

The Organ System

Our organs carry out the functions of our survival. One can build muscles, and strength is a very healthful feature of wellness, but it is the organs that keep us alive. Yoga asana and vinyasa practice can be focused on the various organs of the body in very specific and subtle ways. To say a particular pose is “good for” a particular organ is true only to the degree that the practitioner can find the useful movement and activation of that organ in the practice. Subtle awareness needs to be developed. Most people teaching yoga do not have this awareness. This is one role for the sensitive yoga therapist.

Organs can also be considered to be expressive. Their presence in everyday language indicates as such: I cannot “stomach” this. That galls me! He is pissed off. She has a heartache. You don’t have the guts! Etc. The skeletal-muscular system provides structure and the ability to move, but it is in the organs that we find our feelings, or motivations, or desires and designs. The weight and volume of our organs provide the internal integrity within our torso and skull. They give fullness and presence to our body and its movement; they give aliveness and expression of feeling.

Each organ’s activity generates or supports a different state of mind and quality of expression in movement reflecting its activity, structure, substance, size, and position in the body. Similarly, expression or repression of emotion will not only reflect the organ activity but also affect the organs through stimulation or inhibition of their full functioning. . . . The organs connect us to our “gut” feelings and reactions: to our raw, uncensored, unbounded emotions.

Beside the various physiological functions of the different organs, in general the organs offer postural support and support in movement due to their volume and internal structure of connective tissues. The vitality of each organ, its quality of cellular functioning provides buoyancy in a healthy body that supports the body’s weight and ease in movement. Healthy organs offer support in two significant ways: through **compression** and through **suspension**.

Organs in need of assistance can be worked with through visualization, movement, asana, vinyasa, sounding, hissing, breathing into or from them, and in other ways. It is important to explore what each organ is responsive to, and not to assume without grounding exploration in experience.

Locate an organ you’d like to work with in an anatomy book or online. Study the organ’s features and function. Transfer what you’ve learned to sensing in your body.

Notice the effect of these actions:

1. Breathe into the organ: what is the effect of inhaling into it, exhaling into it?
2. Breathe from the organ (initiate breath from the organ). What affect does this have on the organ and on your breathing?
3. Repeat several short hissing sounds initiating from the organ. Effect?
4. Sound into the organ. What is the effect of different tones and sounds? Consonants?
5. Jiggle or move the organ. Effect?
6. Initiate movement from the organ. Effect?
7. Move the organ in different planes. Effect?
8. Do some yoga practice with awareness of the organ. How is it participating in what you are doing?