

Cultivating and Controlling Sexual Energy

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“ In ancient times [people] were moderate; their periods of activity and rest were regular; and were never disorderly or prone to excessive behaviors. Without prejudice or ill emotions they compassionately enjoined in joyful bliss for the betterment harmony between the sexes. Living tranquilly and harmoniously was their natural temperament. It was by these measures that they could live one hundred years or more in perfect health.

“ But presently people are not like this; their eating, drinking, activities, periods of rest, and behaviors are all treated recklessly. When they enter the bedchamber they exhaust their vital forces (qi), dissipate their true essence (jing), and cannot control or focus their spirit (shen). Wishing only to selfishly amuse and benefit themselves, they cannot find true contentment within, and so cut themselves off from long-life and joyful bliss.” – Su Nu Ching (Counsel of the Plain Girl)

Qi, Jing, and Shen

The fundamental concept in Chinese medicine is “qi”. It is often translated as “energy”, but this can be somewhat misleading. The older Chinese character for “qi” shows steam or vapor coming off of rice. (A simplified form is used today; more ancient forms show the vapor but don't indicate rice.) In Chinese thought, “rice” means not just a side dish, but food, the essence of life itself.



One theory holds that the model of qi flowing in channels dates from Imperial China, when the Emperor ended the Warring States period and united the country by controlling the food supply. All food was stored in central granaries, and was transported by canals. Medical models tend to follow our ideas of how the world works; so this social organization gave rise to a model of the human body, in which the vital nutritive essence (qi) moved in and out of granaries (the organs) and through the body along canals (the jing luo, mistranslated as “meridians”). While this bears little resemblance to our modern understanding of the body, as a practical matter the model often works quite well.

Along with qi, jing and shen form the “Three Treasures” that Taoists seek to cultivate. Jing is “essence”, one's fundamental vitality or constitution. It is a more “solid” form of qi. In this model, we inherit our jing from our parents, and it declines as we age but can supplement it through cultivation practices. Shen is “mind” or “spirit”, our sense of ourself. It is not our intellect, but the light that is in our eyes when we understand our selves, and – ideally – grows as we age. Everything in the universe manifests qi; every living thing manifests jing; but only sentient beings have shen.

The Role of Sex

“ Sexual activity is never to be considered as an end in itself, as it is but part of a larger scheme designed to develop love and the natural exchange of male and female sexual energies. All sexual activity should be embarked on first with mutual respect, love, and great anticipation.

“ If sexual activity is to have spiritual significance and if the yin and yang are to be properly enjoined, then each partner must have the proper attitude and feeling to fully experience the activity. It is for this reason that sexual activity must be undertaken with an attitude of harmony and gentleness. Approach everything slowly and with awareness of what is taking place. Make a concerted effort to feel and sense the actuality of the other person's energy and sensation.” -- Su Nu Ching (Counsel of the Plain Girl)

Love leads to sex. Sex gets your qi moving. Getting the qi moving generates more qi. Having more qi makes you healthy and vigorous, which helps you have better sex. Having better sex helps strengthen love. It's a virtuous circle. But it can be broken at the weakest link, in which case it becomes a vicious circle.

Yin and Yang

The ancient Chinese recognized two complementary principles at work in many natural phenomena, two principles that are opposing yet interdependent, that are continually consuming and transforming into each other. They are called yin and yang, and the characters used to write them developed from pictograms showing the shady side and the sunny side of a hill. Yang is associated with things that are active, masculine, warm, bright, moving upward; yin is receptive and transformative, feminine, cool, dark, moving downward. But they are never separate.



The ancient Chinese texts are rather heteronormative. We must recognize that the energy doesn't always match the plumbing. But even in a homosexual couple, at any given time one partner will be expressing more yang and the other more yin. Yin and yang are always relative.

When the partners who “should” be (for whatever value of “should” applies) more yin or yang do not manifest their primary characteristic, a sort of “bitch and wimp” situation can develop. If the partners are not in touch with their secondary characteristics, a “brute and victim” syndrome can result.

