

THE BEGINNER'S BOOK OF MEDITATION

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO MEDITATION AND
BREATHING TECHNIQUES



ATTILA OROSZ



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THE BEGINNER'S BOOK OF MEDITATION

**A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO MEDITATION
AND BREATHING TECHNIQUES**

**WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY
ATTILA OROSZ**

1st Edition, Kindle – published in 2014, by Attila Orosz attila.orosz@mail.com



Attila Orosz, 2014

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Preface

The book you are reading is a short compendium of some of the most common methods and techniques of meditation known today, while also being an attempt to disseminate some common misunderstandings about the subject. It is not meant to be a comprehensive work, but a practical guide of the basics, with some, hopefully easy to follow advice that might help one to set on a new journey, or just help to deepen the practice of those, already on their way.

Although there are, of course, many more meditation methods and techniques known to man, the ones selected for this book are those that are the easiest to learn and follow in daily practice, offering the greatest benefits, in return for a little invested effort.

Please do not take this for a fast-track sales pitch. Contrary to what contemporary marketing strategies often try to make believe, there are no short-cuts, especially not in mental or spiritual growth and advancement, such as one would expect from meditation. You will have to invest sufficient time and dedication, but this does not necessarily mean that the journey cannot be easy. Although it is not a fast solution, this book definitely offers some methods, which could work ‘right out of the box’. The only requirement from you, dear reader, is: Once you have finished reading, you should put your new-found knowledge into *practice*.

There are many excellent books on the market today, teaching and guiding through meditation techniques, some are more detailed, others may contain different, more recognised or more suitable methods for your individual needs. This book does not attempt to be better or superior to any other, or even try to compete.

The volume you are reading is simply a complementary effort, offering some less well-known methods, often omitted from other works, besides an in-detail introduction to the most common techniques, with probably a slightly different approach towards them. You will find less about the philosophy and history of

meditation practices and more practical advice on how to perform and observe them.

This of course also means, that many commonly taught methods have had to be omitted. Indeed, this book will not cover some of the newer, more contemporary methods of meditation, it does instead focus on some traditional, time-proven techniques, without going too deep into the religious or spiritual and historical background, these traditional techniques usually complement.

The methods described in the book are not follow-along meditations, from beginning to end, that you can just sit down and do step-by-step, prescribed for specific goals, situations, or life events. While there are many excellent books, that offer such guidance, this volume aims to be different.

The goal of this book is, to help you understand meditation, through teaching the foundations of some popular as well as some lesser known techniques, empowering you with the knowledge and experience to build up your own routine, your own way, your own meditation practice. Although it may seem much easier to follow detailed advice from beginning to end, that would also restrict you to the pre-described path and no such advice may replace practice and personal experience.

Meditation is an intimately personal journey and this book will try to provide you with a useful way to begin on that path. Detailed instructions will, of course, be given to start practising any method you choose, yet you will have to proceed in your own pace. This will develop and strengthen your self-discipline, also making your practice independent from any external source or guidance. ☸

WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?

This book is meant for anyone and everyone interested in learning meditation, regardless of age, sex, physical or mental state, or ability, religious philosophical, or spiritual views and previous experience in meditation practice. No questions of religion, philosophy or spirituality will be discussed within, only easy to learn techniques and methods, you may use along your way. Meditation will be regarded as a tool, or vehicle, you might use along your path, any path you have chosen or might choose at a later point in your life.

Whether you seek the benefits of meditation itself, want to enhance your health, your mental capacity or ability, your studies or learning experiences, your physical strength, your career, being able to work more efficiently, become more compassionate or caring; or you pursue higher goals – be it spiritual advancement or enlightenment – deepen your religious experience; connectedness to others, or higher powers; deepen your understanding of philosophy or greater questions about life and existence, meditation has much to offer. Regardless of your goals, meditation will have its place in your daily routine and practice.

Although this non-comprehensive book is, as the title suggests, aimed at the beginner, you are invited for a moment of reflection on who a beginner really is. What is the point after which a student or practitioner of any discipline might be considered advanced in the subject, nay a master of it? How do you measure mastery? Is it the years of practice? Is it a title or rank earned? Everyone may define levels of advancement differently and many would not consider themselves a beginner, after their many years of meditation experience.

Yet, every new experience, everything you learn, means the beginning of something new. Not simply a continuation of a journey, but a whole new journey you set off, empowered by your new knowledge and experiences at every single moment. As the journey may always be regarded as a new one, you might eternally be at the beginning of it, therefore, in a sense, you could always

consider yourself a beginner. While mastery may come from the superb understanding and practise of the basics, every master is at once a beginner, as by achieving mastery, they have already been set on a new path.

Thus, the simplest answer to the above question is: This book is for you, the ultimate beginner, as every new step you take on your path, is also a new beginning. 

WILL YOU FIND SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE OR ADVICE?

There will be no strictly meant spiritual guidance or wisdom printed on these pages. No all-encompassing powerful revelations, no religious views, philosophy or spirituality will be endorsed, discussed or promoted. Different people may come from different backgrounds, with differing views on either subject, while meditation practice is universal, transcending questions of religion, philosophy and spirituality. A catholic priest's daily prayer is as much a meditation experience as is the Buddhist monks religious chanting. A young atheist lady in Europe might go through the same meditation experience as an old aboriginal male shaman in Australia, if they were to use the same techniques.

Keeping that in mind, it is not at all easy to describe such experiences to another person. Everybody may experience the same journey differently and might be unable to show another person what they feel or understand, without that person ever having been there. Think about the following example for a moment:

If a person who has lived his entire life seeing only one colour, probably blue, in his surroundings, they would only know that one colour. If another person, who has seen the whole spectrum, would come and try to explain what the colour red looks like, how would she proceed? An entire vocabulary of colours and palettes would become useless in that situation.

If, on the other hand, the person who has only seen blue, were to describe the ten-thousand shades of that one colour, how would he proceed? The other would have been so overwhelmed by colours all her life, she would be unable to comprehend the finest little details just by description.

If, however, the person who has seen all colours, would take the other and simply show him the colour red, letting him experience it first-hand and make whatever he might be able to make of it, the person formerly unfamiliar with the colour red, would finally be able to form a concept of it for himself. Would she now be able to offer an explanation about the colour red? Probably not, as she

would still have no idea of what the other has made of the experience.

Consider now, that the person familiar with the ten-thousand shades of blue would take the other to a place, where she would be able to contemplate blue without the distraction of all other colours. Leaving sufficient time to understand and see the ten-thousand shades, she would be finally able to comprehend those subtle differences, she would not have previously understood. Would the person, who has only seen blue, be able to further explain about those myriads of shades now? Possibly not, as he will not see into the mind of the other, who has just formed her own concept from her own personal experience.

Similarly, describing one's meditation experience to another may be equally useless, unless the other has a way to experience it first-hand. Once such experience happens however and an explanation be offered, it may still greatly differ from what the other made of the experience personally, as all your experiences and concepts are unique to your own mind and understanding. Therefore, only practical advice will be offered in this book, with as little additional explanation as possible, to avoid any confusion.

Meditation does not, in itself, offer either spirituality or enlightenment, it is not religious, neither is it strictly secular. Meditation is not even spiritual in and of itself. You, dear reader however, may be either, most, or neither of the above. You may have beliefs of your own, or you may follow traditional teachings or wisdom. You might be religious, spiritually inclined, or have a secular, or strictly scientific world view, you may prefer philosophy or even mysticism or have any other convictions of your own.

Whatever your background and wherever your heart and mind is, this book offers meditation practice for what it is: a tool to help you follow your own path in your own way. Wherever you come from and wherever you are going to, meditation will surely guide you throughout the way, thence the answer might still be: Yes, you may find spiritual guidance, though it will not originate from this book, but rather from your own practice and experience.

What this volume has to offer is only help, to find that path for yourself.

Whatever you come across, discover or realise along the way, you may easily incorporate into your convictions or beliefs, your world view, habits or ways. Meditation has not any context, therefore it could be used in any context you may choose. It may enhance your religious or spiritual experience but you may as well use it to enhance your concentration when studying or researching scientific subjects if you like. ■

Introduction

Although it is not organised into a naturally flowing whole, you may choose to read the book as such. First, the breathing techniques will be discussed, the knowledge of these will not only deepen your practice, but could often prove to be essential, for certain meditation techniques, that rely largely on breathing. Likewise, the first methods of sitting meditation discussed, will also serve a basis for later, more advanced practices, thus learning and mastering these first, may enable you to continue with advanced methods without great difficulty.

Each part and even the individual chapters are intended to serve as standalone content when needed. If you are only interested in a specific topic, you may skip to it and start reading right from the middle. You should find a description and discussion of the chosen subject as complete as the confines of this book allow for. You will occasionally notice, that some of these chapters refer to previously discussed ideas. In such case, to better understand the concepts being discussed, it is worth to have a read through those chapters addressed as well.

The book will not concentrate on one particular method or technique, nor will it go into great depth or detail about any. As no one method is superior to, or better than another, you are encouraged to put into practice, try, and evaluate as many as you feel comfortable with, then stick to any of those that feel most appealing, or natural to follow. This would be the most likely way you would continue practising over a longer period of time. Most practices described will cover the very basics, just enough to start you off on your journey. In how much detail each topic will be covered, generally depends on how much detail it *can* be successfully covered in a book, meant for the beginner, without using special terminology, when possible.

You will find that some chapters are lengthier, going into more detail than others. Naturally, this is a consequence of some concepts being simpler, or easier to understand and others may seem less obvious, or might even appear controversial at first. Wherever a somewhat more detailed discussion is due,

such discussion will be provided. While this can lead to somewhat tedious descriptions, understanding difficult concepts could become easier with more background information presented.

Without any disrespect for religions or spirituality, as much of the religious or spiritual aspects of each method have been omitted, as possible, in order to avoid disturbing anyone's probably differing views, preventing them from considering serious practice, wherever the background or traditions associated with a certain method do not match their own beliefs, convictions or experiences. Meditation can indeed form a part of your spiritual or religious practice, but it can also be observed independently from any such views, or even in a strictly secular, nay even scientific manner. It is up to you, to put it into context for yourself.

Some methods and techniques can be learned from a book, or books, whereas others will definitely need further guidance, usually from a teacher, master or instructor. If you feel you are lost, confused, or need further guidance, never hesitate to seek guidance, if it is available. ☸

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK?

As discussed above, the book itself is organised into chapters that may be read in sequence or used individually. In each chapter, you will find three types of paragraphs. The one you are reading now, is just the main text, containing important information, to connect and build up the whole concept.

Highlighted paragraphs will contain important points, often removed from the main flow of text, or just marked as noteworthy. These bits, if recalled during practice, would certainly help you gain a deeper understanding of the concept discussed. (*Editor's note:* On some devices, e.g. the Kindle DX, the background colour of these highlighted paragraphs may not display. The highlighted paragraphs will usually fit well into the flow of text, and these not being marked, should not in any way, lessen your reading experience.)

- Bulleted paragraphs will contain practical instructions. If you later revisit a chapter, or want to start practising after you've read through it, you can simply follow these. When following the guidance this book has to offer, the most important things to remember will be: practice, patience, time and determination.

Note for the Kindle edition: Sub-chapter breaks will be marked with the ☸ (OM) symbol, indicating that the chapter continues on the next page, while chapters end with a small square (■), for convenience and easier navigation.

The best way to start using this book is, probably, to read through it at first. Once finished, you should have a basic idea of the different approaches covered and those interesting you the most. You should consider learning basic abdominal breathing as a minimum, as most methods will require you to be familiar with this technique at least; you should definitely not skip that chapter. Although it would probably be best to start with learning Zen meditation next, as it would create an excellent foundation to any other technique, it is not at all

necessary. Turn to the desired method, get yourself ready, read through the chapter and set on practising.

Once again, if you are a complete beginner, the very minimum recommended for you would be to learn the simple abdominal breathing and Zen meditation, these being the simplest methods for both breathing and meditation practice, and follow these practices until you feel rather confident and comfortable with them. Throughout this time, you might find it beneficial – even though you may read other parts of this book – to concentrate on the concepts and techniques you are just familiarising yourself with. Otherwise, if you choose to read and learn meditation techniques by individual chapters, you can always find the required, or recommended breathing techniques in the previous part of the book to learn them from.

You will probably not remember everything straight away. Just stay relaxed, you will get there. Have the book handy and don't be afraid to open it to have a look. Treat your first couple of practises as learning only. Remember, as long as you are doing it, you cannot do it wrong. Just open up the chapter, if you are not sure about something, and correct yourself accordingly. Start with five minutes for the first five occasions, ten minutes for the next ten times you sit down to practise and extend to fifteen minutes for next five to fifteen attempts. Fifteen to twenty minutes would be sufficient afterwards every time you observe the method of your choice.

Every single time, before you set about meditating, read through the entire chapter about the chosen technique again. There will be some points to refresh, and others you may have not noticed or probably did not fully understand at first. When you feel fairly confident, you can omit the book entirely and just keep practising. Still, once you get more experienced, it is worth revisiting the chapter and reading through it again. You might see things in a different light after you have more experience about what is written. Remember: you are in control, only the practice and time committed will determine your success.

Of course the simple methods and guides described in this book are just the beginning. Once you have mastered your chosen method, a whole new world

opens up and a whole new journey begins. You will discover that your journey so far was but a preparation to another, much longer one, into a new, previously undiscovered realm. Do not allow yourself to be taken by your first successful experience though. Even if it grants a certain feeling of gratification to succeed, please remember, you have only started on a long way, you may never see the end of. There are no short-cuts or fast solutions. Invest your time and you will find your reward. ■

PART 1

ABOUT MEDITATION IN GENERAL

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT MEDITATION?

The word, ‘meditation’, has two distinct meanings that are still connected in a way. One such meaning is: ‘the action or practice of meditating’; while the other is: ‘a written or spoken discourse expressing considered thoughts on a subject’. The latter of these two definitions may highlight why the term ‘contemplation’ is also quite often used in conjunction with meditation. This book will focus mainly on the primary meaning of the word, that being the act or practice of meditation, popularly perceived as an oriental tradition.

