

# Radikal Freedom - Yoga as realisation



## Lines of Flow

Lines of flow through the structure of the body have been recognised and explored in all the Asian cultures. Chinese and Japanese tradition calls these lines of flow 'meridians' and the life-energy-force, which flows through them, is called 'chi' in Chinese and 'ki' in Japanese. In India the lines of flow are called 'nadis' and the life-energy force, which flows through them, is called 'prana'.

These lines of flow, according to these eastern systems of well-being, radically affect our health and potential if they are blocked or if flow is in any obstructed or depleted.

In the west these concepts are new, Wilhelm Reich pioneered the idea of a substance that flows through the body, which he called 'orgone' energy. Reich was heavily persecuted by the establishment for his radical ideas. Within the last fifty years pre-eminently with the work of the Yogini Ida Rolf, bodywork practitioners in the west have become more interested in lines of flow and connection through the soft tissue structure of the body.

The concepts rising from her bodywork school such as the 'tensegrity' model which accounts for the lightness of the skeleton by accounting for the tensile forces of fascial tissues that act like rigging on a sailing ship and support the skeleton, drawing open the joints and freeing them from overly compressive forces that cause undue wear. Fascial tissue is the wrapping layers that surrounds, separates and connects all the individual organs, muscles and other structures of the body.

This fascial tissue is a network of tissue that penetrates and supports the whole structure.

More recently Anatomy Trains by Tom Myers has outlined what he calls Myo-Fascial meridians.

Contraction of muscular and more importantly fascial tissue along these lines of flow leads to tightness and lack of flow through the connected areas of the body.

Lack of flow can be associated with physical stiffness, poor circulation, skeletal problems, repeated illness, as tissues are not being oxygenated or detoxified effectively and general aches and pains.

In Yogic physiology there are fourteen major 'nadis' out of a total of seventy two thousand. Six of these nadis run from the third eye to the nasal passages, the eyes and the ears on both left and right side. Of the more central nadis seven flow from the base chakra Muladhara. Two nadis run to the navel chakra and there branch out to supply prana to the right and left hands and feet. One nadi runs to the organs of elimination, one to the sexual organs, one to the navel chakra where it supplies the digestive system. Another runs to the heart chakra from where, through circulation and respiration it pervades the whole body. Another nadi runs from the throat chakra to the mouth area and activates speech and gives wisdom.

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The last major nadi runs from the base chakra to the crown and is responsible for energising the spine, brain and in the collects the energies of all the other nadis. It is also associated with rising kundalini and the flow of prana-shakti that is said to rise on the awakening and enlightenment of the practitioner.

In the Chinese and Japanese systems there are twelve major meridians that traverse the body. The meridians flow between layers of skin and muscle tissue and are more analogous to the myo-fascial meridians. The acupuncture points or tsubos occur where the three primal layers of embryonic tissue meet in an adult. This is areas of connection between deep organs, bone, muscle and skin. The tsubos and the pressure or needling of them then effect deep into the body structure through these points of intersection.

There are naturally some parallels between systems, the myo-fascial back line running up the back of the body closely parallels the water meridians of kidney and bladder in Chinese medicine.

The superficial front line from myo-fascial theory closely follows first the anterior Kidney meridian (water element), then tracks the inferior Stomach meridian (earth element).

The myo-fascial lateral lines traversing the sides of the body relate to Gall Bladder lines in Chinese theory. There are other analogs between the two systems that indicate a similar underlying mechanism for both systems.

The Indian nadis bear some resemblance to the water meridians and the lines through the arms and legs again resemble those similarly placed meridians in the Chinese and myo-fascial system. The nadis become an essential tool of understanding and treatment in Ayurveda and have essential function in the esoteric practices of Kundalini Yoga. For developing understanding in physical practice they are however not that helpful as their function is described and understood to be more to do with subtle prana flow and with control of life process than life energy flow through the grosser physical structure of muscle and bone.

For the western practitioner it may be most useful to initially focus on the myo-fascial meridians as they offer the easiest route to understanding body function through the models of life-energy flow. Tom Myers book Anatomy Trains is informative but a tough read for someone with no anatomical background.

