



Kidney Yin Meridian and Urinary Bladder Yang Meridian Self-Inquiry

Water: Fear, survival, brainstem function, deepest inner directives, self knowledge, & wisdom. Who I am at my core and how I carry it out in the world.

If your water element is weak and you have assessed yourself as having deficient **kidney** energies, perhaps you feel like your own inner treasures aren't of sufficient worth in this life. As such, your urinary bladder meridian may carry out the weakness in this system of energies. According to Chinese medicine, our kidney essence must be conserved, as it is with us for life. When we are lacking in rest, quiet, and inner solitude, it is easier to squander our precious essence. Activities that deplete our physical kidney essence include overwork, staying up all night, excessive sex, and excessive noise. If we are psychologically deficient in the kidney energies, we might try to overcome our inner fears of unworthiness by disproportionately acting and doing for others.

The **urinary bladder** is the conduit between our inner resources and the way they are reflected in the world. The urinary bladder's psychological action is like a reservoir, which discerns where our treasures are to be shared, and where they are to be conserved. A healthy urinary bladder system can ascertain how to conserve and contain our resources to nourish ourselves first, and where it is appropriate to expend our deepest energy reserves without dissipating them. The urinary bladder functions within the context of the whole. It is an intuitive organ system whose function can be tuned into by the demands of the moment. Yet, we can become aware of areas where our water system may need strengthening.

Physical signs of deficiency:

- dark circles under the eyes
- low back pain
- knee difficulty
- night sweats, hot flashes
- lack of cervical fluid
- increased urination
- low libido

SELF-INQUIRY

To evaluate the action of your water reserves, reflect on the following questions:
What issues cause me the most fear? _____

When I think about my future, I'm most afraid of: _____

Which fears keep me withdrawn from full participation in life? _____

How am I caring for my inner reserves? _____

How do I honor my participation in life? _____

How can I expand my limits and increase my comfort zone? _____

Do I get enough rest and meditation each day? _____

How could I get more? _____

Do I spend time in solitude getting to know my deepest self? _____

How could I honor myself more? _____

Am I more prone to conserve or squander my resources? _____

How could I better recognize my inherent gifts, appreciate them more fully, and share them more appropriately? _____

Who am I at my core without my job, relationships, and external identities? _____

Which positive traits do I think I might pass on to my offspring? _____

Which negative traits do I fear I might pass on to my children? _____

Can I accept that life ultimately will never be secure? _____

After taking stock of the physical manifestation of the water energies, and looking at the emotional implications of water, let's look at our belief systems underlying the water energies.

Beliefs/Points of view: What is one belief or point of view through which I see the world which stems from fear or the survival instinct? _____

(share)

Meditation – quiet time. The sense organ that relates to the kidney energies is the ears. Listening to a favorite soothing song while practicing the microcosmic breath is one of the most powerful and nurturing meditative practices. Allow the sounds of nature to penetrate into your depths. Try a sound fast. Reside in the state of stillness until you can feel the spark of the divine within, the truest state of your source.

Deep water. Still water. Purity. Settled.

Balance 'You' Time and Social time – Whether you take a restorative yoga break, read a good book, or do Qi Gong in the forest, the water element attains peace of mind in knowing there is time in her day for complete solitude and time to reside in the depths.



the fertile soul

Liver Yin Meridian and Gallbladder Yang Meridian Self-Inquiry

Wood: Resistance, frustration, anger, vision – seeing things as they are; dreaming them to be different, right brain functioning, acceptance, compassion, decisiveness

The **liver** oversees planning and the implementation of strategies. The liver empowers vision and allows perspective. The wood element sees, assesses rightness and wrongness, and imposes judgment such as, "This should not be." The liver allows us to dream and desire. Overactive dreams and excessive desires are causes of an imbalanced wood element. Wood represents the healthy urge to become. It also discerns when to advance and when to retreat.