There are many concepts and misconceptions of what meditation really is. One of the popularly held beliefs is that the practitioner would sit for an extended period of time, motionless, with an empty head, purposely not thinking about anything, freeing themselves from thought and emotions, being still and empty. Although not very far from the truth, this picture is in need of some corrections.

Being in a state, as described above, resembles not so much a state of meditation, but rather that of being dead. Thoughts and emotions are an integral part of human nature and can be expected to occur. While one is too busy suppressing their thoughts, with all their brain powers directed towards fighting the stubbornly reoccurring mental images, there will be little energy left to focus on more important elements of the meditation practice. This leads straight to the real essence of meditation: *focus*.

What meditation really is, can be most easily described like this: A heightened state of focus, concentrated into one point, sharply, *consciously* and purposefully. Being free of thoughts might occur with practice, but never forcedly; it could be viewed more as a side effect of focusing your attention. At a higher level, meditation might or might not become a spiritual practice, as meditation can be practised in religious, spiritual, or strictly secular ways. Some

meditation techniques are aimed at opening up chakras, leaving one's body or otherwise connecting to the spiritual world, travelling through time and space and other uncommon goals, most of which will possibly appear to be mystical or arcane for the average person.

While such practices are usually followed by those who commit all their lives to spiritual attainment and enlightenment, like monks, yogis, ascetics and other legendary transcended spirits, this book will generally focus on the more earthly methods of everyday meditation, that can be followed in real life, seeking health benefits and probably mental or spiritual advancement from daily meditation practice. Simple methods like sitting in Zazen can be followed and mastered by anyone, with or without a spiritual approach or training in any religious or philosophical system.

Although sitting meditation is a most common practice, it is not, by any means the only way you might meditate. There are certain ways to practice meditation with-, in-or through movement as well, while other methods would require you to lay down flat on the floor.

Meditation should not be confused with relaxation either. Although relaxation generally occurs as a result of meditation, the terms are not completely interchangeable. Meditation in general is not necessarily a relaxed state of mind, in fact, it most often means quite an intense mental practice.

Another question is that relaxation usually follows the meditation practice naturally, as a result of the intense focus and freeing yourself from the one-thousand things occupying your mind. Every moment of every day, myriads of impulses bombard you through your five senses and from within, manifesting as thoughts, ideas and emotions. Focusing your attention into one point might help silencing the inner chatter and your mind may eventually be allowed to get some rest, resulting ultimately in the greatest experience of relaxation and peace. 

THE BENEFITS OF MEDITATION

Much scientific and less-scientific research have been conducted regarding the true benefits of meditation. Apart from the base-ones detailed here, there are many more physiological, psychological and even spiritual benefits, you can achieve from regular meditation practice.

Depending on the method and technique used, some of these benefits may differ and some practices may have different uses than others. These minor differences would usually come from the nature of method in question, such as sitting meditation may not be beneficial for joint health, whereas moving meditation usually promotes healthy joints and freedom of movement. Of course, no one method is superior to another, each would allow the practitioner to be healthier and feel better in body, mind and spirit alike. There are some common points though, positive effects of the practice, which all meditators, regardless of the way they choose to follow, may experience.

Meditation at a basic level has nothing mystical about it, being simply a method of focusing the mind. The experiences and realisations resulting from prolonged practice may be spiritual or strictly secular, your own experience will much depend on the frame of your own mind.

Being a mental exercise, meditation has its most obvious benefits on the mind and physiologically, the brain. Various studies confirm, that brain activity significantly changes during meditation. Some researchers found that in experienced meditators the grey matter of the brain observably thickens, effectively resulting in greater brain power.

Think of meditation as training for the mind. If you train your muscles, the muscles thicken and become stronger. The same happens to your brain, meditating is just like training your mental capabilities. Cognitive function enormously benefits from meditation practice, along with an increased ability to

focus in general, a lengthened attention which immediately and directly addresses a rising problem in modern society, where a shortening attention span poses an ever increasing concern.

Another, much sought after outcome of meditation is what is known as the relaxation response. As mentioned earlier, relaxation, although not interchangeable with meditation, will most likely occur as a result of the practice. Studies confirm, that meditation induces deep relaxation, alleviates stress and promotes more positive thinking and view of the world in general. Experienced meditators are also thought to need shorter periods of sleep as well.

The reasons behind such relaxation response are manifold, coming from the physiological responses of the body as well as some psychological and even spiritual effects meditation has on the practitioner.

On a basic physiological level, the lowering oxygen consumption and decreasing respiratory rate result in a lowering heart-rate, which immediately leads to a calmer body. Through this, the muscular system can more effectively relax, releasing much of the stored tension and stress from the body. The nervous system will also benefit from such bodily relaxation, releasing the over-used nervous pathways for the duration of the practice, while other, less often used nervous connections will be activated instead.

On a psychological level, this will of course, result in lowered levels of chronic stress and all the ill effects of this modern day epidemic, with active and regular practice. Learning to control your thoughts will lead to increased productivity, more coherent thinking, and a finer control over your bad habits in life. Training your brain powers also helps developing a better memory retention and recall, and you may find it easier to also control or solve any phobias or fears you may experience. The increasing level of serotonin in the blood also promotes a fuller, happier living.

On a spiritual level the individual's experiences will always differ, according to their views and beliefs, but there are some common traits, meditation could

offer to all, regardless of their background. Spiritual growth is an imminent result of regular practice, and the higher spirits and increased happiness benefit your everyday mind. Meditation helps develop tolerance and acceptance, forgiveness while sharpening the sense of intuition. Suppressing the ego during practice generally helps to connect to the spiritual self, or to even greater spiritual entities, if that be the goal, with an increased sensation of connectedness, and oneness.

There are undeniable health benefits of these effects. Lower stress levels promote a healthier immune system, lessening the chance of contracting both viral diseases and cancer. All the above effects benefit you in your everyday life, in your relationships, work, study and all your activities. The effects of living a healthier, happier life extend far beyond the individual, affecting the lives of others, your family, friends and acquaintances; transforming your communities and have the power of forming the ways of society. The greatest impact you can make *right now* is simply being happy. That is one way, *you* may change the world around you.

Practising for 15–20 minutes a day should be sufficient to achieve all of the above, although the more the better. Do you have 15 minutes for yourself, for your health and well-being? If your answer is no, consider: Practising meditation will not only benefit you, but everyone around you, your family, children, partner, friends, colleagues, even your neighbours. You will be generally happier, less stressed and more content. It is easy to see, what your environment might gain from such changes in your own lifestyle, as you will have more time to focus on what is important in your life, worrying and stressing yourself less. 

HOW WILL YOU KNOW YOU ARE DOING IT RIGHT?

Whatever method you may be using for your daily meditation practice, you cannot go wrong. The only important consideration is that you are *doing it*. Thinking about it, or worrying about not being able to do it, knowing about it in theory, learning and reading about it might be a start, but once you are *doing it*, you will know, you are on the right track.

Meditation at its most basic level is very simple and easy, yet at higher levels it can be very challenging. That said there is *no wrong way* to do meditation. If you are *doing it*, you are *doing it right*. The only way to do it wrong is not to do it at all.

Your practise will become a very personal experience, even with the partner meditation exercise described in a later chapter, or if you are participating in group meditation at an event or school. Your progress will be particular to you and your efforts. How deep you understand the method you use and how well you are able to use it, will depend entirely on your practice and frame of mind. This is all of only secondary importance though, the real important thing is to *do it*.

You will most probably catch yourself trying to find excuses, such as not having time, being too busy, too tired, too excited, too occupied, *etc*. There are thousands of excuses and only one right way to do meditation, that is to do it at all. As long as you find the time and willpower to practice regularly, nothing can go wrong. If you are unsure about your practice, you feel like you are not getting it right, or keep forgetting some important pointers of what you have read or learned from this book or elsewhere, do not worry. If you cannot follow the advice given to the letter, do not worry. If you practice regularly, everything will fall into its place eventually. Do not try to rush it, do not try to do it right. Just do it and try not to worry about it. Just do it as best you can.

With practice comes mastery. As long as you practice, you will have the full benefits of your practice, regardless of your level or expertise. You will gain the same much from your meditation on the first day of your practice than you will after ten years, only your *perception* and *understanding* of your experience will have changed. Worrying about form or technique will distract your focus and prevent you from practising. Just focus on what you are doing, and stop wondering if what you do is good. If you can let go of these worries, you *are* doing it right.

Do not worry about anything, just find some place and time, or if you cannot find it, *create it*, and set about practising. You will only need to focus on *what* you are doing, never *how* you are doing it. Keep your mind on the method, try to follow the advice in this book and you will have mastered you chosen method or technique before you even realise it has happened. ☸

HOW OFTEN SHOULD YOU PRACTISE?

The short answer is: Ideally, you should practise every day, for twenty minutes or more. If you do not have such time, even a few minutes of QiGong exercise in the morning would be enough to start with.

Unfortunately, this is not an ideal world and not everyone has the same amount of time, energy and determination. Being honest with yourself, in today's accelerated world, unless one is a monk living in a far-away monastery on some abandoned mountain, it is highly unlikely that everyone would meet these 'minimum requirements'. Real life often interferes with your carefully drafted plans, while other days you may just not feel up to the task. And that is perfectly fine, especially when you are just starting out.

This, of course, may seem to be the polar opposite of what has been written previously, but following the thought of 'practising at all is of the greatest importance', you must have other considerations as well. The bottom line is, as long as the practice is *regular*, it does not make a *huge* difference, how much practice you can commit. Of course it does make a difference, but it definitely is not the most important factor.

Do not penalise yourself for not being able to practise as much as you would like or you have made up your mind to, and especially not if such demand is placed on you from an external source. If you feel guilty about missing practise, it will eventually turn your meditation into a burden.

If you look at your practise as a task, that *has to be* completed, you will not be able to enjoy it. If you do not enjoy your practice, it is less likely that you would stick to it in the long term. It is easy to see, why skipping a few days now and then, rather than pushing yourself to do something, may have a greater positive effect in the long term.

Remember, it is very important, to practise with all your heart. If you do

practise that way, it will become easier with every occasion, and may eventually become a habit. It does, generally speaking, require more effort to break a habit, than to keep it, therefore once you have turned your meditation practice into a real habit, it will be only natural to go with it, possibly even more often than when you have originally started out.

If you can practise two or three times a week, that should be perfectly fine, as long as you do it. Of course anything more than that can, and will be beneficial, as the more you practise the better you will become at it; and the deeper your understanding will be, the greater the benefits you will reap from it. It is generally agreed that 20 minutes meditation is the ideal time for a single session, although this is by no means an unbreakable rule. If you are only just starting out, you can go much shorter than that, even two to five minutes should be sufficient on the first couple of occasions. It is probably best not to have any timer set up, but rather go by intuition and finish the practice whenever it feels right. This of course requires experience and plenty of time at hand, as it can turn any meditation session into a surprisingly long one.

If you do not find a few minutes for yourself twice a week however, you need to ask yourself: Are you looking for excuses? If you are very much pressed for time, it is still possible to apply some sort of meditation, daily, just turn to the ‘QiGong Exercise’ chapter of this book and learn the first sequence of *BaDuanJin*. It can be completed in under two minutes and can prove an excellent starting point, if that is all the time you have. If you are *that busy* however, it would probably benefit your own health to consider some serious lifestyle changes. ☸

FINDING YOUR SILENCE WHEN YOU ARE TRYING TO FIND THE IDEAL SETTING FOR MEDITATION PRACTICE, IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO BE IN A QUIET ENVIRONMENT, WITH AS LITTLE EXTERNAL DISTURBANCE AS POSSIBLE. MANY WOULD OFTEN NOT REALISE, JUST HOW MUCH NOISE THEY USUALLY LIVE WITH, UNTIL THEY TRY TO FIND A PLACE WITHOUT NOISE, AND SUDDENLY ENCOUNTER DEEP SILENCE.

People in the west, especially those living in urban environments have forgotten, or, for the most, never really learned to appreciate quietness. Silence may even frighten some. They do not know, what to do with it, how to handle it, silence feels strange and unusual.

It is often people themselves that are the origin of the noise. With turning on the TV, radio, or music player, ‘just to have something on’, regardless if they are interested in what is being played; when they talk loudly to people around them, whether or not they have something important or meaningful to say, ‘just to say something’; and through numerous other daily activities; they create noise for and around themselves.

Often such noise serves no other purpose than to stifle the constant inner dialogue, the internal noise, omnipresent for many, apparently forming an essential part of daily life, or just a by-product of today’s technologically advanced modern lifestyle. Practising meditation offers an alternative solution to help overcome the internal dialogue, without the necessity of introducing external noise. Meditation does not only help you discover the true meaning of silence, but it can help you learn to really appreciate it, through discovering its deepest values. ☸

HOW TO PREPARE FOR PRACTICE?

Meditation practice, generally speaking, does not require any special equipment, clothing or appliances, it can be practised anytime, anywhere, you will only need time and effort. There are, however, certain things that may aid your practice, although these are not essential. A quiet environment can be very useful, away from any possible distractions, phones, radio, TV, computers and other, both audible and visual noise, as noted previously. If you cannot find a quiet enough place, earplugs may help, but they can easily become a distraction themselves.

Apart from silence, the clothing can be the greatest help. You should wear clothes as loose fitting as possible, or if you are lucky enough to practice in a warmer environment, and have the necessary privacy ensured, probably as little as possible. Clothing, that does not feel tight in the everyday life, could become suddenly uncomfortable after prolonged sitting and mental focus. Your mind will try to find ways to escape, ‘come back to reality’ as the meditation practice always poses a mental challenge. The feeling of clothes being tight could easily become a straw to grab onto. When you choose your clothing, ensure it hangs freely without any tight chords or bands around your waist or limbs. Traditional Chinese silk clothing may be an excellent choice.

When practising sitting meditation, adequate cushioning will become very important. This would ensure you can sit comfortably with crossed legs, your buttocks elevated as little or as much as you need, to be able to sit comfortably, while keeping your back straight. A good posture is important as it will allow you to breathe freely and avoid back pain, that may be an unfortunate side-effect of prolonged sitting with a bad posture. There are purpose-made pillows available for meditation practice, but a regular pillow, a bean-bag, a folded towel or blanket, or any form of cushioning may do, as long as it would let you sit upright.

