

Universal Principles of Alignment¹

- **Open to Grace** - openhearted attitude of trust and surrender. Alignment of intention, attention and spirit/heart/mind quality. Sankalpa.
- **Muscular Energy** - muscle to bone contractive effort. Muscles gently but firmly "hug" the bones, completely and evenly on all sides. There is also a more global contractive energy of "hugging the midline": for example, squeezing the legs towards each other even when in a straddle stance or step stance. Draw muscular energy from the feet through the legs, and into the pelvis and focal point of the shape or movement.
- **Inner Spiral (expanding energy)** - opens and creates freedom and space in the body. An expanding spiral of energy that starts along the inner edge (big toe) of the feet and progressively widens as it spirals upward to the outer edges of the waistline. There are three primary effects of inner spiral in the legs:
 - It turns the front of the feet, shins, thighs and pelvis inward toward the midline.
 - It moves the inner edges of the feet, legs and pelvis, including the public plate and sitting bones backward (inner heels, inner knees and inner thighs move back).
 - It broadens and laterally expands the legs and pelvis apart, creating space in the sacroiliac joints.
- **Outer Spiral (contracting energy)** - closes and contains the energy for stability in the body. Runs from the waistline area to the feet in a narrowing spiral that specifically turns from the outer waistline down through the tailbone and out through the legs and feet. There are three principle effects of outer spiral:
 - It turns the pelvis bones, legs and feet outward.
 - It moves the inner edges of the pelvis (tailbone, base of sacrum and sitting bones) forward.
 - It draws the sides of the pelvis, legs and feet together, toward the midline.
- **Organic Energy** - is an extension from the inner body that radiates out in all directions. Organic energy pulsates with muscular energy to create balanced effort and surrender. It is the energy that returns to the universe from the effort you put forth. More simply put, muscular energy is contractive; organic energy is expansive.

¹ Source unknown. Document was issued during the Dharma Yoga Teacher Training led by Uma Kleppinger at the YogaPearl in Spring 2008. I have edited some material that was too specifically geared towards instruction of yoga classes, and added notes where I felt appropriate to do so.

Muscular and Organic Energyⁱ

The currents of energy that flow in Spirals and ‘Loops’² in the body are composed of two kinds of energy that we work to keep in dynamic balance. Every hatha yoga pose [or, basic shape we take, every purposeful movement] demands that we actively exercise and consciously bring about a balance between the two:

- **Integrative** energy - ‘**Muscular Energy**’ - a current of energy that firms inward from the periphery toward the core. In its simplest sense, Muscular Energy is that which firms the muscles at work so that they draw close to the bone with a feeling of strength, support and assurance - a very different quality from ‘tightening’ or flexing the muscles for show.
- **Expansive** energy - **Organic Energy** - a current of energy that expands, flows and radiates outward from the core, bringing about extension with a feeling of lightness, freedom, suppleness and ease. We usually associate ‘stretching’ with the development of Organic Energy, but the qualities associated with the expression of Organic Energy in a yoga pose set it apart from the experience of just a good stretch.

The keynote of these two ideas is **balance** and **integration**, which comes about through awareness of a Focal Point or meeting place of the two energies. In a hatha yoga pose, to engage ‘**muscular**’ energy is to firm the muscles, ‘hugging’ them to the bones while directing the flow of this energy *inward* toward the core of the body. ‘**Organic**’ expansion complements that integrative force with a lengthening and extension *outward* from that core. The energetic core around and through which these energies play in a particular pose can be called a Focal Point. Thanks to this interplay, although a pose may *look* static and unmoving, we can experience it as a living, dynamic pulsation of energy, of fully integrated self-awareness expressed through the body. By contrast, *without* the awareness of the role of *both* Muscular and Organic Energy organized around a Focal Point, hatha yoga [or, any form of exercise] can indeed amount to little more than stretching and ‘holding’ poses, [or ‘throwing’ arms and legs about in an approximation of the intended movement].

When both energies are incorporated into one’s practice, yoga [or, any form of exercise] is not only safer and more beneficial; it also transcends the merely physical experience of the practice. Muscular Energy brings self-awareness - receiving, embracing and drawing inward to the self, while Organic Energy is expansive, expressing our unique selfhood outward in a way that embraces and affirms the unity of self and world. The balance between the two fosters a strong and open heart.

Muscular Energy is extrinsic, moving from the outside inward. It is an intensifying energy that imparts firmness in the way that the bark of a tree gives it strength and integrity, providing the stability to grow and expand.