A healthy liver knows acceptance. It must begin by seeing things as they are, not as they "should" be. Only then can we discern if action is to be taken. Usually we resist far too many things in our life, causing us internal stress. When we fight what is, we produce resistance. When we resist, we make the thing that we are fighting stronger. For example, when we fight the fact that we are having difficulty conceiving, such as by trying to force a pregnancy using medicine, we can make the internal message stronger if we haven't paid attention to its cause. I commonly see this when ovarian stimulation is used to make someone ovulate. Oftentimes the body's negative message will then become stronger – in the form of elevated prolactin levels, raised FSH, poor ovarian response, etc. When we use the process of five element inquiry, we can find the messages that our body/mind/spirit is conveying to us, alleviate their cause, and allow them to dissolve.

When we are maneuvering our way through this journey, a well-functioning **gallbladder** empowers us with the ability to make strong decisions when we have a choice to make. The gallbladder actualizes the liver's dreaming, visioning, and planning impulse by allowing us to make a decision and honor it. We do not become obsessed with the details. We know what we know, we accept what life shows us, and we make a decision in the moment. And then we honor the decision that we have made without remorse. If we end up making a decision that we later wish we hadn't, then we use the element of compassion and forgiveness, never guilt, which only compounds the stress in the liver-gallbladder system. Our life unfolds according to the choices we make.

Signs of imbalance:

tension anywhere in the body – clenched teeth, TMJ, signs of gripping
hormonal elevations
irritability, frustration
breast pain or tenderness, especially at ovulation
depression

SELF-INQUIRY

What are my greatest dreams, visions, or aspirations? _____

What am I presently resisting? _____

When has resistance, frustration or anger prevented the fulfillment of my dreams, goals or visions? _____

Do I need to determine if things are "right" or "wrong" before I can act on them? _____

Can I recognize that there is no absolute right or absolute wrong in anything? _____

When have I found myself paralyzed by indecision? _____

What am I resisting in my life? _____

Would I describe myself as either timid (weak gallbladder) _____
or overbearing (excess gallbladder energies)? _____

Do I have difficulty honoring the choices I make? _____

Can I accept that every decision is right, if only I will make it? _____

Who is my biggest critic? _____

Can I imagine feeling compassion for my critic? _____

What are some decisions I need to make in my life now? _____

What decisions do I need to make in my life this year? _____

What past decisions have I made over which I feel guilt or regret? _____

Can I imagine that I made the best decision I could at the time? _____

How can I allow myself to accept the choices I made? _____

Can I imagine feeling anger at the situation, but compassion for myself? _____

If not, what is preventing me from doing so? _____

What would my life look like if I had no desires or hopes that things would be different than they are right now? _____

What people in my life do I think should be different than they are? _____

What angers me most about the process of trying to conceive? _____

How am I relying on expectations for a different future? _____

What provides me the greatest hope – right now? _____

After taking stock of the physical manifestation of the wood energies, and looking at the emotional implications of wood, let's look at our belief systems underlying the wood energies.

Beliefs/Points of view: What is one belief or point of view through which I see the world which stems from anger, resistance, or feeling "wrong"? _____

(share)

Meditation – Inner seeing. The sense organs that relates to wood are the eyes. Practice internal guided imagery. First see yourself where you are, without trying to change it. Embrace yourself with compassion. Now move into a vision of where you find comfort, ease, relaxation and healing. New shoot emerging; rising mist.

Release Anger and Resentment – Resolve feelings of frustration with forgiveness of self or others whenever possible, as stagnated emotion can inhibit the Qi mechanism. Use journaling or letter burning to bring these feelings out to release tension. The tendons hold tension. Shake them out. Stomp out the built up tension. Scream out loud or punch a pillow.

Laugh Out Loud – Laughter is the cure for all ailments, so watch a funny movie or call a friend whose sense of humor brings you to tears to release any stuck internal feelings. Breathe deeply and relax – circulating the breath immediately drops stress levels initiating the relaxation response and setting the stage for meditation.

Eye Exercises – The liver is related to vision, so it is important to exercise the eyes to clear out stuck memories. Lying or sitting, look up, look down, to the right, to the left, and make big circles in each direction. Try with eyes opened, and with eyes closed. This exercise repeated daily can help reprogram thoughts, calm the nervous system and improve vision dramatically.



the fertile soul

Spleen Yin Meridian and Stomach Yang Meridian Self-Inquiry

Earth: Center, the ability to gather, take in, and form an impression of ourselves and the world. Nourishment, thought, belief and action stem from the earth element. Internal housekeeping functions, midbrain, hypothalamus.