If you do not like to, or cannot sit cross-legged, choose a chair, on which you

can easily maintain a straight back and upright posture. Do not use the back-rest, of the chair, but rather make sure you sit upright by your conscious effort. If you sit in a position like *seiza* (kneeling, sitting on your heels), or similar, keeping your back upright, would usually occur naturally. Sitting consciously in a good posture will help you remain present during the meditation practice, preventing you from drifting away.

It is important, that you should not eat for at least two hours and should not drink for at least an hour before practice, if possible. It is not strictly required, but having your stomach full will cause digestion to use much energy and redirect blood-flow towards your intestines. This may cause some tiredness, making it easier to lose focus and difficult to keep your attention at one point.

Two hours after the meal, the stomach would be mostly empty, as the digestion continues in the small intestines, requiring somewhat less energy and blood. Not having anything to drink is important, to avoid any pressure in the bladder, and the urge to go to the toilet. Having your stomach as empty as possible will also be a great help when practising certain advanced breathing techniques, which may cause some compression of the internal organs. 

A NOTE ON GUIDED MEDITATION

In the last few decades various guided meditation methods and practices have gained notable popularity. With the use of CD players or audio files (or formerly tapes), there is no need for a guide, guru, or instructor to be present, the listener can easily follow through the pre-recorded meditation, offering comfort and convenience.

Most such audio guides offer a great relaxation experience. The soothing voice of the guide, some calming background music and the often invoked mental imagery are great methods to achieve a nice relaxation response and relieve daily stress.

Guided meditation can be a good way to start meditation for someone, who has never experienced it, or is simply afraid to try on their own, but because it is usually lacking the necessary mental effort to maintain the state of meditation and strong focus, it is often more akin to simple relaxation, than actual meditation, a remarkable difference.

Guided meditation also requires some skill in mental imagery, therefore it would be most beneficial to practise the two in conjunction, for those choosing to go with guided practices. Guided meditation also shares many characteristics with music meditation, as both rely on an audible guide, one using words, another using music. Music meditation could also be practised as a way of guided meditation, as contemplating skilfully composed music can in itself become a journey, similar to what a spoken guide may take you through.

Although it may have its place in the beginner's practise and even the more experienced meditator may occasionally find it useful, practising guided meditation could make one dependent on the guide or the guide's voice and will only allow one to proceed as far as the guide would let them, never being able to explore their own full potentials in meditation practise.

In reality, guided meditation is not so much a meditation, but much more like hypnosis. In hypnosis, similar effects can be produced as in the deepest

meditation, both mentally and physiologically. The most significant difference is that in hypnosis there is always a guide, usually a hypnotherapist, who would conduct and lead the hypnotised person through these stages. Hypnosis works through harnessing the mind's power without internal effort, while relaxing. The actual effort is on the outside, coming from another person (the hypnotherapist), who will do most of the hard work.

The same happens in guided meditation, where you follow the voice of your guide, leading you through the meditation. There is literally no difference between guided meditation and hypnosis, thus the word 'meditation' in the name is slightly misleading. Such name was most possibly adopted due to the bad reputation hypnosis has gained through circus and stage acts, yet the idea of meditation is, quite fortunately, rapidly gaining popularity. For further reading about hypnosis, see the 'Recommended Reading' chapter at the end of this book.

Even though both hypnosis and guided meditation can be great ways or tools, or even means to an end, they have to be differentiated from traditional meditation practices, which require a greater effort from the practitioner's side, and many of its benefits arise from this applied effort itself. Therefore, if one only seeks an easy short-cut to meditation and its benefits, guided meditation is *not* the way to go. There are no short-cuts, as nothing will replace the effort and time invested.

Mediation is really a very personal experience. It is very difficult to describe your own experiences, as another person would go through the same journey in their own unique way, and would probably use different words to describe even the most similar sensations. The best guided meditation practices will therefore be those, which simply give instructions, without attempting to tell you what you are supposed to feel or experience.

If guided meditation is taken for what it is (guided hypnosis, or a great way of relaxation), it can certainly have its place in your daily practice, either as an easy relaxation method, a preparation for serious meditation practice, or any other

benefit, the guide in question may offer. It is difficult to tell whether a guided meditation audio recording is worth the effort of going through it, or even purchasing, especially by only looking at titles or descriptions. The most beneficial ones that could easily be differentiated from the greater bulk are those, in which the guide would direct the listener's attention inwards, similarly as one would do during a traditional meditation practice, on their own.

Some guided meditations may even guide you through the exact methods described in this book, although most probably with a somewhat different approach. Such guided meditations could in fact have the added benefit of teaching a traditional meditation method. It is only important to remember not to depend on the guide's voice, but try and achieve the desired state of meditation by your own effort, once the technique taught is mastered, or learned sufficiently.

The methods and practices described in this book will offer a chance to anyone wishing to gain the deeper benefits of putting in the effort themselves without requiring or depending on a guide, voice or further instructions. Follow the methods described here and you will become your own guide on the journey to come. ■

PART 2

BREATHING

THE IMPORTANCE OF BREATHING RIGHT

Breathing might be the most natural activity most people will engage in day by day. You need not pay attention to your breath, breathing will continue automatically. Although it continues without your attention, you are also able to consciously control your breathing, which makes it quite unique among your bodily functions.

Without going too deep into human anatomy, it is worth noting that breathing happens through the use of a large dome shaped muscle called the diaphragm and many small muscles between your ribs, called the intercostals. As these muscles contract and relax, your ribcage and the internal cavity open and collapse, making your lungs expand and shrink in turn. Muscular contraction and relaxation usually happens in one of two ways: automatically or consciously. Your heart will continue beating without your conscious effort or attention, also when you digest food, many muscles in your digestive system work automatically, without you being aware of this. As you move, you use your skeletal muscles quite consciously, you can control your movements by will.

Breathing however, may be both conscious or automatic. You can consciously inhale, take a deep breath, or ‘just suck a little air in’ and you can consciously exhale, as slow or fast, as deep or shallow as you are physically able to. If you stop paying attention to your breathing, it will continue automatically, without a moment’s delay.

Through controlling your breath, you can also control other life functions. Slowing down your breathing will eventually slow down your heart-rate, while

breathing rapidly will raise it. This means in other terms, that breathing slowly can make you calmer and simply with breathing rapidly, you have the ability to excite yourself. Brain function, digestion and nearly everything else that happens in your body will also be affected by the rate, depth and rhythm of your breath and the varying oxygen uptake it provides. Your life depends on the oxygen you draw from each breath, and you have a control over this oxygen uptake to an extent.

Apart from the biological and physiological importance of your ability to control your breathing, your daily meditation practice would also benefit from it in many different ways. Breathing is an excellent starting point for mindfulness. Breathing is always present, easily observable and can soon become the centre of your attention.

Breathing techniques have an important role in meditation practice. Some meditation methods like Zen meditation revolve almost exclusively around breathing or the focus on the breath, while all other meditation methods will benefit enormously from breathing the right way when practising.

The ability to alter your heart-rate and excite or calm yourself just through breathing, has obvious benefits in evoking a desired relaxation response. Even if you may not control your breath during certain meditation practices, observing how it naturally slows down, would help calming your mind.

Unfortunately, most people will live an entire lifetime without ever paying attention to their breathing, partly because people do not learn how to breathe, as they assume breathing is something that just happens. Breathing however, is much more than a necessary, but uninteresting body function, as it can hold the key to your health and deepen your meditation practices.

Breathing techniques have several health benefits, even if practised on their own, through increased and more efficient oxygen uptake and the better use of your abdominal musculature. Most techniques discussed in this book involve the conscious movement of your abdominal wall. This would not only help

activating the often dormant musculature of your abdomen, helping to create and maintain a better, more natural posture, alleviating much of the stress placed on the spine, that is partly the cause of lower-back pain; but some deep abdominal muscles also get to work and become stronger through the regular withdrawal of the abdomen and consciously using other, seldom activated muscles around the abdominal region. 

WHY YOU WOULD OFTEN BREATHE THE WRONG WAY

Although breathing seems natural for maintaining life functions, the way most people breathe day by day, is unfortunately far from how it was intended by nature. Among the many reasons for having to learn, or rather re-learn proper breathing are too much sitting, wearing tight belts and clothes and following unhealthy beauty ideals, striving to maintain a flat belly at all times. These and other unhealthy habits cause the development of ineffective breathing habits and an unnatural use of the body's anatomy.

This 'bad' breathing habit can be described simply as breathing into the chest, rather than to the abdominal region. There is a large dome shaped muscle, called the diaphragm, right under the lungs, that separates the upper part of the body cavity from the lower part. The movement of this muscle plays an important role in expanding and compressing the lungs and most of the breathing should happen through this movement.

There are of course other muscles around the ribs that help lifting the ribcage somewhat, further expanding the chest, but this should only happen in conjunction with diaphragmatic expansion and compression, essentially helping the diaphragm to perform its work better, when there is a need for some extra lung capacity, like during physical activity.

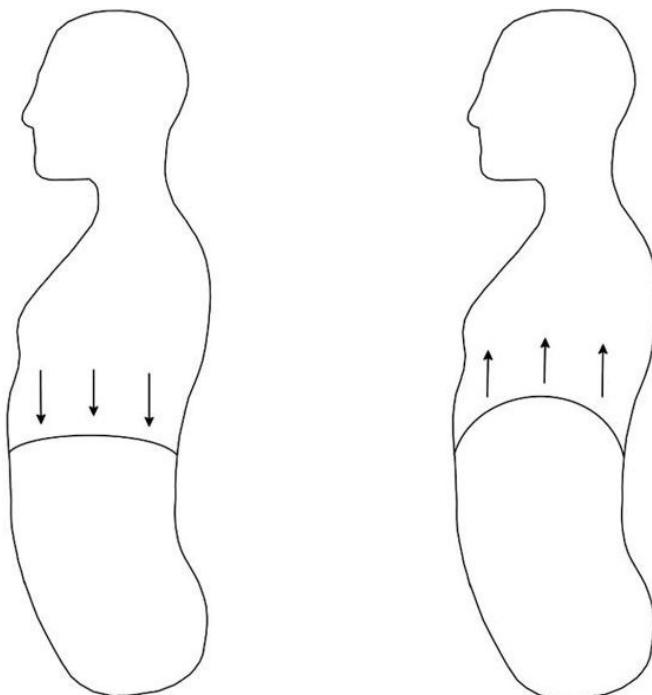
Breathing into the chest essentially means, that these helper muscles are being used more for regular breathing than they should be, and the diaphragm is being used less. This is unnatural and very unhealthy. While the diaphragm remains under-utilised, these helper muscles, called intercostals, become over-used and over-stressed as they have to do most of the work of breathing, instead of only helping the diaphragm perform this duty.

Take a moment to observe your own breathing. Put one hand on your chest, just on the sternum (the breast bone) and another on your belly. Breathe naturally, do not try to control your breathing. Observe your hands. Which

hand is moving? Chances are you see the upper hand (the one over your chest), or both hands moving as you breathe. This means you are using the small muscles between your ribs, that are responsible for lifting up and collapsing your ribcage, much more than you normally would in a resting situation.

When sitting and reading, you need less air and oxygen, than during physical activity. This amount of air can be obtained by the movement of your diaphragm for most. The contraction–relaxation of this muscle is what makes up, or should make up most of your breath, whether you are aware of it or not, making your lungs expand, resulting in air being sucked in (inhale), or compress, resulting in air being forced out (exhale).

When you inhale, the diaphragm contracts, flattening out from its domed shape, pulling on the lungs and expanding them. This would naturally result of all internal organs under the diaphragm (the whole digestive tract, the liver, pancreas, etc.) shifting somewhat downwards with each inhale. To make room for these organs, your abdominal wall will relax and let the belly expand slightly. Similarly, when you exhale, the abdominal wall returns to its flat position, your internal organs return to their original place, as the diaphragm shifts upwards, compressing the lungs, resulting in the air rushing out.



During inhalation, the diaphragm compresses, flattening downwards. During exhalation, the diaphragm relaxes, returning to its dome shape

The problem starts with tight clothing around the waist, bad posture, or too much sitting causing your belly to be unable to expand outwardly and sideways. To compensate for this, your body can just use the small muscles between the ribs, to lift the ribcage up, so the lungs can expand upwards and outwards.

This is natural, when you want to take a deeper breath, or you are engaged in physical activity, giving the lungs considerable extra capacity to expand, making them capable of taking in much larger quantities of air, giving your body more of the much needed oxygen. When you sit, this excessive lifting of the ribcage means an unnecessary labour for your body. Although it may not seem as much muscular work, just consider how many inhales and exhales you go through in only a single day.

Breathing is a continuous activity and these muscles will never be able to totally relax. Unlike the muscle of the heart, that are designed to go without relaxation for a lifetime, these little muscles, like most other muscles in your body, need rest. When the intercostals are constantly strained, relaxation becomes increasingly difficult, as relaxation requires first and foremost the relaxing of your neuro-muscular system. The tension accumulating in and

around the chest is responsible for much of the residual stress, so common in modern society.

There is another problematic outcome of bad posture, tight clothing and too much sitting, that is not being able to breathe smoothly. As you inhale, the air would enter through the nose, and into the nasal cavity, from where it will continue towards the pharynx (the upper part of the throat), which is a common passage for food and air, connecting the nasal and oral cavities. The air then passes down the airways towards the lungs. One of the pharynx's functions is separating the ways of food and air when eating, with the contraction and relaxation of the soft palate which is less important for this discussion, although the role of the soft palate will later be of some importance.

What is more important for now, is the function of the pharynx in the process of inhalation. The muscles in the wall of the pharynx or throat, (more particularly the naso-pharynx, or the upper, or nasal part of the throat), aid the suction of air through the nose by expanding the cavity, thus sucking some air in through the nose. This air is then sucked further down by the contraction of the diaphragm and other muscles, and the expansion of the lungs, as seen above. Evenly out the pressure difference between the upper and lower airways by filling up the pharynx, means less work for the muscles around the lungs, as they could expand easier without much resistance.