In the myo-fascial system there are fourteen lines of connection.

Simply put; the superficial front line runs up the front of the body. The deep front line runs in deep along the front of the skeletal structure up the front of the body, this is most fully opened in strong back bending.

The back lines run along the spine and are most deeply opened in forward bends.

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The lateral lines run up either side of the body and are most deeply opened in movements such as lateral flexion in triangle pose.

There are deep and superficial lines, which are relatively close parallels to the Chinese meridians, along the front and back of the arms which open with arm opening in the different planes of movement.

Spiral lines open as we twist the body and the connections through the structure along these lines provide support and flexibility for twisting and turning movements.

There are two other lines called functional lines that add to the complex possibilities along the front and back of the body.

These meridians follow basic rules; they flow in a consistent direction without interruption. They flow through fascial fibres which run in the same direction, they may connect across bone junctions such as where the internal obliques of the abdomen connect across the anterior superior iliac spine of the pelvis down along the tensor fascia latae along the outside of the legs, as you can see from this example they stay in the same line of flow.

Meridians are tacked down at bony attachments. Tracks sometimes join at such attachments and give points where directional shift of flow can occur. Important points where many myo-fascial meridians meet such as the Iliac crest of the pelvis and the pubic bone become very important in postural work such as asana practice.

Changes in direction of body usage then engages different meridians.

## Finding your own meridians

1. As you practice and as you explore your body with your hands, feel with your hands from the outside and from the inside with your internal senses the grain and flow of the connective tissue. Sense where it maintains a steady direction without jumping joints or levels or crossing through planes of fascia that are intervening across the line of flow in a different direction.
2. See if you can discover the stations where the myo-fascial meridians are tied down to the underlying tissues such as bony surfaces.
3. Be aware of any other tracks which diverge or converge with the line you are following.
4. Be aware of any muscles that cross only a single joint that may affect the working of the line of flow you are following.

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Each meridian describes a fairly precise line of pull through the body structure. In asana practice we can do simple enough movements that are held for long enough to develop a feel for these lines. Most unheld movements involve complexities of body areas and movement sweeps through the body, changing its angle of pull and the meridians it affects moment by moment making such sensorial awareness much more complex.

Beginning to analyse which lines are tight or held, whether there is imbalance or asymmetry between right and left is a useful beginning. Without awareness of imbalance it cannot be addressed through our practice.

If one body area is weak or overly tight, we compensate by using a part that is stronger or more capable of movement. In terms of development this compensation is not productive in the long term as it becomes habitual and harder to change and merely aggravates the already existing imbalance. Seeking areas of compensation in movement is also helpful. Ask yourself appropriate questions flowing from your developing awareness, like, "Do I always drop my tummy first?" an example of someone who has weaker shoulders and triceps (on the back of the arm) moving into chaturanga (the push up type position). Another example would be someone folding at the mid and lower back and curving forward in Paschimottanasana (sitting forward bend), compensating for tight hamstrings.

If you find compensation patterns then soften the practice until you develop the necessary strength or flexibility to move with greater ease and without compensation into the asana.

I found in my practice that my feeling of lines of flow were not identical with the myo-fascial version, trusting my own experience for now, I work with seeking symmetry and depth of practice using a model of meridians that has arisen through my practice. Of course there is huge similarity with myo-fascial meridians and with the acupuncture meridians because we are all speaking of unique but related bodies.

I have found it useful to study Chinese meridians and myo-fascial meridians and related theoretical concepts with regard to fascial function. I have also found it useful to study anatomy and kinesiology (the study of bodies in movement) with reference to Yoga. Developing an understanding and creating a visual and sensorial map of where muscles begin and end and where tendons and ligaments run within body structure is very useful. It is our own bodies, minds and hearts that are our main teachers and they, ultimately, get precedence over any other theories.

If the meridian models encourage greater awareness, greater inquiry and greater understanding of body function from both a theoretical and experiential perspective then this is all good.

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## Bibliography

Tom W. Myers, Anatomy Trains, Churchill Livingstone 2001