Yang is fire, yin is water: just as building a fire and keeping it going takes more attention than having a pond around, Thus, most of the Chinese texts focus on cultivation practices for the male.

Cultivating energy

General tips:

- exercise. You have to spend qi to make qi.
- eat right. You have to eat right to build qi. Lots of vegetables and fruits, less refined foods and sugar.
- Be clean. Hygiene helps your qi. Some Taoist sources even recommend shaving the genitals (supposedly takes the body back to an adolescent state), and applying lotion to the penis to benefit the skin. (If you have chafing from condom use, shea butter can be quite useful.)
- Avoid nicotine, which constricts the blood vessels. Avoid too much caffeine, which can sap your energy; same with alcohol and other drugs.

Breathing

Breathing is necessary to be healthy. What a concept!

From a comfortable yet erect posture, with the abdomen open and free, and the tongue touching the roof of the mouth just behind the front teeth:

1) Deep abdominal breathing: breathe in through the nose allowing the belly to expand, like your belly was a water balloon, filling from the bottom. Then continue to inhale and allow your chest to expand. Don't raise your shoulders, keep them down and relaxed. Then breath out, starting drawing in your abdomen, then your chest - like a tube of toothpaste, squeeze from the end and move up. Exhale completely.

2) The "microcosmic orbit": using visualization to enhance the circulation of qi. As you breath in, imagine energy running up your spine ("Governing Vessel", the most yang meridian) from the "bowl" of the pelvis; as you exhale, allow it to run down the front of the body ("Conception Vessel", the most yin meridian).

3) "Four step breathing": as above, but now pause after the inhalation and after the exhalation. Inhale for four beats, hold for four, exhale for six (exhale completely), pause for two. Retaining the breath helps generate energy.

4) Locks. These are energy "gates", where the flow of qi and blood is controlled. Strengthening them aids the flow. Start with doing them one at a time, then together; then add them to your breathing practice: lock as you inhale and draw the energy up, like the locks on a canal; unlock after exhaling, allowing the qi to flow back down.

- Neck: pull the chin in and down, tightening the muscles and creating the feeling of pushing the back of the neck toward the front. Hold for three seconds and then relax.
- Abdomen: suck in your gut, as if pulling your belly button in and up toward your spine. Hold for

three seconds and relax.

- Pelvic floor: tighten the muscles you would use to hold in urination or a bowel movement. Hold for three seconds, then tighten more firmly as if lifting the anus. Hold for three seconds. Release the higher lock, then the lower.

Contraindications for Shiatsu and Acupressure

- During pregnancy, or while trying to conceive:
 - avoid Spleen 6, Spleen 8 (inside of the lower leg/shin), Large Intestine 4 (webbing of the hand), Gall Bladder 21 (top of shoulders), Bladder 60, Bladder 62, Bladder 67, Kidney 3 (around the ankle bones and the outside edge of the foot)
 - avoid the abdomen and lower back
- No bilateral pressure over the neck arteries or veins (best to avoid entirely for beginners)
- Avoid varicose veins
- No prolonged pressure over any artery or vein
- Avoid tumors, of lumps of unknown origin
- Avoid recent injuries or surgical sites
- Don't work on someone in the acute stages of an infectious disease, fever
- If in doubt – don't!!

“Dragon pressing its body”

An acupressure exercise to improve flow of qi and blood to the genitals.

- rub the area two fingers below the navel (CV 6, a.k.a. the “Sea of Qi” or the “Lower Dantien”) with right palm, clockwise 36 times, then with the thumb, clockwise 36 times (clockwise to tonify and gather qi)
- thumb press the “Spleen 6” point four fingers above the inside ankle bone (medial malleolus). Press each leg 36 times.
- thumb press the point “Stomach 36” (four fingers below the kneecap, 1 to the outside of the shinbone) 36 times
- with the palm, massage up along legs (Liver meridian) to the groin area.