Usually happening at the beginning of each inhale, such suction through the pharynx is important, as this is responsible for the sensation of 'sucking the air in through your nose' (along with a somewhat loose soft-palate). It is anatomically important when the nose is blocked or otherwise obstructed, to aid breathing without overly straining the muscles around the lungs. Unfortunately most will continue to breathe like this, whether it is necessary or not.

When you sit, your chest and abdominal region collapse and the lungs are being constantly compressed, thus the muscles usually responsible for breathing, cannot fully maintain their function, as the lungs cannot properly expand in such position. Even though the muscles of the ribcage help with each breath, lifting your ribcage up, this is a lot less effective than properly using your diaphragm.

To aid inhalation, the muscles of the throat will help to initiate the suction, much the same as they do when the nasal pathways are obstructed, evening out the pressure between the pharynx and the lower bronchi. Furthermore, as the average person spends so much time sitting and the muscles responsible for proper breathing cannot function to their full potential, such muscles become weak, often so much so that they are unable to initiate inhalation without fatigue.

The soft palate could also play a role in having a better ‘feel’ for this suction taking place. While inhaling, the soft palate would not open the nasal pathway fully, creating a greater sensation of air rushing down the pharynx, as it would have to pass through a narrower passage, also providing an audible feedback besides that created in and around the nostrils, when taking a quick, deep breath

‘Sucking air through the nose’ (or rather the upper throat) thus becomes perpetual, a bad habit for life. The more you breathe an improper way, the weaker your breathing becomes. The weaker the breath will be, the more you will breathe the ‘wrong way’. ■

BREATHING TECHNIQUES ONCE YOU HAVE REALIZED YOU HAVE BEEN PROBABLY BREATHING THE ‘WRONG WAY’ MOST OF YOUR LIFE, USING YOUR LUNGS AT A LOWER CAPACITY THAN IT HAS BEEN INTENDED BY NATURE, IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND IT WILL BE NEVER TOO LATE TO RECLAIM YOUR BREATH, AND THROUGH IT, YOUR HEALTH. THE FOLLOWING BREATHING METHODS ARE MEANT TO DEMONSTRATE, HOW YOU CAN LEARN TO BREATHE RIGHT ONCE AGAIN.

Some of the breathing techniques described here, will be applicable later in this book, to be used with different meditation practices. With each meditation method, the most suitable breathing technique will be advised, but these are, more often than not, interchangeable.

While some of these techniques may become automatic with practice and have the potential to change your everyday habits, some more difficult methods are meant to be deliberately practiced along your daily meditation, to aid your focus and keep you in good health, both in body and spirit. ☸

BREATHING SMOOTHLY

The first step towards re-learning the natural and more healthy way of breathing is to consciously learn to breath smoothly. This would mean trying to exclude your throat from the process and learn to breath solely through the expansion of the lungs.

To have a smoother breath is relatively easy, maintaining such breathing however, might need some practice. Even though it would be near impossible to keep breathing like that under all circumstances, it is quite easy to check yourself if you are doing it correctly, eventually turning it into a habit. Any time, when breathing is important, you can just switch to this smoother breathing, and maintain it during the practice.

- To start to breath smoothly, try to relax your throat. This may seem odd, but what you should do is focus on the throat and make sure it does not expand.

Start observing your breaths, feel as the air is getting sucked in, through your nose. Follow the air down as it goes, where does it end? Do you breathe into your abdomen? Or into your chest? For now, it is not important. Whether it is the right breathing technique you use, or not, you should be able to breathe smoothly with any way of breathing, under any circumstances.

- If this seems difficult, you can try to open your throat, as if you were to open your mouth wide, without actually opening your lips, pushing your tongue somewhat downwards. Don't worry, you need not keep your mouth and tongue like this to breathe properly, it is only to have a first feel for what is happening.
- While keeping your throat 'open' like this, or simply relaxed, shift your attention towards your lungs, more particularly to the region you have felt the air was going.
- Now try and inhale, but instead of sucking the air in through your nose,

just expand your lungs (be it through the expansion of your chest or the abdomen) and let the air smoothly rush through your body. Focus on filling up your lungs with a deep breath. Do not worry about the airways, your nose or how the air gets there, just feel, how your lungs fill up.

- When you exhale, the same should happen. Keep your throat open and compress your lungs (be it chest or abdomen, you are really compressing) and feel the air rushing out.
- Once you have a feel for it, you need not keep your throat so wide open. It is just enough to relax your soft palate, that would usually block your nose from inside, so that no food could enter when eating.
- Continue breathing using only the muscles around your lungs. Keep breathing this way, until you feel your breaths quiet and calm down. Once you find yourself doing it without effort, you can be sure, you are on the right track.

If you are having difficulties feeling how you ‘suck air in’ through the nose, or if you feel it, but you cannot make out how to breathe smoother, immersing yourself under water could be a great tool to help.

If you own a bath or have access to a public bath house, you can try the following:

- Immerse yourself into nice warm water, in which you can sit comfortably.
- Now put your head under water, leaning backwards, only your face and nose should stick out, so you can still breathe without getting any water in your nose, but make sure, both of your ears are below the water-line. If you are in a quiet enough environment, you can probably hear your own breathing now.
- Listen to the air being sucked in, as it is audibly rushing in through your nose. Your goal is now, following the above described method, to quiet down this airflow, until you can hear nothing of it anymore.

Such audible feedback can come handy even if you had no difficulty picturing

and following the technique of breathing smoothly, but you would like to check yourself, whether you are doing it right. You will probably be surprised how much audible your breath still is, even though you may do your utmost to keep it quiet. If you have no access to a bath or other way to sit in water, earplugs may be used as a somewhat less effective substitute.

When you first try to breathe this way, it is possible that you will feel dizzy or get tired soon. One of the most possible reasons for this is breathing much deeper than usual. As you are focusing so much on the inhale phase, it may become longer than you are used to. Another possibility is that you are using the muscles around your lungs much more intensely than you are used to and the pharynx now does nothing, or very little to help you initiate the breath. Do not worry, you will get used to it and you will feel less and less tiredness or dizziness while breathing this way, you only need to practise

Do not be put off by an apparent lack of success, you are on the right path, as long as you are trying. With time, patience and practise, results will come. Once you are comfortable with how to breathe smoothly, you can incorporate it into the breathing technique of your choice. You should certainly try it in conjunction with abdominal breathing, as it would make learning abdominal breathing much easier, while abdominal breathing would also make maintaining a smooth breathing much simpler. Before you attempt to learn a more advanced breathing technique however, you should definitely be comfortable with the technique of breathing smoothly. ☸

SIMPLE ABDOMINAL BREATHING

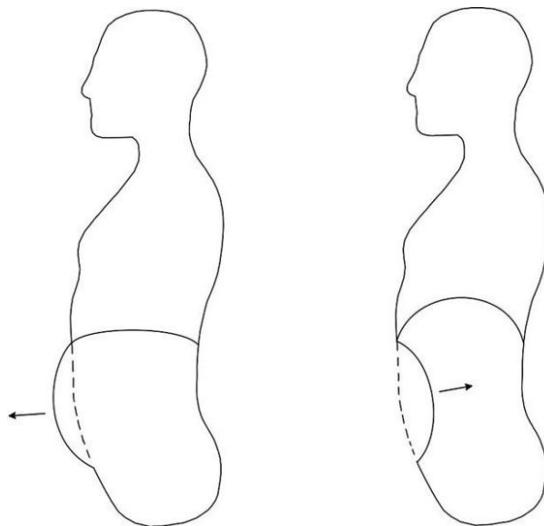
The first ‘real’ breathing technique discussed is probably the most important, as this is one you can learn, or rather re-learn to unconsciously follow, making it your everyday breathing habit. Although described and taught as a basic technique, abdominal breathing is the way you should breathe naturally, this is the way you are meant to breathe by nature.

Re-learning proper abdominal breathing does in fact reduce stress levels without any further effort, while meditation obviously adds much greater benefits to simply breathing good. Learning to breath naturally is key to learn meditation. Learning abdominal breathing can be somewhat challenging at the beginning, but in reality it is much easier than many would believe, as re-learning something is a lot easier than learning a new skill.

- To correct your breathing, get back to the same position, you have used for checking yourself previously, with one hand over your chest, another over your belly. Sit or stand with a straight spine, but comfortably.
- Now, start breathing consciously. Watch your hands rise and fall. Try to inhale into your belly, pushing out your belly to an extreme with every inhale, and pulling it in, as much as you can, with every exhale. Do this consciously, only minding the movement of your abdominal wall.
- Practise for a few breaths. When you are fairly comfortable with it, and it does feel more natural than it did at first, you can start doing it with less effort: do not push your belly out that far and do not draw it all the way in with each breath.
- Now start watching the hand on your chest. This hand should barely move, or not move at all. This will probably be much more challenging than the first part, you would most likely need some effort to compress your chest as you inhale, preventing it from moving upwards and outwards. It might even help to apply some gentle pressure with your

hand, to prevent this movement, yet the effort should really originate from inside, but never force anything.

Do not worry, it will become effortless in no time. This non-movement of your chest is only essential for the learning phase. Once you learn to use abdominal breathing naturally, some movement of your chest will still be present, but a lot less articulated or observable than when you are mainly using your chest to breathe.



As you inhale, the abdominal wall relaxes and protrudes. As you exhale, the abdominal wall compresses and withdraws

Your breathing should be relaxed for most of your practice. The movement of your abdomen would still be noticeable, but not very much articulated, while your chest would move very little, or not at all. This is one way you can breathe in most sitting meditation practices.

Practise until you feel you need. Practise every day, at least once a day, always in a rested position. Remember, the exaggerated belly movement was only for the beginning for you to feel how your abdomen should move, you must not produce the same belly movement for your entire practice.

You can use a couple of deeper breaths, with greater navel movement every time you practice, to start off with a better feel of it, then just return to breathing normally. Alternatively, you can turn it into an individual breathing exercise, with greater abdominal involvement, as a way of training your abdominal wall.

Another point to consider is, at least when you are consciously practising abdominal breathing, that you should not attempt to suck in the air through your nose. Just move your belly in and out, open your nose and your throat and let the air stream in effortlessly, without doing anything else in order to inhale. This could eventually lead to a truly relaxed breathing process, with only a minimal movement of the diaphragm, where even the movement of the belly is hardly noticeable.

- After several days of practice, when you are confident and the correct breathing does not require a great effort anymore, you can incorporate this practice into your everyday activities. During the day, whenever you remember it, start watching your breathing and if you catch yourself breathing into your chest, switch immediately to abdominal breathing. Do not penalise yourself or feel bad about still breathing into your chest. This is normal, you have probably been breathing like that for so many years, your body needs time to re-adjust and come back to its natural ways.

It will take some time, but you will notice how you need to adjust your breathing less and less, and eventually you will find that you always breathe the right way, without any particular effort. How long it takes, will vary from person to person. Do not try to rush it, let it happen at its own pace. Chances are, the process will take a lot shorter time than you would expect, as your body has an amazing ability of adaptation. If it takes longer than you thought, there is nothing you are doing wrong, you only need more patience. With time and practice the change will eventually occur.

You do not have to have learned to breathe automatically this way, to start practising meditation. As soon as maintaining simple abdominal breathing requires little effort, you can start practising meditation, just make sure you keep your breathing the right way. Many meditation techniques would involve focusing on your breath anyway, having to watch yourself breathing the correct way should not only not disturb, but possibly even aid and deepen your practice.



ADVANCED ABDOMINAL BREATHING

While the above described method is generally regarded as ‘The’ abdominal breathing, there are some, slightly more advanced abdominal breathing methods, that could be practised as standalone techniques or alongside meditation. There is a difference between the simple abdominal breathing you would observe in your everyday life and such advanced techniques.

Whenever a meditation practice calls for abdominal breathing, you should consider using this advanced technique if you can, although the simpler method will suffice just as well in most cases. Although it helps, or may even be required to be aware of your breath, you would try to avoid controlling your breathing during most meditation practices. Before you would be able to achieve this, you should spend considerable time practising and learning any advanced breathing method, until you are able to use it effortlessly, without attempting to incorporate it into your meditation practice. Until such time, you will be safe to proceed with simpler breathing techniques for your meditation practices, just make sure, you set aside sufficient time for learning to breath more efficiently.

The advanced abdominal breathing is much like an extension of the simple method described above, not meant to be used for the subconscious everyday breathing, but very useful for mindful practising. To learn this technique, you should be already familiar with the simple abdominal breathing to such an extent that you should breathe that way without conscious effort at all times, breathing the right way having become natural.

This advanced technique will not differ very much form the simple abdominal breathing. One minor difference will be, that apart from breathing into your belly, you will maintain the conscious effort of the movement of your abdominal wall, just like when you were first learning it. With every inhale, you should consciously expand your belly and with the exhales you should withdraw it,

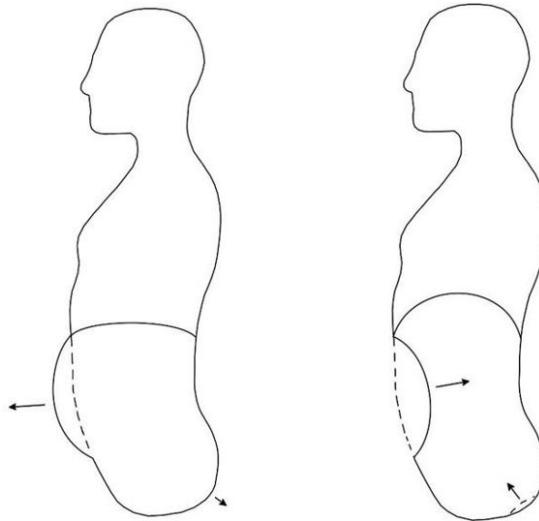
although not to an extreme.

You can observe how your sides are also moving along with the abdominal wall. As your belly expands, your whole abdominal region would also expand sideways, and as you withdraw your belly your sides should tighten up like a belt around your waist. This is a natural movement of some lesser known abdominal muscles, often called the ‘obliques’

The real difference comes from a little discussed way of withdrawing and releasing your buttocks during breathing, meaning mostly the squeezing and relaxing the muscles around the anus and the gluteal cleft. Some may prefer to omit this detail, as it is not considered ‘proper’ to talk about such topics. You should let go of any associations this might invoke,. You will use some muscles to aid your breathing practice and nothing more.