Organic Energy is intrinsic; it is a liberating current of energy that flows from the inside outward, like the flow of sap from the roots to the leaves in a tree. Organic Energy is the power of growth and expansion itself, softer, subtler, but in combination with Muscular Energy brings far greater strength than reliance upon the extrinsic strength of Muscular Energy alone. Imagine the force that drives the sap upward to the leaves of a 60-foot tree, or drives the roots to penetrate and split solid rock! Yet all too often when faced with a challenge we brace ourselves and try to ‘muscle’ our way through, rather than go deeper inside and balance outer strength with a deeper, expansive wellspring of power arising from the core. The word ‘organic’ when applied to yoga (or, movement) is meant to express this deeper core energy that is not found merely in the working of extrinsic muscles, but is the supple strength that is the essence of growth, youth and healing.

This is *not* to say that muscles are not involved in Organic extension. In the exercise given below³, muscles are of course being used in the ‘organic’ arm - the difference is that through the *intention* behind organic

² see image of Anusara Posture Loops p.4

³ not included in this excerpt

extension, we access deeper supporting and postural muscles that are not ordinarily under our voluntary control. In the body overall, these more intrinsic muscles governing posture that are able to hold firm while in extension can be more steadfast than extrinsic muscles that work primarily by shortening through contraction (such as the bicep).

For this reason, a relatively slight person can often hold a handstand far longer than a more ‘muscular’ person. She calls upon a deeper strength, which works in *conjunction* with Muscular Energy, but is not limited to it.

People by nature tend to have one or the other of these energies predominate in their physical makeup. Some are more hard and muscular, while others are soft and organic. If one of the two energies far exceeds the other, it can be a weakness. The overly muscular person is so tight as to be immobile - literally ‘muscle-bound’. This kind of inflexibility is the result of a struggle; the muscles strongly contract, bunching up in opposition to each other without being balanced by a current of Organic extension. The muscles have only learned one action, which is to contract, and the predominantly Muscular person typically experiences ‘tightness’ from the muscles pulling up short.

‘Stiffness’ is something different, and is often due to a *lack* of Muscular Energy. A ‘stiff’ person, has both weakened and shortened muscles - usually through disuse - and actually needs to engage more Muscular Energy before attempting to stretch or extend them. Flexibility begins with strength. When we try to force the body to be flexible through ‘stretching,’ without engaging Muscular Energy, we risk injury and fail to bring about a healthy lengthening of the muscles. In other words, we cannot become more ‘Organic’ except by the path of Muscular engagement. By the same token, if we emphasize the development of muscular strength with little or no attention to Organic extension, we risk stifling the innate suppleness of our life energy.

At the other end of the spectrum. Organic Energy in the absence of Muscular Energy is sorely lacking in a particular kind of strength. An organic person may be strong - able to move into very flexible positions such as a deep backbend and hold them - yet can be so fluid as to lack core strength. She is so loose in the joints that she is challenged to pull herself together to protect the joints and integrate the actions of the body in a more balanced way. Yoga can actually be more *difficult* for the overly organic person, because her body does not provide a firm vessel for this energy that imparts a sense of a center, as well as of limits and of boundaries. An organic person can end up overextending in a stretch to the point of injury, not having a sense of where to stop. Flexibility ceases to be a virtue when one moves beyond the limits of what is healthy for the body; this is an important distinction between yoga poses and circus feats. Flexibility (Organic Energy) must be integrated and supported by strength (Muscular Energy), just as strength (Muscular Energy) must be unlocked and completed through flexibility (Organic Energy).

The point of yoga is to bring these two energies into balance. Each is distinct from the other, having its own distinct qualities.

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This excerpt from the book Hatha Yoga in the Anusara Style by Doug Keller was issued during the Dharma Yoga Teacher Training led by Uma Kleppinger at the YogaPearl in Spring 2008. I have edited some material that was too specifically geared towards instruction of yoga classes, and added notes where I felt appropriate to do so.

skull loop

starts at upper palate, moves back through base of skull, up over top of head, and back to upper palate

lift chin, release jaw, soft palate is center of head

shoulder loop

starts in upper palate, draws shoulderblades in towards heart, moves forward and up to lift chest and open throat

pull shoulders down the back away from ears, then forward to xyphoid process, both clavicles and scapula are open

kidney loop

starts in core abs, draws back and up through kidneys, moves up toward heart, the back and down xyphoid process to belly

"connect heart center" draw two halves of ribcage together and into body

pelvic loop

starts in core abs, moves down lumbar/sacrum, forward through coxxyx, lifts ASIS

pull pubic bone up to navel without pushing pelvis forward, pull navel inward

thigh loop

brings top of thighbones back, shins forward, and muscular lift of thighs

pull kneecap up, micro-hinge in hip socket without tilt in pelvis

shin loop

takes base of shinbone back, lifts calves, moves top of shinbone forward

micro-bend in knees "hug" calves to bones

ankle loop

creates lift in arches and top of feet

lift, then spread and lower toes, pull balls of feet towards heels