The **spleen** and the **stomach** form a functional yoke whose concern is acquiring and distributing all nourishment in life. They transform what is taken in into something else. The stomach is the interface between the spleen's internal environment and all potential sources of external nourishment. Earth energies are where growth happens; the soil in which our lives flourish and grow. Earth energies are responsible for the integration of self; bringing together thoughts, words, ideas and concepts into philosophies and beliefs. Earth represents the thought process, and in the extreme, becomes worry, anxiety and obsession. Worry replaces clear thought; clarity supplants anxiety. Because earth is the pivot of the 5 elements, continuous attention to ongoing alignment and intention keep the earth energies in support of all the other elements' proper functioning.

The earth energies make up the center of your being, between yesterday and tomorrow, between what came before into what can be. The earth is defined by intention and action, and it must be acted on without reserve. We don't send out a partial intention. We make a decision and we give ourselves over to the act. Earth represents the pivot between past and future. The only time that matters is now. The stomach contains the ability to digest only enough for one day. If it takes too little in, the vehicle can't support its activities of the day and it breaks down a little. If it takes in too much, it begins to rot.

The concept of self arises here, as does the act of sympathy with another. When imbalanced, the boundary between nourishing ourselves and fulfilling the needs of others can become ill-defined. This may show up as over-reliance on others or dysfunctionally taking care of others.

Signs of imbalance:

- Digestive disturbances
- Fatigue, especially after eating
- Low blood pressure
- Hypoglycemia, light headedness when hungry
- Easy bruising
- Lack of concentration or attention, feeling scattered.

SELF-INQUIRY

Which qualities define my sense of me, today, at this stage of my life? _____

What centers me and provides a sense of grounding? _____

Who supports these qualities? _____

Who doesn't? _____

Do I meditate or have a way of calming my mind? _____

Do I tend to worry more than I act? _____

What worries me most? _____

What actions do I take on to prove myself to others? _____

What actions do I take that are consistent with my goals? _____

What actions do I take that are inconsistent with my visions? _____

What action do I need to take? _____

What do I do when I become anxious? _____

What could I do when I become anxious? _____

How have I habitually conditioned myself into patterns which no longer work for me? _____

Do I have an outlet when I become obsessed with thoughts and worries? _____

Who do I care for? _____

Are these relationships beneficial to me also? _____

Can I think of any areas in my life that are at war with each other? (examples: I don't like the way I look, act, feel; I care for others at my own expense) _____

What provides me a sense of integrity? _____

What situations, activities or processes give me a sense of self-acceptance? _____

How do I care for myself alone? _____

What nourishes my soul? _____

What is my greatest worry on the journey toward parenthood? _____

What centers me in this journey? _____

How do I appreciate the changing seasons in life? _____

After taking stock of the physical manifestation of earth energies, and looking at the emotional implications of earth, let's look at our belief systems underlying the earth energies.

Beliefs/Points of view: What is one belief or point of view which gives me a sense of self, and defines the way I view myself in relation to the world? _____

(share)

Action to strengthen the spleen and stomach: acknowledge life's ongoing rhythms. Be mindful of regularly repeating patterns and how you condition yourself. Make small, focused movements, and move fully, paying mindful attention. I know how to say yes when I really want to, and I can say a strong no without explanation.

Quiet Meditation – Learn to sit quietly and allow thoughts to pass through the mind without attaching to them. Allow yourself release from concentration and focused attention – mind fast. Practice focused attention on your breath, on a candle flame, on sights, sounds, senses. Open receptive soil, not too dry, not too moist. Not needing to do anything but absorb.
Practice mindful eating, savoring each bite with all of your focus. Take little bites. Chew. Pay attention to the entire digestive process.

Trust in Self – Develop self-confidence by learning to listen to your inner voice and say "No" without a reason or excuse. Adopt self-expression affirmations: "I feel.", "I feel like.", "I like my _____. "

Nurture Self – Make a concerted effort to do at least one thing to care for yourself each day.