With the exhale, as you withdraw your abdominal wall, you should withdraw (somewhat squeeze) your buttocks. Neither your belly nor the bottom should be squeezed strongly and it should not require an effort to do so, these are all gentle movements. This will greatly enhance the feeling of how your sides also tighten up.

When you inhale, as you are expanding your belly, you should relax your gluteal cleft and the muscles around it, again, do not totally attempt to push outwards either your belly or your bottom, just relax it as much as it feels natural, making sure you are doing it consciously.



Inhale: While consciously moving your abdominal wall outwards, also relax the buttocks. Exhale: While withdrawing your abdominal wall, do squeeze your buttocks, making it feel like it was being withdrawn

This will provide a gentle massage for your internal organs, as with each exhale you are compressing them from two directions and each inhale they will be relaxed once again. Also, this helps maintaining the mindfulness and focus on your breath. When breathing like this, your focus will gradually shift from the abdominal wall to the inside of your abdominal cavity, deepening your meditation practice.

To learn advanced abdominal breathing, you should set some time aside to practise it daily, always as long as it feels comfortable. You will notice, that unlike with simple abdominal breathing, a greater amount of air will have been exchanged during this time. This is due to the more pronounced movement of your abdomen, resulting in deeper, more conscious breaths, which can feel quite refreshing, both physically and mentally.

As you practise, you will feel that you need less effort to maintain such breathing technique with time. While at first it might feel unnatural and forceful, it should eventually become easy and effortless. When this effortlessness occurs, you will know that you have mastered this technique and you are ready to incorporate it into your meditation practice. ☸

EMBRYONIC BREATHING

The embryonic breathing is an ancient Chinese breathing method, closely related to QiGong (or Chi Kung) practise and Daoism (Taoism). Its English name comes from the fact that a new-born baby will naturally breathe this way, before she would start using the normal abdominal breathing, adults would naturally use in everyday life.

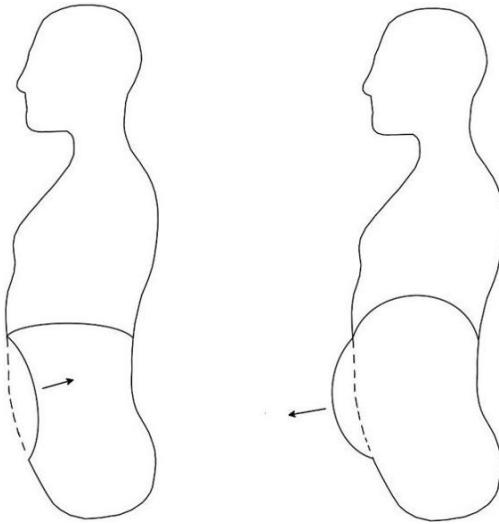
Embryonic breathing is also often referred to as inverse, or inverted breathing, because the movement of the belly is right the opposite of what you experience during abdominal breathing. In embryonic breathing when you inhale, the belly moves inwards, and as you exhale the belly moves outwards. This helps to gather and accumulate internal energy in the abdominal region, referred to as Qi or Chi in Chinese.

People often use embryonic breathing, most of the times subconsciously, usually right before attempting to undertake some heavy physical effort, as a way of preparation, such as heavy lifting or otherwise moving a heavy object. Weight-lifters use a method called ‘power breathing’, that is very similar in principle to embryonic breathing.

The accumulation of such energy is caused by the pressure and stimulation on and around the diaphragmatic region, originating from the opposite movement of the abdominal wall. You can read more about the concept of Qi under the chapter ‘QiGong Meditation’, yet an in-depth explanation of the physiological and energetic processes leading to the accumulation of power and energy would require a separate volume by itself.

LEARNING EMBRYONIC BREATHING

- Start with practising conscious abdominal breathing. It is useful to be familiar with the advanced abdominal breathing method as embryonic breathing will share some of its characteristics, while offering an even greater complexity.
- Once your mind has quieted somewhat, start inverting your breaths. This will most possibly feel strange and even uncomfortable at first, but you will quickly get used to it. Concentrate on your belly, about one or two inches below your belly button.
- As you inhale, squeeze and withdraw your belly as you would normally do with an exhale. When you exhale, relax your abdominal wall, and push your belly out. Keep practising this way, continuing to concentrate on your belly. Observe your breathing and the abdominal wall, as it moves.

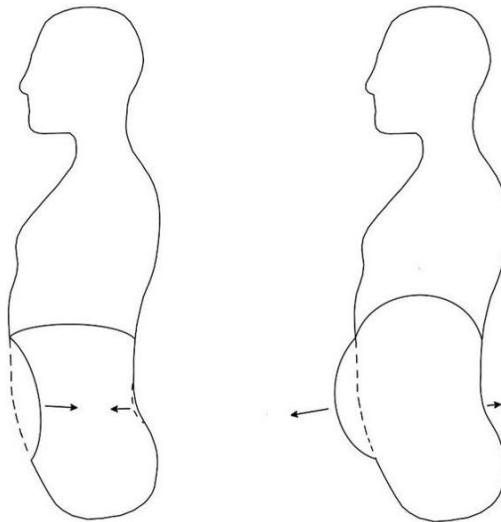


*As you **inhale**, the belly compresses and withdraws (left image). As you **exhale**, the belly relaxes and protrudes (right image)*

- You can incorporate counting your breaths, similarly to what you would do in Zen meditation practice, once the inverted breathing becomes natural. Although this is not required, it can aid your concentration if you feel it is necessary.

Some would regard this simple technique as ‘The’ embryonic breathing, yet there is some more to it to be learned. Of course, you can comfortably practice at this level as long as you feel necessary. Always follow your intuition, when making decisions about your practice. If something doesn’t feel right, do not ever force it. To proceed further you will need some experience as a meditator, with a strong and undivided focus.

- Once you feel ready to proceed further, it is time to turn your attention to your lower back. While continuing to focus on your belly, start paying attention to your lower back *at the same time*.
- As you breathe, your belly would come inwards with each inhale, while pushing out on the exhale. You should be able to observe a similar movement on your lower back. Although it would probably not be noticeable for the eye, you would definitely be able to feel it. The point, that feels like the centre of such barely noticeable movement should be in the centre of your attention.



Inhale: The belly squeezes and withdraws, so does the lower back *Exhale: The belly relaxes and protrudes, relaxing the lower back as well*

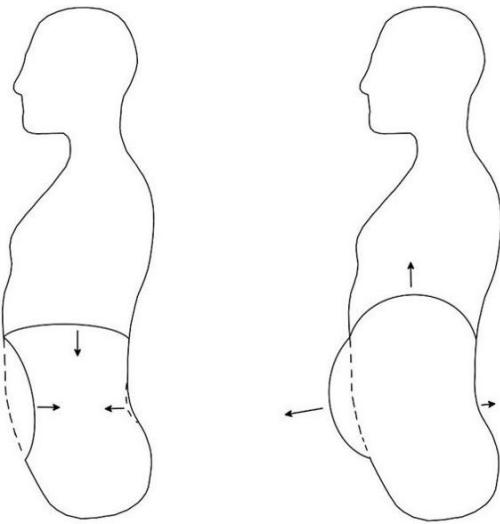
Although probably not easily noticeable at first, this inward-outward movement of the lower spine will become much more perceptible with practice. As your belly withdraws while you inhale, so should your lower back. Similarly,

they would both relax and move outwards with the exhale.

- Keep focusing on both your belly and your lower back simultaneously. Instead of trying to split your attention two ways, try to connect the two and focus on them at the same time. It will not be easy and you definitely should not rush it. Some time and devoted practice will be necessary, but you will get there if you are willing to put in the effort. Take as much time as you need. It may be days, it may be weeks, or longer.

The sensation is most akin to that of your lower back moving in and out, yet in reality this is just the contraction and relaxation of the muscles around the spine. Even though it may prove useful to consciously contract and relax these muscles, for many people it could prove difficult to isolate the proper muscles and use only those necessary, thus is it advisable to only concentrate on the movement, or rather the sensation of it, as it happens, rather than trying to consciously initiate it.

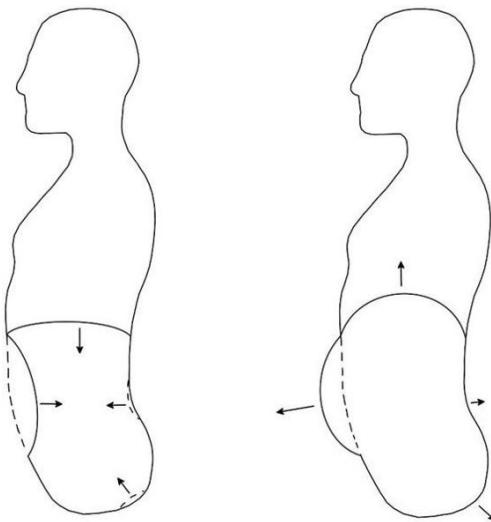
- When you are able to focus on the front and the back at the same time, the next step would be to connect the diaphragm into your practice. Continue with the practice as usual, but direct your focus onto the top of your abdominal cavity as well as the front and back.
- Feel your diaphragm pushing down on this cavity, as it contracts, while your belly and lower back are drawing inwards with each inhale. Through the exhale, everything relaxes outwards. Your belly protrudes and your lower back relaxes, as your diaphragm returns to its dome shape.



Inhale: Squeezing and withdrawing the belly and the lower back, while also focusing on the contraction of the diaphragm Exhale: Relaxing the belly and the lower back, while also focusing on relaxing diaphragm

Mental imagery might help to deepen your focus, while going with how it feels would certainly be enough for most of the time. See, or feel your diaphragm pushing down into your abdominal cavity with each inhale, further compressing your organs as both your belly and your lower back draw inwards, then see or feel how it relaxes at each exhale, relaxing this compression, as your belly and your lower back also return to a relaxed position. Practice meticulously, until it becomes easy, almost natural. Take your time, practise as many days or weeks as you need.

- The last step of the basics of this method will be to include the buttocks (mainly the anus and the gluteal cleft). This will not at all differ from the previous experiences, or that of the advanced abdominal breathing. With an inhale it will draw upwards, while at the same time your diaphragm comes downwards and your belly and lower back inwards, then, with the exhale, everything relaxes and returns to the previous position.



Inhale: While squeezing the belly and the lower back, concentrating on the diaphragm, also squeeze and withdrawing the buttocks. The focus shifts into the abdominal cavity, finding the 'lower DanTien'

Exhale: Relaxing the belly and the lower back, while watching the diaphragm relax and also relaxing the buttocks. The 'lower DanTien' expands, flushing the abdominal region with energy

You should now be able to focus on these four points, or four corners *simultaneously*, eventually realising that you are, in reality, focusing on the whole of the abdominal cavity and what happens to it through practising this breathing technique.

It takes considerable effort to be able to maintain such focus, but it will naturally become easier with time. The very centre of this focus is what is called the lower 'DanTien', the 'garden of energy' in Chinese tradition. This will be important in QiGong meditation practise, throughout which you will use this newly learned breathing technique extensively.

Breathing with such technique could be practised as a standalone breathing exercise, several times a day, for a few minutes at a time, even when not doing any meditation practice, as it has some additional health benefits, when compared to simple and advanced abdominal breathing methods, mostly those of greater activation of the abdominal wall and additional muscles. Mastering embryonic breathing may also make it easier to learn full abdominal breathing.

The most recommended books on the subject of Qi, QiGong and

embryonic breathing include the works of Dr Yang Jwing-Ming, who has been scientifically researching the Qi phenomena (see the ‘Recommended Reading’ chapter for details). In his books he explains the science behind both embryonic breathing and QiGong meditation in greater depth and detail, offering spiritual, scientific and medical explanations of the bodily processes resulting from the practice. The short introductions offered in this book should be sufficient enough for anyone to try the methods described here and decide if they wish to pursue such practices further. ☸

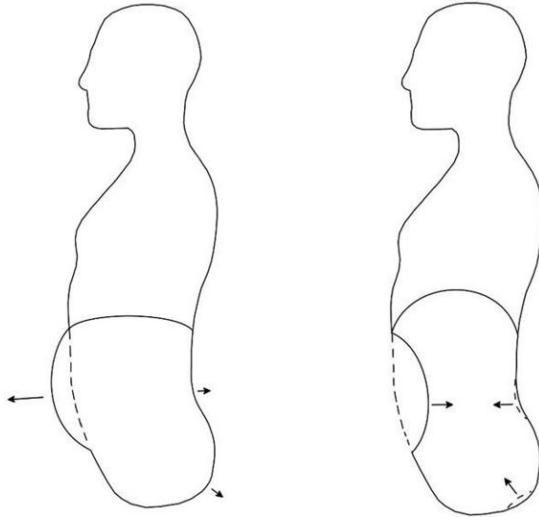
FULL ABDOMINAL BREATHING

The full abdominal breathing further extends the practice of advanced abdominal breathing through introducing the lower back and the diaphragm itself, similar to what has been discussed under ‘Embryonic Breathing’, although in a different order. The reason it is introduced after the embryonic breathing method is that embryonic breathing is probably somewhat easier to be learned, at first.

You should be fairly familiar with the advanced abdominal breathing method and be able to maintain breathing that way for an extended period of time without considerable effort. Having already learned embryonic breathing would be an even greater advantage, although not absolutely necessary.

- Once you are ready to proceed to the next level, you will extend your focus from the belly and the buttocks to the lower back. You should be aware of some perceived movement of the lower back, although probably not visible for the external observer, but should be fairly obvious for yourself, as you start paying attention. When you inhale as your belly extends forward and your bottom relaxes, your lower back will also relax, as if your spine would move away from your centre.
- With each exhale as your belly will be drawn inwards and your buttocks drawn upwards, you will also attempt to draw your lower back inwards, as if your spine would be moving towards your centre. While there may be no actual movement of the spine, it would certainly feel like the back is moving together with the belly, outwards as you inhale and inwards as you exhale. This will feel like an extension of the movement of your sides, complementing of the feeling of tightening belt around the waist. You should focus your attention to all three points at the same time, belly

buttock and lumbar spine.



