

Leg Meridian Opening Exercises

This is a relaxing set derived from a combination of shiatsu and yoga: a simple series of leg movements in a reclining position, which activate the energy meridians in the lower body, including the extended meridians located by shiatsu pioneer Masunaga Sensei.

The joy of these exercises lies in the direct physical experience of energy flow initiated by minimal but precise movements of the legs; movements where stillness – paradoxically is the key factor.

The movements themselves are derived from a combination of meridian extension techniques from shiatsu and yoga asana. They are effortless and simple. Indeed their essence is in “not doing” or *wu wei* as the Chinese have traditionally called it. In practice, this means minimal effort and maximal awareness for the best possible results: do what is necessary but no more. This became the basis of Zen as it developed out of Daoism in China, and explains for example, the characteristically clean and minimalistic look so typical of the Japanese Zen aesthetic style.

Here *wu wei* translates into the art of activating and observing change through minimal intervention. We can directly experience the workings of the meridians of Chinese medicine through attentive awareness and careful postural positioning.

The exercises resemble simplified stretches except for one notable difference. The intention, instead of being to stretch the body, is to allow the body to *open* itself. This increases the sense of space in the exercise, which in turn maximises the awareness of energy flow, release and transformation in the body.

There is one position for each of the twelve meridians and the movements are designed to open and activate the meridians, thereby circulating energy freely and abundantly throughout the body. The exercise has been developed with the clear intention of giving a simple but emphatic experience of *qi* – life energy – as it circulates through and activates the physical body. It is also designed to raise awareness of the connexion between the physical “core” and the energy “field” that together make up the human being.

Certain individuals find that they can directly feel the pathways of the meridians. Just about everybody can feel the immediate general effect of the exercises. It is also a simple matter to identify those meridians that have energy imbalances – either from exaggerated tension or depleted flow. Tension reveals itself as pain, while depletion usually makes the mover wish to remain in and return to the position for an extended time, perhaps even relaxing into a deep trance-like state...

These exercises are just about the most relaxing in the universe. They also teach us something very important about ourselves - we are made of energy and if we approach our bodies in this way, they will reward us a hundred thousand times over!