

The Energy of Yin and Yang

Yin and Yang in balance help us live mind-body healthy, show up with joy, and build sustainable lives. We need both.

We may have a natural tendency to lean more one way than other in general, or we may show up in yang energy in some parts of life or some relationships, and in our yin energy in others.

While both are good and needed, we can tip a little far in any one direction and the more we become awake to our patterns, the easier it is to catch ourselves and return to a more balanced state.

Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioner, Elina Zagkorontskagia, writes, “In Western Medicine terms, the Yin/Yang balance can be comprehended as the balance of the autonomic nervous system” where Yang represents the sympathetic (fight, fright, flight) state and Yin represents the parasympathetic (rest, digest, collapse) state.

The different states of our nervous system serve a purpose, yet the goal is not to remain in one or the other but to understand the strengths and potentials issues of living too much in one state and to aim for homeostasis.

In *Lunar Abundance*, Ezzie Spencer (I recommend this book for anyone interested in seasonal living – or a more compassionate and gentle way of being in the world) offers us some primary characteristics of Yin and Yang along with an example of how that might show up both in a more and a less effective way in our life.

YANG

Characteristics: doing, moving, speaking, giving

Effective: purposed-driven, focused direction, from head and heart, assertive and respectful

Less effective: achievement-oriented, random busyness, overly intellectualized, pushy and dominant

YIN

Characteristics: being, restoring, listening, receiving

Effective: allows uncertainty, nurtures self and others, hears and collaborates, accepts with boundaries

Less effective: controls, helpless and overwhelmed, too timid, feels the need to reciprocate

The dialectic of yin and yang in practicing self-compassion

Dr. Kristen Neff, Associate Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Texas at Austin, co-author of *The Mindful Self-Compassion Workbook* as well as *Teaching the Mindful Self-Compassion Program: A Guide for Professionals*, and co-founder of the nonprofit Center for Mindful Self-Compassion also believes that Yin and yang “energies are needed for inner healing and outer change.”

She teaches about two forms of self-compassion: gentle self-compassion (yin) and fierce self-compassion (yang).

You can see in the chart below how she breaks down the different purposes of yin and yang energy and offers ideas for they show up for the three components of self-compassion (self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness).

Purpose	Self-Kindness	Common Humanity	Mindfulness
Yin (Be With)	Loving	Connected	Presence
Yang (Protect)	Fierce	Empowered	Clarity
Yang (Provide)	Fulfilling	Balanced	Authenticity
Yang (Motivate)	Encouraging	Wise	Vision

Furthermore, she shares that when yin and yang out of balance:

- Self-acceptance can become complacency
- Self-protection can become hostility
- Self-providing can become greed
- Self-motivation can become perfectionism

It’s important to note that yin and yang are not gendered though they may at times be referred to as “feminine” or “masculine” energies. Neff believes that “the gendering of yin and yang helps to lock patriarchy in place: Girls are socialized to be yin and not yang and this disempowers women. Boys are socialized to be yang and not yin and this creates fear of vulnerability in men.”