Inhale: The third corner of focus, the lower back relaxes, while the belly protrudes, and the buttocks also relax Exhale: The buttocks squeeze and withdraw along with the belly, while lower back follows

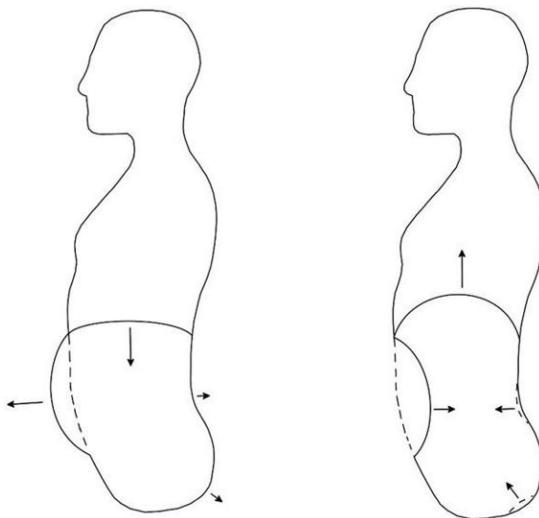
With time you should be able to only observe such apparent movement, without attempting to consciously initiate it. As a result of your effort to withdraw the abdominal wall, the muscles around your lower back will naturally contract. This is the sensation that you are looking for.

Such perceived movement comes from the natural contraction and relaxation of the muscles around your lower spine as a result of drawing in and relaxing your abdominal muscles. This will probably prove challenging, and you will need to practice until it becomes fairly easy and straightforward. This will not happen at the first time you sit down to practise. It can take anywhere between a few days and a few weeks of committed practice. Being persistent is very important.

Do not try to isolate the muscles of your back and contract them consciously, it is more important to feel it happen than to make it happen. Keep practising this way, until you feel able to comfortably maintain such breathing for some time without a great effort. Eventually you may realise, it is in fact the whole muscular belt around your waist contracting and relaxing simultaneously, but for

now, it is most important to keep your attention at these distinct points.

- The last corner of focus will be your diaphragm. You will keep your attention focused on the three corners: belly, buttocks and lower back, as you start focusing on your diaphragmatic movement. This will be a lot more challenging than the previous three points of focus, as your diaphragm does not relax with each inhalation, but it in fact contracts.



Inhale: Full abdominal breathing is complete with the focus on the diaphragm's own movement. Concentrate on all "four corners" at once. Exhale: As the abdominal region squeezes from three sides, also focus on the diaphragm relaxing upwards

This fourth corner, the diaphragm, will *not* follow the pattern of the other three, as they move away from the centre at the inhale phase, but the diaphragm will rather be moving towards it. As you exhale, the first three corners will move towards your centre, and the diaphragm will move away from it.

This means, when you inhale, your belly *relaxes* and *protrudes* outwards, your buttocks *relax* downwards, your lower back *relaxes* outwards as well, while your diaphragm *contracts* and moves downwards.

Similarly, with each exhale, your belly *contracts* and *withdraws* inwards, your buttocks *squeeze* and *contract* inwards, your lower back *squeezes* and *contracts* inwards as well, while your diaphragm *relaxes* and moves upwards, returning to its dome shape. Although the direction is similar (i.e. moving up, or in; and down, or out at the same time), the action of contraction or relaxation will be opposing.

Contrary to what you may experience during embryonic breathing, where the four corners are moving in synchrony at once *away* from the centre (exhalation) or *towards* the centre (inhalation), through the full abdominal breathing the diaphragm is pushing down, and the three other corners are making room for the contents of the abdominal cavity as they shift downwards. Similarly, the diaphragm essentially makes room for everything moving up, as the muscles contract and squeeze the intestines and the contents of the abdominal cavity. This way the full abdominal breathing provides a different way of massaging your digestive tract, not through squeeze and release, but rather a downward-upwards shift. This movement of your organs (mostly your digestive tract) is present even while you practise the most basic abdominal breathing, the only real difference being that you now have a greater awareness of it.

Practising full abdominal breathing with your meditation can also enhance your focus, deepen your practice and help keeping your attention at your breath, although only when practised with such proficiency, that it could be maintained without much excess effort. ☸

EMBRYONIC BREATHING OR FULL ABDOMINAL BREATHING?

Although both of these breathing techniques have some common characteristics, they both offer their unique set of benefits and a different form of application. To be able to make an individual choice about the suitability of any of the techniques, it is important to be familiar with both, while understanding the main differences between them.

Although it may seem counter-intuitive at first, to move your abdomen against the natural movement of the intestines caused by the downward push of the diaphragm, as is the case with embryonic breathing, it certainly has merits of its own. One of the numerous physiological effects of embryonic or inverted breathing is the continuous massage and stimulation of the internal organs, most remarkably the digestive system. Full abdominal breathing does have a somewhat similar effect, yet the two work in different ways. In abdominal breathing the diaphragm appears to give room for the internal organs as the abdominal cavity is being compressed and similarly when the diaphragm pushes downwards, the abdominal area will expand, allowing the organs to shift downwards. Quite differently, in embryonic breathing the compression happens simultaneously from all sides during the inhalation phase. Instead of being shifted up and down, the internal organs are now being compressed and expanded. One effect of such compression can be the liver being simulated to release some of its stored blood and glycogen, as well as the massage will cause some stored fat around the organs to be ‘burned off’ and turned into glycogen.

Both blood and glycogen are essential elements of what is known as Qi in Chinese medicine. (You can read more on the concept of Qi in the ‘QiGong Meditation’ chapter.) Through this and some more intricate physiological and probably non-physiological processes, triggered by the stimulus of rhythmic compression and release, the feeling of energy rushing into the abdominal region is nearly imminent as soon as you start practising the breathing technique, if done the right way.

Embryonic breathing may as well appear to be a more natural way of using the musculature of the abdomen. In embryonic breathing, all abdominal muscles, including the diaphragm, will contract at once during the inhale, and relax at the same time while exhaling, which may also help to better relax the mind. When practising abdominal breathing, the contractions of the diaphragm happen as the other muscles relax in the inhale phase, while during the exhale, the diaphragm relaxes and all other muscles involved will contract. The reason you might feel this more natural, is basically being more used to it, besides the lack of compression of the internal organs that probably makes it feel more comfortable.

Both full abdominal breathing and embryonic breathing have similar benefits to offer and most of the debate about which one may prove more effective, often seems to be based on religious or spiritual tradition.

You are strongly encouraged to learn and master both, and use either one that feels more intuitively right or natural in any given situation. Some meditation techniques will also call for specific breathing methods, in such cases you should learn the appropriate breathing technique for the meditation of your choice. If you are to practise both Zen and QiGong meditation, you are most likely to end up using both breathing techniques regularly and therefore reap the individual benefits of both. You should not allow yourself to be restricted by the beliefs of another person, or group. Practice, experience and draw your own conclusions based on your own intuition and you may find your own way, best suited to your own practice. ☸

DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING

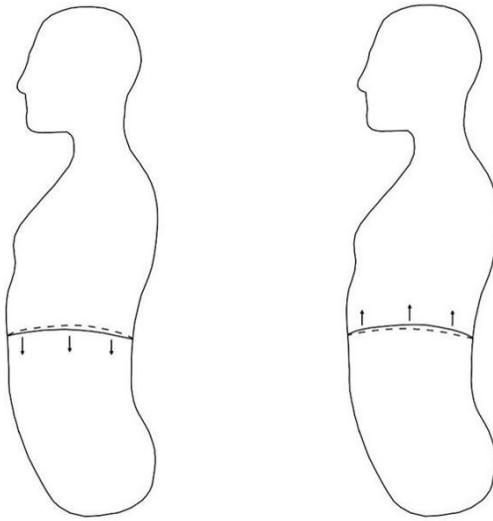
Although often used interchangeably with the term ‘abdominal breathing’, this breathing technique is somewhat different from all three abdominal breathing practices introduced earlier. While the basic principle is similar, using the diaphragm more than anything else to initiate each breath, pure diaphragmatic breathing is more than just abdominal breathing, or in a way, less than that.

Diaphragmatic breathing may occur naturally as a result of deep relaxation or might be practised consciously. The conscious practice is a meditation method itself, and it will be discussed in the ‘Corpse Pose (Shavasana)’ chapter; only an explanation of what diaphragmatic breathing really means will be presented here.

As the body relaxes, the heart-beats slow down, the muscles and internal organs work less and less, the oxygen consumption will significantly decrease, this results in slower breathing with less depth. Interestingly, slowing down the breathing consciously would also result in the above physiological response, resulting in relaxation of the body, the process is bi-directional.

In either case, it is possible to reach such depths of relaxation, where so little oxygen would be consumed as the lungs will barely need to expand to inhale. When practising simple abdominal breathing and such relaxation response occurs, the movements of the diaphragm would become so minimal, that not only will the chest cease rising and falling, but even inward-outward movement of the abdominal wall will be less and less noticeable, until it becomes completely unnoticeable.

To the external observer, the practitioner would literally appear to have stopped breathing. In reality, the movement of the diaphragm is still present inside the body, but it has become so minimal, that there is no visible sign of it anymore. Of course this requires perfect stillness of both the mind and body, as the lowered amount of oxygen exchange would barely be enough to maintain basic life functions.



Inhale: A minimal contraction of the diaphragm, no breathing is apparent, the abdomen remains motionless. Exhale: The diaphragm relaxes, returning to its former shape. Once again, no movement of the abdomen is noticeable

The body has the ability to shut down the digestive system, which usually occurs during demanding physical activity, to be able to redirect most of the blood-flow (and therefore most of the oxygen) to the skeletal muscles, providing them with the extra oxygen and nutrients, so that they can keep going.

What happens during real diaphragmatic breathing is very similar to this, only this time all the non-essential organs will reduce functioning to a maintenance level, where they barely consume any oxygen, so that they can survive on the lowered oxygen levels present in the blood. The muscles are at complete rest, consuming minimal amounts of oxygen as well. The greatest consumer of energy, the brain, also comes to a very deeply rested state, so that the oxygen consumption will be drastically reduced all over the system.

Although this might sound unhealthy at first, just consider how little rest most of your organs usually get, being over-worked and constantly spiked by daily stress, excess food and sugar intake, mental strain, etc. Your organs have the ability to go through this low energy state without damage and the rest you gain through this, is comparable to nothing, but the deepest, most refreshing sleep, most people never even experience.

Diaphragmatic breathing, as the greatest way of relaxation, might occur as

a result of meditation or relaxation practises, or you may consciously practise this breathing technique to invoke a relaxation response. Reaching such state of relaxation during your everyday meditation is a great sign of being on track. ☸

FULL YOGIC BREATHING

Having learned the most essential ways to reclaim the natural ways of breathing through using the diaphragm to its fullest potential, along with some advanced methods to incorporate in different meditation practices, it is worth mentioning, that there are many more , often more advanced breathing techniques, all of which are very beneficial to maintain good general health and especially a healthy respiratory system.

Yoga in particular teaches a host of these methods, that can, and should be incorporated into your daily practices, either before meditation, to refresh your bloodstream with oxygen, aiding your concentration; or right after a longer meditation practice, to refresh your body. One such method, the full yogic breathing, probably the most important of them all, will teach you how to reclaim the full capacity of your lungs, filling them with air from bottom to top. The particular breathing method discussed here is not only mentioned for its applicability to meditation, but also for its great health benefits, when practised regularly.

In Pranayama, the yogic art of breathing, three regions of breath are differentiated: the lower, or abdominal region, as discussed under abdominal breathing; the middle, or chest region, as discussed under ‘bad’ breathing habits; and the top, or shoulder region, not yet mentioned in this book. The lungs have a top section, most people never use throughout their lives, usually for the same reasons they mostly use their chests to breathe: bad posture and too much sitting. The hunched-over position, many would assume during most of the day, renders it physically impossible to utilize the upper parts of the lungs, those being constantly compressed. The tissues of the top parts of the lungs thus underutilized, become dysfunctional.

Athletes and people who regularly engage in demanding physical tasks may be

an exception from this, as their bodies would regularly require a higher oxygen intake, to help fuel their bodies throughout these demanding activities. Most such people use a larger part of their lungs, breathing a full yogic breathing instinctively, whenever the demand for oxygen rises. Yoga in fact did not invent this breathing technique, it only teaches how to re-learn to breathe as humans were intended to, by nature.

For people with more sedentary lifestyles, practising yogic breathing would help to re-learn how to use these forgotten lung surfaces and rebuild any unused lung-tissues. The body's amazing ability to recover allows for recovering dysfunctional body tissues. Therefore, through practicing breathing techniques and most importantly full yogic breathing, not only the unused capacity of the lungs can be reactivated, but with regular practice, dysfunctional lung surfaces may be rebuilt, thus the lungs' physical capacity and usable surface could increase.

Apart from increasing lung capacity, yogic breathing offers the benefits of better oxygen absorption rates and stronger lungs, leading to increased immunity against infections and diseases of the airways, reducing the risk or symptoms of allergies, asthma and other adverse health conditions that may affect the lungs and airways.

In some yogis the increase of lung capacity was shown to be over 1-1.5 litres, just by learning and regularly practicing yogic breathing methods, most significantly full yogic breathing. The most easily noticeable benefits of practicing yogic breathing are the immediate refreshing of the mind, body and spirit; elevated mood, and general feeling of higher state of energy; through the additional oxygen absorbed in the blood.

It is interesting to note that the amount of residual air, which remains in the lungs even after the deepest exhalation, could reduce from the 1.5 litres of the average person, to approximately 0.5 litres in experienced yogis, meaning a much greater and fuller gas exchange taking place with each breath. While such

residual air is anatomically important to help maintaining the shape of the lungs, for the average person its volume is much higher than necessary, due to the ineffective use of the muscles that aid respiration, causing an ineffective, shallow exhalation.

HOW TO BREATHE A FULL YOGIC BREATH

To start yogic breathing, it is beneficial to be quite familiar with simple abdominal breathing, as this would be your starting point. The following three phases will reference the three regions of breath, as discussed earlier. If you are only just starting out, it is probably best to familiarize yourself with one phase at a time and keep practicing it until it becomes effortless, before proceeding to the next phase.