Journaling – In a process of self-reflection, write down troubling thoughts that haven't produced action at the end of each day with the intention of releasing them and starting fresh in the morning. Say undigested words to yourself, another, a pet, or a tree. Release all lingering unsaid words.



The fertile soul

Lung Yin Meridian and Large Intestine Yang Meridian Self-Inquiry

Metal: Protection from the outer world. Discrimination between self and non-self. External immunity. Forming bonds, grief of separation. Linear, rational, left brain function

Taking in and releasing.

Lungs – health indicated by good external immunity, the ability to breathe deeply, and respond appropriately to our environment.

Large Intestine – health indicated by good releasing function – the ability to release a stool daily, without strain: ideal is firm, light brown, and floating.

Metal represents a protective barrier and affords us our most immediate give and take with the environment. The **lungs** are the separation between our inner and outer world, defining what is self and what is non-self. Many of us have a face that we show the world which is more like a mask, protecting us from what we believe others might think of us if they knew who we really are. The lung governs the process of grief when we lose that which we value. Metal governs our bonds we make in relationship with others. Metal represents release; the ability to let go and open up to receive. As the lungs take in the most rarefied essence – breath or qi, the large intestine releases the densest of substances back into the earth.

The **large intestine** ensures inner purity by recognizing and sorting what is of importance and what is waste product, and eliminating the latter from our life. Thus we can continue to find value – not in what we have, but in who we are. Holding and releasing are very similar movements, just like inhaling and exhaling are. All that we release can become compost in the depths of possibility to fertilize what can be. That which we hold onto prevents us from receiving.

Signs of imbalance:

- shortness of breath
- respiratory difficulty
- skin disorders, rashes
- allergies
- constipation

SELF-INQUIRY

Which partnerships or relationships define me? _____

Can I find a sense of worth outside of these relationships? _____

What masks do I show the world? _____

What is my most damaging mask? _____

What items of value tie me down? _____

What external situation might be defining me that is not for my highest good? _____

What relationship patterns obstruct my growth? _____

What needs of mine do I receive in my primary relationship(s)? _____

How can I disengage from these patterns? _____

What can I let go that which is no longer providing a sense of worth in my life? _____

What person, place, thing or situation causes me the most grief? _____

Which person, place, thing or situation do I need to release? _____

What do I most value in those close to me? _____

Over what characteristic in others am I most critical? _____

What am I holding onto that prevents me from living fully? _____

What have I told myself I need in order to be happy? _____

What past regrets do I have that haunt me? _____

Can I imagine living in the knowledge that things couldn't have been different, and therefore embrace all possibilities right now? _____

What is my greatest sadness? _____

What aspect of me do I value most on this journey? _____

How do I appreciate the ongoing rhythms of life? _____

After taking stock of the physical manifestation of the metal energies, and looking at the emotional implications of metal, let's look at our belief systems underlying the metal energies.

Beliefs/Points of view: What is one belief or point of view through which I see the world which stems from grief, sadness, or failure to let go? _____

(share)

Action to balance metal: A time to hold fast, a time to release. Give and receive. Exercise the unknown. Be loose and free. Release.

Meditation – Feeling the sense of expansion and contraction throughout the body. Sensations. Interfacing with the world. Clenching, release, letting go. There is no need to indulge, renounce, transform, refine or analyze anything. Simply let them flow on by. Rely on awareness rather than trying to alter the course of events. It is awareness—the source of the dynamic energy behind every thought, emotion, or opinion. Nothing need be done other than resting in the awareness. In and out. Fully letting go into possibility. Not bound by the margins of the skin. Fresh breeze.

Breathwork – Deep breaths purify and clear the lungs, removing stuck matter. Sit on your knees or cross-legged if this is more comfortable. Place your hand on your belly to start off. Take a deep inhale breath through the nose and then forcefully exhale through the nose in short sharp breaths. Feel your abdomen pulsating with each breath. Continue for 40- 50 breaths and then repeat the exercise, exhaling through the mouth – pretend you are blowing out birthday candles. Your shoulders remain level the entire time, and once you have a sense of the outward and inward motion of the belly, you can place your hands on your knees.

Sauna – Toxins are released through the process of sweating. The ancient practice of the sweat lodge was meant to burn off karma and release that which is not serving us. By heating the body, experiences and “dead weight” could be lifted from the body and clear the path to walk on, fresh and rejuvenated.

