, emotions or thoughts that we have not, or could not express.

The Purple Palace can absorb and store a certain amount of Yi, protecting our system from its ill effects. But its capacity is not unlimited. When its limit is reached, Yi pours out from the Purple Palace and causes imbalances of various organs.

Energy blocked at the Purple Palace can cause any number of physical or psychological problems including: depression, anxiety, indigestion, constipation, menstrual irregularities, headaches, insomnia, eye problems, breathing problems, and heart problems.

### Zone Two: The Beginning of Qi Circulation ("The Three Amigos")

The circulation of Qi in the body begins with the lung meridian. The starting point of the lung meridian is deep in the body at the midline of the abdomen, halfway between the tip of the breastbone and the navel. If there is any blockage here, it can cause problems elsewhere in the system.

There are two points that are located above and below this point on the midline of the body. The three points work together in helping move the flow of Qi through the meridians.

Acting as a potent tonic for the entire system, stimulating this zone will help improve digestion, strengthen the Lungs and immunity, enhance the health of the physical nerves, stimulate the production of red blood cells, and tone the brain.

### Zone Three: Upper and Lower Qi Gates

#### Upper Gates of Qi

Located under the collarbone near the shoulder, it is mainly through these gates that energy flows into and out of the head from the torso. Good flow of energy here is important for the proper functioning of the senses. Blockages here can also contribute to internal organs sagging (prolapsing). Stimulating the upper gates helps to lift Qi.

#### The Lower Gates of Qi

Located near the pubic area, just a little lateral to the upper corners of the pubic bone, these are gates to and from the torso into the legs.

Problems here can manifest as hip or knee problems, poor circulation to the legs and feet, menstrual problems, problems with the jaw (like TMJ), weakness of the lower bowel and bladder, prostate problems, and disorders of the lower back.

Blockages here can also affect proper breathing. For a full breath to take place, the muscles of the pelvic floor must drop slightly in order to allow the abdominal organs to move toward the floor. When this happens, the flow of Qi is much stronger.

#### Zone Four: Dan Tien and the Small Intestine

DanTien is located on the midline of the abdomen about 1½ inches below the navel. It is a powerful center of energy and the location of an acupuncture point that stimulates the autonomic nervous system. It is considered the root of physical energy.

Note: CV 6 is one of three major 'root' points on the front of the body. CV 6 is the root of physical Qi, CV 17 (on the sternum, at midline, on the level of the nipples) is the root of emotional Qi and the point between the eyebrows is the root of spiritual Qi. All three are stimulated during our classes.

About 2 inches below DanTien is the access area for the Small Intestine. The Small Intestine is responsible for separating what the body needs to assimilate and what is impure and necessary to eliminate. If this process is inhibited, toxins build up that can cause disharmony in the body along with fatigue, irritability, insomnia, and lack of ability to concentrate. Over time, autoimmune imbalances can result. On the psychological level, the Small Intestine energy is responsible for guiding us to what is best for our growth and happiness and steering away from that which is harmful.

#### Zone Five: The Gate of Shen

This gate may access the deepest, most primordial Qi of all the zones. It involves both the Heart and the Stomach. Located across the upper back at the level of the 5th thoracic vertebra, it is the intersecting point of both the Stomach (nerves from here innervate the Stomach) and the Heart (energetically, the level of the 5th thoracic vertebra is the main access point for Heart energy).

##### The Heart

The Heart is the rhythm of life, the master organ of circulation of blood, and the energetic seat of the mind. Imbalances or blockages of Qi can lead to insomnia, circulatory problems, high or low blood pressure, stress, the inability to relate to others properly, and cardiac imbalances.

##### The Stomach

In Oriental Medicine, the Stomach shares most of the same physiological functions as in Western medicine. But, due to the course its meridian travels, the Stomach also exerts a strong influence on many vital organs and areas of the body: sinuses, jaw, neck, lungs, heart, breasts, digestive organs, hips, knees, ankles, and feet, for example.

The Gate of Shen. Shen is our spirit, that which makes us individuals. It is also our energetic point of connection to the higher Spirit. The Heart is the home of shen, but energetically, the Heart needs the Stomach to give it its spark of life. Therefore, this zone represents the energetic moment of the beginning of our individual existence.

Stimulating this zone can benefit digestion and the heart, but it also benefits all forms of stress, anxiety, depression, insomnia, shortness of breath, and even problems with the back and hips.

### Zone 6: Diaphragm and Blood

This zone, at the mid back, from the 7th thoracic vertebra to the 9th, is strongly related to the diaphragm, blood, and the Liver. Stimulating this zone helps release blockages from the diaphragm and tones the Liver.

#### The Diaphragm

The Heart rests on it and the Liver hangs off it. The natural, easy movement of the diaphragm as we breathe stimulates and massages the Heart and Liver, contributing to their optimal functioning.

#### The Liver

Among its many functions, the Liver acts like a second Heart. In Chinese Medicine, the Liver is responsible for the free flow of Qi, blood, essence, and even thoughts and emotions. Stagnation of the Liver energy causes many of disorders, from improper digestion to nightmares, dizziness, eye problems, depression, menstrual problems, and the tendency to form cysts in the body.

The Liver is strongly associated with vision, both physical and inner (the ability to conceptualize goals, the future, ideas, etc). If our Liver energy gets constrained (which it does very easily), we cannot envision a future or make reasonable plans.

Blockage of Liver energy is also associated with depression and frustration.

### Zone Seven: Ming Men, The Gate of the Fire of Life

This is the area on the back, around the 2nd lumbar vertebra. It is considered to be the source of physical life for the individual. This zone is strongly connected to the Kidneys and Adrenals. Kidney energy governs reproduction, birth, and maturation. Weakness here contributes to premature aging and all the symptoms and disorders associated with it.