- If you are completely new to breathing techniques, you might want to stick to ‘Inhale – Phase 1’ and ‘Exhale – Phase 1’, which are just the extensions of simple abdominal breathing. As you become more experienced, you could practise Inhale – Phase 1, followed directly by Inhale – Phase 2; then Exhale – Phase 1 followed by Exhale – Phase 2.
- If completing the two phases for inhaling and exhaling does not appear to be challenging anymore, you can proceed with Inhale – Phase 1, Inhale – Phase 2 and Inhale – Phase 3, then Exhale – Phase 1, Exhale – Phase 2 and Exhale – Phase 3, in this exact order, making the three phases of inhalation into one long inhale and the three phases of exhalation into one long and complete exhale.

Connecting the three phases of inhalation and three phases of exhalation into one breath will make it one true full yogic breathing. While any of the partial phases or steps involved could be practised alone or in sequence as separate breathing techniques, those could already be considered advanced yogic breathing methods. As far as full yogic breathing is concerned, they should be treated as preparatory steps, before you can connect them all up into one full yogic breath.

Full yogic breathing can become surprisingly challenging, as you will be using muscles you have probably not been actively using for many years. Please be aware, that practicing yogic breathing, especially for the first few occasions, will possibly cause some light-headedness, and probably dizziness. This is due to your blood over-saturating with previously unknown amounts of oxygen. Although it is perfectly natural, you should stop practicing when such sensations occur and let your body gradually get used to the new oxygen levels introduced. You should remember, as always, not to rush anything.

INHALE – PHASE 1

- You should either sit comfortably, or stand up, with your spine fully erect, nothing compressing your belly or chest. Wear loose fitting clothes, no tight parts.
- Exhale as fully as you can, then start breathing slowly and deeply into your abdomen.
- Do not attempt to consciously inhale, rather just expand your abdominal wall, but instead of simply letting it protrude forward, control the way it expands.
- First, the lowest part should come forth, gradually coming up, like a wave, higher and higher, filling the lower part of your lung deeper and deeper with air.
- In the meantime, keep your chest as low as possible, do not let your ribcage lift, keep this deep breath abdominal only.
- If you are familiar with full abdominal breathing, you can add those additional corners of focus, although this is not strictly necessary. Such wave like motion of your abdominal wall will in and of itself provide your internal organs with a gentle massage.

INHALE – PHASE 2

- Once your diaphragm has fully contracted, and your belly has been pushed forward as much as possible, when you feel you cannot breathe any more into your abdomen, continue inhaling, but now by expanding your chest towards the sides.
- Concentrate now on this sideways movement, until you feel that your chest cannot expand any further.
- When you once again feel that your lungs are full, start lifting your chest and moving your sternum (the chest-bone) outwards and slightly up. It may be surprising how much extra capacity there still was, to continue breathing.
- While expanding your chest, it is important not to let your belly collapse, keep it pushed out as far as possible. Eventually your chest will expand to such extent that it comes right above your abdominal wall once again.
- If you now try breathing into your chest and put your hands on the sides of your ribcage, you will notice, that your chest does not only protract forward, but it keeps expanding to the sides, possibly even further, than you would have thought it possible.

This will be very similar to the ‘bad’ breathing habit discussed earlier. It is important to understand, there is no such way as ‘bad breathing’, all parts of your lungs are equally important, there are only bad habits, and inappropriate use of your breathing. As you incorporate the mid-section of your lungs into the full yogic breath, you may see and experience, how this particular area was intended to be used in breathing, by nature.

INHALE – PHASE 3

Phases 1 and 2 would be immediately available for many people, yet you should only proceed to Phase 3, when you are really familiar with the above steps and can breathe into the previous two regions without difficulty,

maintaining an even and controlled breath. Until such time, please proceed with Exhale – Phase 1.

- When your chest has been expanded both sideways and upwards to its maximum, start lifting your shoulders, all the way up to your ears. This should further stretch your lungs, pulling up the upper corners that are so rarely used in your daily life.
- Attempt to inhale through this process. Do not worry, if you feel your lungs are full, and you cannot inhale any further, just keep pulling your shoulders up while holding your throat open, just like when you inhale. Some air might eventually start flowing through with practice, whether you are aware of it or not.
- As you get more experienced, you will not need to lift your shoulders that high, as you will feel, exactly how much movement is necessary to fill the top section of your lungs fully. Until you have such awareness, it is best to lift your shoulders as high as you can.

Remember, the tissues of this upper part of your lungs have been probably dormant and dysfunctional for years. It takes time, and dedicated practice to repair and rebuild them, with fully working lung tissues. Your body's recovery abilities are wonderful. If you practice regularly, with time you will be able to reclaim these forgotten corners of your breath, eventually enabling you to breathe a full yogic inhale.

EXHALE – PHASE 1

Once you reached your apparent maximum lung-capacity, regardless of which phase of inhalation you have reached, you may pause your breath. There are several ways to pace your breathing, its rhythm can depend on many factors. For learning purposes, pause only for a couple of seconds or heartbeats, and observe the sensation of your lungs being fully expanded. This will be important later, as you practice, as you will have a way of comparison, so that you may track your progress, observing how your lung capacity becomes greater.

When you become more experienced, you will probably notice, how the natural urge to inhale and exhale slows down. As your blood saturates with oxygen, you need to breathe less frequently, which is quite normal, when you practice full yogic breathing. If this occurs, feel free to follow your body's intuition, and breathe in the rhythm your body dictates.

You will now exhale, also from bottom to top. Though some may advise an opposite direction (exhaling from top to bottom), in traditional yogic practice the bottom to top progression seems more usual, as well as it will probably feel more natural to visualize as you would not have to circulate air through regions that you have previously 'emptied'. Also, until you are able to breathe a full yogic breath, this is the easiest way you can proceed, as you can only exhale from regions you have previously inhaled into and there will be no confusion about the order.

- Contract your abdominal region, starting from the bottom of your belly, squeezing and withdrawing in from bottom to top in a wave-like motion, similarly to what you have done for the inhale phase, only now you would be drawing it inwards this way.
- Keep your chest expanded all this time (and your shoulders drawn up), if you have gone through the second (and third) phases of inhalation. As you contract a lower part, keep it drawn in as you proceed upwards. Eventually the whole abdomen would be withdrawn, forcing the air from the lower part of your lungs to rush out.

EXHALE – PHASE 2

- When you can no longer squeeze and withdraw your abdomen further, start compressing the chest, from the sides, as you have expanded them for the second phase of inhalation, keeping your belly squeezed and drawn in, sternum remaining up and forward.
- Once you can no longer contract the sides of your chest, start lowering the

sternum, compressing the chest even further. The exhalation should proceed smoothly, until you have fully compressed your chest, while keeping the belly withdrawn.

- You should still keep your shoulders high, if you have previously proceeded to inhale into that last region (Inhale – Phase 3).

EXHALE – PHASE 3

Only proceed, if you have gone through Inhale – Phase 3. If you have not yet attempted that stage, please continue with Inhale – Phase 1. Then keep on practising the first two phases of inhalations and exhalations until you are ready to proceed inhaling into that last region.

- Start lowering your shoulders, pushing them as low as possible, keeping your chest collapsed and tight, belly withdrawn. This will squeeze the top part of your lungs once again, completing the process of the exhalation.
- When your shoulders reach their lowest, slightly hunch your back, stooping forwards a little and try to push your arms down. This will squeeze your chest and with it your lungs even further, forcing some more air out.
- If you can, stoop forward even further, rounding your back and almost curling up into a ball, while observing how some additional air could still be squeezed out.

Such hunching and curling up is only essential through the learning process, as it will aid your understanding of the exhalation greatly, while also aiding the exhalation itself, until your other helper muscles will become sufficiently strong to squeeze your lungs to the maximum.

When you have mastered all phases of inhalation and exhalation, you can omit curling your body up, as your lungs and the muscles that help breathing will have learned how to function most efficiently. If you did curl your body up, and

are ready to come back to the Inhale – Phase 1, you have two ways to proceed:

- You could first straighten up your torso, consciously trying not to inhale. You will feel somewhat of a vacuum being created in your chest. This vacuum will have some additional benefits of training the tissues around your lungs. Only start inhaling, when you are fully erect.
- Alternatively, you could incorporate straightening your body out gradually as you go through the three phases of inhalation. This might prove more challenging, but it would certainly aid your focus on the breath and provide a great physiological help to expanding your lungs the right way and going through the three phases in the right order.

Repeat the desired phases of inhalation and exhalation as long or short as you see fit. Practising for a few minutes each day should be sufficient, but feel free to take additional practice sessions any time of the day you feel. Soon your technique should become smooth and much easier to follow. Your muscles around the chest and your lungs will adapt, gaining capacity and begin working much more effectively. 

SQUARE OR CIRCULAR BREATHING

Square breathing is a really simple idea of making every step of the breathing equal in length. Though not suitable for all meditation methods, especially not those that call for not trying to regulate your breathing, square or circular breathing, combined with the breathing technique of your choice, can be adequately practised with many meditation methods.

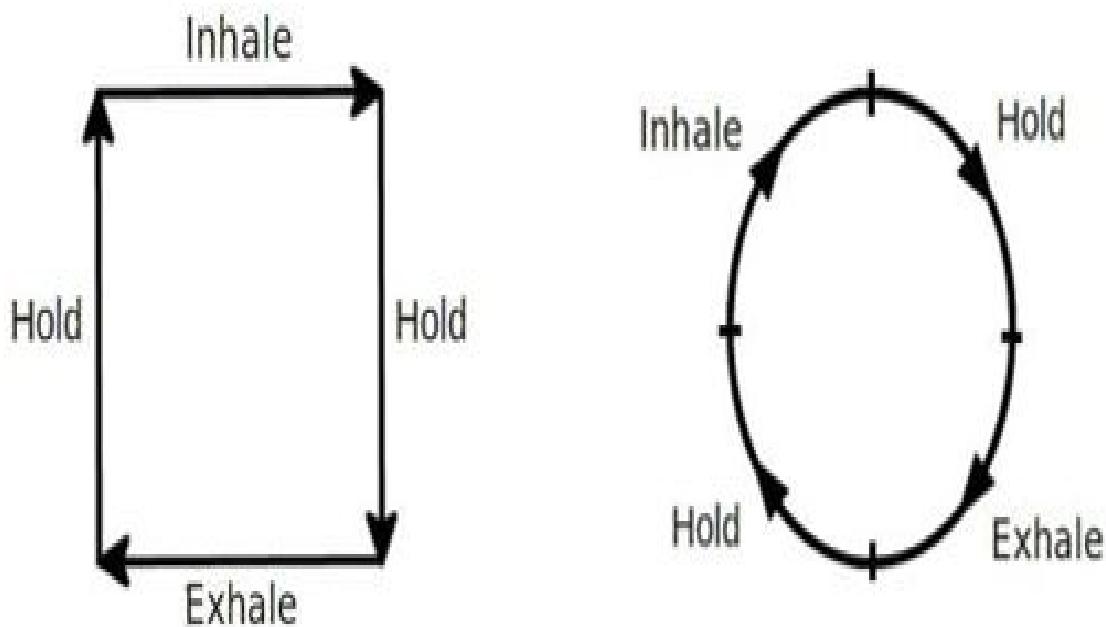
Square or circular breathing is not so much a breathing technique, but rather setting a pace or rhythm for breathing, that can be used with any breathing technique, including all methods described previously.

Through square breathing, the depth of your breath may eventually reduce to diaphragmatic breathing with time and practice, if the relaxation deepens sufficiently. For simplicity's sake, square breathing will be discussed as used with simple abdominal breathing, but it should be equally easy to implement with any breathing technique you prefer.

- Sit comfortably, or lay down, wear loose fitting clothes. Start practising simple abdominal breathing.
- Now, pay attention to the length of each inhale and exhale and the length of time you may hold your breath after inhale and any pause after exhale. You want all of these to become equal in length, just like the sides of the square.
- Start counting to four. You will not be counting your breaths, but the length of each breath.
- Inhale slowly and smoothly, while counting to four.
- Once you have reached four, hold your breath to the count of four.
- Now start exhaling, while counting to four.

- As you have finished exhaling, pause to the count of four, before continuing with an inhale.

If you are counting at a steady pace, the length of each phase will be exactly the same, making its ‘shape’ resemble a perfect square. This could also be illustrated as equal segments of a circle, making the name ‘circular breathing’ more suitable.



The most significant problem you will run into is counting evenly. Even if you think you are counting at a steady pace, chances are, your counting will speed up, while you are holding your breath and slow down during exhales.

This is natural. After inhalation, your body gets slightly excited, with the fresh amount of oxygen introduced to the system, this will speed up your brain activity for the moment and cause you to count a little faster. When you exhale, the lack of oxygen in your blood will cause everything to slow down, if ever so slightly. The best way around this is using a metronome.

- Set the metronome at a steady pace – not too fast, but not too slow, you do not want to run out of air during exhaling and pausing. You will need to experiment to find the perfect pace.

If you set your metronome around 120 beats per minute (or bpm), each beat would take exactly half a second. Counting four beats would make two seconds for each phase, making it 2 seconds inhale, 2 seconds hold, 2 seconds exhale, 2 seconds pause. A higher bpm would make your metronome beat faster, this would mean shorter phases of breath, while a lower bpm will result in longer phases of breathing. Starting anywhere between 90–120 bpm could be ideal for anyone. If your lung capacity is not great or your breath is shallow, start with a higher setting.