“Dragon wagging its tail”

Do this after a warm shower. It draws blood into the head of the penis, stretching the tissues, improving blood flow, and desensitizes the penis a bit to help prevent premature ejaculation. With right hand, index and middle fingers, press point CV 1 on the perineum. With left hand, wrap the base of the penis with the thumb and index finger, and slap the head of the penis against the left thigh 36 times. Reverse hands and do other side. Slapping is moderate and slow – it shouldn't sting! But it should make a sound when it slaps.

(There are several other exercises, meant to increase the size of the penis. They're more...vigorous, and could be harmful if done improperly. Hsi Lai's book describes them if you're interested.)

Herbs and Foods to Tonify Yang

- ginger increases blood flow to the extremities, including the genitals
- American ginseng tea, 2x/day. Do not take while sick, and avoid radishes and turnips while taking ginseng (it's very yang, they're very yin, it makes a mess). The American variety is more yin, reduces heat in lungs, and is considered best for improving sexual function.
- each day for 60 days, eat two ounces of crushed walnuts. They are a tonic for the kidney yang. After sixty days, stop for ninety, then start again.
- other herbs: yohimbe, saw palmetto

Chinese herbs are generally taken for 45 days or less at a shot, then two weeks off. More is not necessarily better.

Controlling Ejaculation

We usually think of a simple sequence for the male sexual response: arousal - erection - ejaculation and orgasm. But we all know that erection can occur without arousal (the bane of teenage boys); and arousal can occur without erection (the bane of older men). Just so, ejaculation can occur without orgasm, and orgasm without ejaculation.

Withholding ejaculation is the key to Taoist sexual yoga for men – ejaculation is seen as depleting a man's jing. The ideal is frequent sex, infrequent ejaculation. But rather than thinking about baseball, we're going to think about our bodies, become completely aware of them, not just our genitals but our breathing and all the energy moving through us.

Slow it down: even pause, stimulate your partner with your fingers for a minute while you control your energy.

Nine shallow, one deep: controlling the depths of penetration is important. One way to do this is “nine shallow, one deep”, which can either be repeated, or changed to eight shallow, two deep; then seven shallow, three deep; and so on.

Hold it in with your hands: firm pressure at CV 1, on the perineum; or, circle the left thumb and index finger around the base (especially the underside) of the penis, and squeeze the tip with the right index finger and thumb 36 times (not too hard)

Lock it up: do the locks described above, especially the pelvic floor one.

Breathe!: quick inhalation, long exhalation.

Move the energy: visualize the energy moving up the spine to the brain as you slowly and completely exhale. You've GOT TO MOVE THE ENERGY, not just withhold ejaculation! You can practice this any time you get an inconvenient erection, or even while masturbating.

Here's a more complicated method from the Su Nu Ching:

“Upon first sensing that you are about to ejaculate stop all movement of the Jade Stem and forcefully press on your pubic area around the base of the Jade Stem with both hands. Breathe in deeply and quickly, then exhale gradually and slowly. Simultaneously grit the teeth together and breathe in slowly and deeply. As you are doing this raise your head to gaze upward and then downward, and then from left to right. Then contract the lower abdomen and relax momentarily.

“Next fill the abdomen and lungs with air so they expand, focusing on your tan t'ien while exhaling and contracting your abdomen. Simultaneously gaze upward and relax momentarily. Then breathe in deeply, slowly exhale. Rotate your eyes clockwise three times while contracting the abdomen. Inhale deeply while gritting the teeth together and relax the entire body. When you sense a windlike movement on your ears, contract the abdomen.

“When the erection starts to subside, your breathing and heart will quiet and you will feel in control of your spirit. At this point sexual activity may again be resumed.”

What's important here is not the details, but intent, visualization, and awareness of the body. And remember, the same thing applies to sex as what a cha-do master once told me about the Japanese tea ceremony: “However many mistakes happen, no mistakes happen.” Have fun!

Further Reading

- Dunas, Felice w/ Phillip Goldberg. *Passion Play*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1997.
- Lai, Hsi. *The Sexual Teachings of the Jade Dragon*. Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books, 2002.
- Gach, Michael Reed. *Acupressure for Lovers*. New York: Bantam Books, 1997.