Exfoliation – We literally reinvent our cells as we scrub off dead skin cells – it is a process of regeneration and rejuvenation. As we clear our skin, we impact its partner organs: the lungs and the large intestine, supporting relinquishing and releasing on all levels:, physically and figuratively.

Releasing Emotion – Forgiveness is an essential component to leading a happy, fulfilled and healthy life. When we hold onto lower vibration energies for too long, they impact our very cells and invite disease. Taking the time to express and process all emotions, including grief and resentment, is most important. Sometimes writing a letter that is never sent, or simply speaking forgiveness out loud can release its grip on us and allow us to move on.



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Heart Yin Meridian and Small Intestine Yang Meridian Self-Inquiry

FIRE: The ability to love unconditionally and experience the inherent joy of life itself. How we share and communicate our love in the world. Frontal lobe and higher functioning

Fire represents the outpouring of the spirit of love and joy in our lives. The natural state of fire, which is contagious, is the inherent joy of life itself. The heart is the home of the spirit, and from it, joy is radiated. The heart transmits 5,000 times the energy of the brain. When the heart feels safe (by having balance in the other four elements), we can spread our joy unconditionally with others.

The **small intestine** could be seen as a lens that focuses the intention of the heart. It filters and sorts out the pure from the impure according to our heart's experience. Because the spirit (and thus the heart) is the emperor of the body/mind, all communication to and from it go through the small intestine. This entails the sense of transmitting. The Secret of the Golden Flower, an alchemical text from the 18th century, describes this sense of transmitting as listening, as such:

The hen can hatch her eggs because the heart is always *listening*... The energy of heat can warm the shells but cannot penetrate into the interior. She conducts this energy inward with her heart. With her hearing, she concentrates her whole heart. When the energy of the heart penetrates, the chick receives the energy of heat, and begins to live. Even when she leaves her eggs, she has the attitude of *listening with a bent ear*. Thus, the concentration of the spirit is not interrupted.

Signs of Imbalance

Restlessness, irritability, insomnia, nightmares
Inability to feel peace, anxiety in the chest

SELF-INQUIRY

How do I experience joy and appreciation? _____

Where is joy lacking in my life (work, sex, home life, relationships)? _____

Who do I love purely (without expectation of anything in return)? _____

How do I express my love? _____

How do I communicate my innermost self? _____

Who knows my being in entirety? _____

Whom or what do I trust fully? _____

Do I remember a time in my life when I first felt like I had to protect my heart? _____

When was this? _____

What do I need in order to open my heart again? _____

Do I need a child to feel love wholly? _____

How do I live most passionately? _____

What prevents me from trusting in nature's way? _____

Do I trust in the goodness of life? _____

How do I follow my heart? _____

What is my soul's highest purpose? _____

After taking stock of the physical manifestation of the fire energies, and looking at the emotional implications of fire, let's look at our belief systems underlying the fire energies.

Beliefs/Points of view: What is one belief or point of view through which I see the world which stems from my inability to live or trust in life unconditionally? _____

(share)

Action to balance fire: Sharing bounty. Living fully. Experiencing life and its actions from a place of abundance. Loving because it's our nature.

Gratitude and Reverence Practices – Visualize something in your life that brings you a sense of gratitude and appreciation. Focus on that image. Feel your heart expanding and send the energies of appreciation and gratitude into your heart. Feel the sense of calm and unconditional love that is the heart's natural state of being. Keep a "gratitude journal" and make a list each day of at least five things that you are grateful for. Like the sun filling the empty sky.

Meditation – Find a quiet corner in your home where you feel good. This will be your space to come and sit and renew. Take the time to meditate, closing your eyes and filling yourself with the positive vibrations of your sacred space.

Chanting – There is a direct link between singing or chanting and the heart. Simply repeating the word OM or a healing word of your choice sends healing vibrations to the heart, flooding you with feelings of joy.

Alone Time – Preserve boundaries and allow space to regain inner calm. Express your needs by nurturing yourself each day. Take a bath. Read a book. Meditate. Listen to meditative tapes before bed. Get an adequate amount of rest each night.