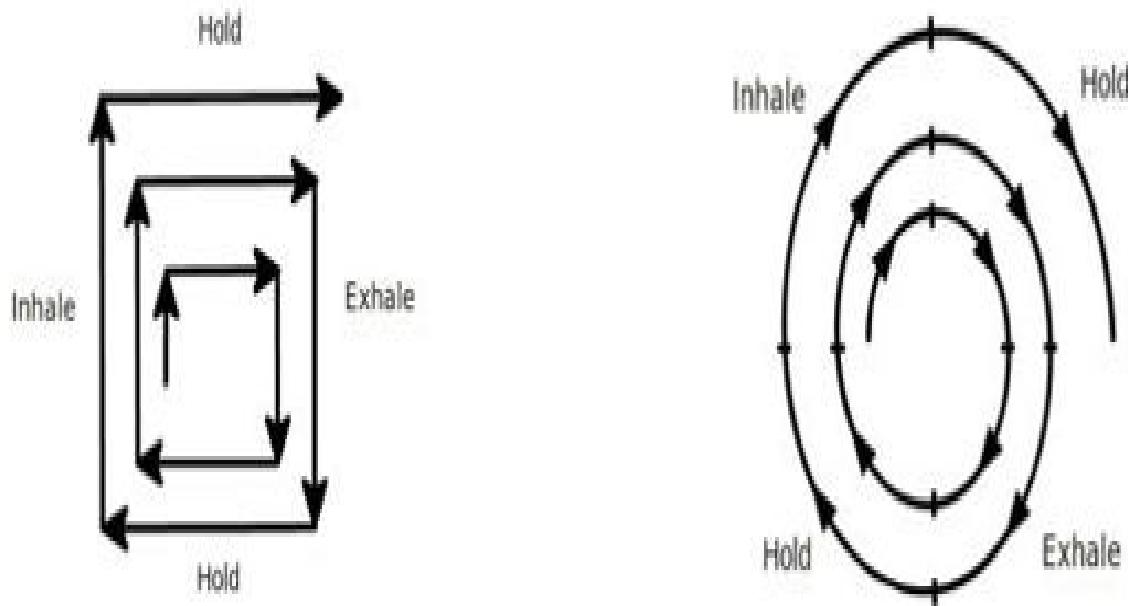
- Count in synchrony with the metronome, that will ensure your breaths are truly evenly paced. Continue practising with the metronome for many sessions. It does take time, but you will eventually unconsciously learn the pace.
- After you feel absolutely confident that you have learned the pace and you can actually imagine or just feel the metronome's rhythm, you are safe to abandon it and continue with counting only.

Eventually you will be able to keep the perfect square breathing without even counting. This will not happen overnight, or even in a couple of days or weeks. Do take your time and follow your intuition, more than just your conscious mind.

Some might say you should count your heartbeats. Counting your heartbeats might be sufficient, but you have to keep in mind that while you are practising this breathing method, your heart-rate will steadily decrease, until it reaches its minimum, usually about 60-70 beats per minute, or less, depending on your general health and fitness level.

This means that each inhalation and exhalation will be longer than the previous one. Eventually this can lead to such a slow pace of breathing that you cannot just yet sustain, especially if you have relatively low resting heart-rate (below 60 bpm).

When you breathe this way, following the count of heartbeats, an interesting phenomenon may occur. As your heart-rate decreases, each phase becomes longer and longer and the square shape will be distorted, becoming more and more like a spiral, while eventually evening out to return into the shape of a square, or circle.



If you can maintain square breathing at your resting heart-rate with four heartbeats counting as one phase, aligning your breaths to your heartbeats might even aid you into relaxation, through the steadily lengthening breaths and decreasing heart-rate. This is especially useful with relaxation-meditation methods, such as Corpse Pose (Shavasana), while with other techniques overly relaxing can easily deteriorate your focus.

Which method you can use square breathing with, will therefore depend much on the applicability to the meditation technique of your choice, apart from your own capability of maintaining the pace or rhythm. ■

PART 3

SITTING MEDITATION

THE MOST COMMONLY CONSIDERED MEDITATION METHOD

For most people, sitting meditation will be the picture to come to mind when thinking about meditation in general. It is true, most meditation methods can be practised in a seated position, while some are explicitly advisable to be observed this way. Basic sitting meditation is easy to learn and offers great benefits, making it an excellent starting point for anyone interested in learning meditation or to deepen their practice.

While the most basic methods are fairly easy to be learned by anyone in a short time, some advanced techniques will require many months or even years of dedicated effort to access the additional benefits they might offer. Whichever way you chose to take, sitting meditation will have an important place among your daily meditation practices.

The seated position requires your core and back muscles to keep your body upright. In most seated positions you will need to sit with a straight back, with the crown tall, which definitely needs some effort. Such position offers many benefits, the most obvious being that you will never be allowed to fully relax. Although it may sound counter-intuitive at first, you must not forget, meditation is not just relaxation, even though a relaxation response usually follows the meditation practice.

Unlike in a more relaxed position, such as the ‘Corpse Pose’ described in a later chapter, the relaxation of the body is imperfect while seated. This will help you to keep your attention as upright and straight as your back and prevent you from falling asleep. Even though it is not necessarily a ‘bad’ response, falling asleep goes right against the goal of most meditation practices, that being sharp focus on a single point, object, idea, sound, or picture, depending on your chosen

method.

Some seated meditation practices offer greater relaxation response than others, *e.g.* Zazen or the OM mantra are both known to calm the mind and emotions, while others, like the mental imagery exercises discussed in this book, or the quite exotic mandala meditation called ‘Observing yourself through the outer eye’, described in a later chapter, may induce a certain degree of mental fatigue, requiring a considerable amount of mind-power to be invested. The primary aim of such practices is the sharpening and generally training your mental abilities.

The techniques described in this part of the book follow a pattern of increasing difficulty. The very first chapter is not strictly a sitting meditation technique, but it is the easiest way to start for the inexperienced practitioner. The first ‘real’ traditional meditation technique, Zen meditation might seem surprisingly simple at the first glance. That is well in line with the Zen philosophy of simplicity, yet the practice holds previously unexplored depths for those who have the persistence to venture deep enough.

Through different methods and techniques, gradually increasing in difficulty, you will eventually reach some spiritually inclined methods, traditionally used to experience leaving one’s physical body and either experience extra-sensory perception (as in ‘Observing yourself through the outer eye’) or spiritual connectedness (as in ‘Opening the crown chakra’).

Such methods have their roots in ancient traditions, being the products of a mind and spirituality very different from the way of thinking modern people are accustomed to. If you are not spiritually inclined, or choose not to believe in spiritual experiences, the methods may still serve as an excellent exercise for training your mental abilities and exploring the little known corners of your conscious and subconscious mind.

This book will not attempt to offer an explanation from either point of view. It is once again up to you to try and experience for yourself everything or anything you like, and draw your own conclusions. ■

PREPARING TO LEARN MEDITATION: MUSIC RELAXATION

If you have never done meditation before, you may feel intimidated, or unsure where to start. Before jumping right into learning meditation, it is beneficial to prepare yourself for the practice. Good preparation will ensure a deeper experience with greater effect and it will make meditation generally easier to learn.

The first step will be to relax. This is probably easier said than done. Living the hectic lifestyle of this time and age, how would you go about relaxing? It is important to find the proper setting. Your office, or any place where you usually work, or deal with stressful issues, might not be the best place for this, as the setting itself could invoke undesirable stress responses, probably without you even being consciously aware of it.

If you can, get away from people and noise, turn off all appliances, TV, computer, even your mobile phone, and ‘cut yourself off from the world’ for a short time. You will not be able to practice meditation, if you cannot be with only yourself for the duration of the practice. If you live in a noisy environment, like near a busy road, or in the city centre, where daily noise is unavoidable, you might want to schedule your practice to a later time in the evening, when traffic might be lower, or early in the morning, when others might still be asleep. Just make sure, you find a suitable time and place.

Music may aid your relaxation, and if you cannot find a quiet enough environment, it may also help, with giving you something to focus on and disregard the background noise. Relaxing with music can quickly get you into the proper mind-set to start your usual meditation practice as well. Choose some soothing tunes, preferably classics or relaxation music. Upbeat, popular music

will not suite this purpose. You need something soothing, slow and relaxing.

If you have a limited time, set up a gentle, non-intrusive alarm, to remind you when it's time to 'come back'. You might as well fall asleep while relaxing. It is probably best to practise in the evening, or at a time when you need not rush as having a tight schedule will in itself defeat the purpose, as to have much to arrange or attend still, will not let go of your mind.

- Schedule your practice to a time, when you have done everything important for the day.
- Wear loose fitting clothes and place yourself into a comfortable position, be it sitting or lying down. Turn on the music, and listen to it.
- Don't just let it be in the background as you would with the radio, or your mp3 player in the gym or at work. *Listen* to the music *actively*. Try to soak up every note, every movement, every sound, contemplate the different instruments used, or just go with the flow.
- Let your thoughts flow free. Do not try to suppress them, but do not let them linger either. Just come back to the music any time your thoughts get carried away.
- The important thing is, be *in* the music. Your eventual goal will be to become one with the music, or at least that is how you should feel.
- Continue with this, until your alarm goes off, until you fall asleep, or until you feel like you've done enough.

Although the terms 'music relaxation' and 'music meditation' are often used somewhat interchangeably, a clear difference might be made between these very similar practices, namely the sharpness and intensity of focus, while listening to music. If you flow with the music to alleviate stress, it could be called a music relaxation exercise, and if you try to be in or with the music, contemplating it closely, the experience becomes more akin to a meditation practice

If you have managed to listen actively and never be distracted completely from the music itself, or at least kept such distractions short, you have just been through your very first conscious meditation experience. Music meditation is the most simple and ‘beginner-friendly’ of all the different methods discussed in this book. Although very often not considered to be a serious meditation practice, music meditation offers all the benefits of meditation while also preparing you for more advanced practices. Music meditation can also be practised just right before more advanced methods, as a way of preparation and mind setting. ■

ZEN MEDITATION

One of the most common, easiest, and arguably most beneficial forms of sitting meditation is Zen meditation, or sitting in Zazen. Although the benefits of one technique could hardly be placed above those of another, the most distinct advantage of techniques like Zazen lies in their simplicity.

This method is very easy to learn by anyone and can be practised by the complete beginner, or the advanced practitioner alike; making Zazen one of the most widely practised forms of meditation known today.

Although Zazen has its origins in Buddhism, particularly Zen (Ch'an) Buddhism of Japan and China, it is not, by any means, a religious practice. Although the aim of this book is not to go much into details, some background information may prove beneficial in deepening your understanding and therefore your experience of Zazen.

Zen (Ch'an) Buddhism evolved in ancient China, from the original Buddhist doctrines of India over many centuries. Zen emphasises the attainment of enlightenment through direct and personal experience, instead of the knowledge of religious texts and doctrines.

Zen can be viewed as a way of returning to the original meaning of the Buddhist teachings, which regard the material world as an illusion of the mind, making it unique to the observer, where everybody's experience would differ, as it originates in the individual's mind only. Therefore, the true meaning of things may only be understood and attained through personal practice, experience and intuition.

To strengthen one's mind powers and intuitions and deepen one's insight, Zazen, the Zen meditation practice was conceived. According to the followers of the Zen philosophy, the practice of Zazen is essential in attaining enlightenment.

Even though Zen meditation has its origins in Buddhism and spiritualism, it might be easily practised by anyone, who has no interest in any of the above, as it requires no religious rituals to be observed, neither would you need to study any religious texts or teachings. Even if for are an atheist, or strictly secular person, the health benefits of meditation (for mind and body) can be most easily attained by sitting in Zazen. ☸

PREPARING FOR ZAZEN – CONTEMPLATING HERE AND NOW

Zen meditation is about mindfulness, and being in the present moment, a practical application of Zen philosophy. The following contemplation practice is an excellent preparation for Zen meditation and could be used as a meditation practice on its own, reinforcing the feeling of being in the present moment and space.

- To begin practising, sit comfortably, with a straight back. You may sit on a chair, if cross legged sitting is not yet comfortable. If you are fairly confident sitting in a cross legged position, sit on a pillow and make yourself comfortable. Sit tall, do not compress your chest or your belly. Your hand position is not yet important. Rest your hands on your thighs, or your knees.
- Breathe with simple abdominal breathing. Make sure you relax your shoulders with every exhale. With each inhale, ‘take good things in’, contemplate the fresh air, the life supporting oxygen and with it life sustaining energy entering your body. With the exhale let go of ‘bad things’, think of the carbon-dioxide leaving your body, and with it all your stress and worries. Continue contemplating your breath in this manner for five to ten more inhales and exhales.

You should be somewhat more relaxed by now. It is time to turn your focus inwardly, and start to contemplate being here and now.

- As you inhale, speak the word ‘here’ in your mind. Hear the word clearly and be aware of its meaning. You are here, in this place, in this space.
- As you exhale, let go of that thought.
- Inhale again, hearing ‘here’ in your mind. Contemplate what the word means. You are here. Occupying a certain space sitting on a chair or on the floor. Exhale, let go of the thought.
- Continue speaking to yourself ‘here’ for a number of inhales. You will

feel, when you are ready to move on, usually five to ten breaths would suffice, but do not rush it.

Do not try to count your breaths, just go with your intuition. When you feel ‘centred’, somewhat more ‘grounded’ and generally more aware of your own presence, you are ready to proceed further.

- Keep speaking ‘here’ in your mind each time you inhale, but now, as you exhale, add the word ‘now’. Hear the word ring clearly in your mind. Contemplate its meaning. You are now, at this present moment.
- Inhale, hear the word ‘here’ – you are here, occupying this space, this place. Then exhale: ‘now’ – you are in the moment, this present moment, right now.
- Inhale, ‘here’. Exhale ‘now’. You are here and now. In this space, in this place, at this present moment. Be aware of your presence, your existence.

During this simple exercise, thoughts will most certainly arise, diverting your attention from your contemplation. This is natural, this simple exercise cannot occupy your mind for too long. As thoughts arise, smile to yourself gently and let the thoughts go, as they came. Do not linger on any thought, just let them pass. They will appear and re-appear, this is normal. As long as you do not linger on them too long and you come back to your contemplation, it is all fine.

This exercise is not about being thoughtless. It is about being aware. The gentle smile will help you stay relaxed, and not get annoyed with yourself because of disturbing thoughts. Remember, having thoughts is just human nature. You need not restrain your thinking or forcing yourself to be without thoughts. For now, you are learning to let go of issues from your mind.

If you are practising this way of contemplation as a preparation to Zazen practice, you should continue for five minutes in total. After five minutes you can continue without pausing to practising Zazen. If you are using this method as a standalone meditation practise, you can continue with your practise for ten to

fifteen minutes at a time. ॐ

SITTING IN ZAZEN

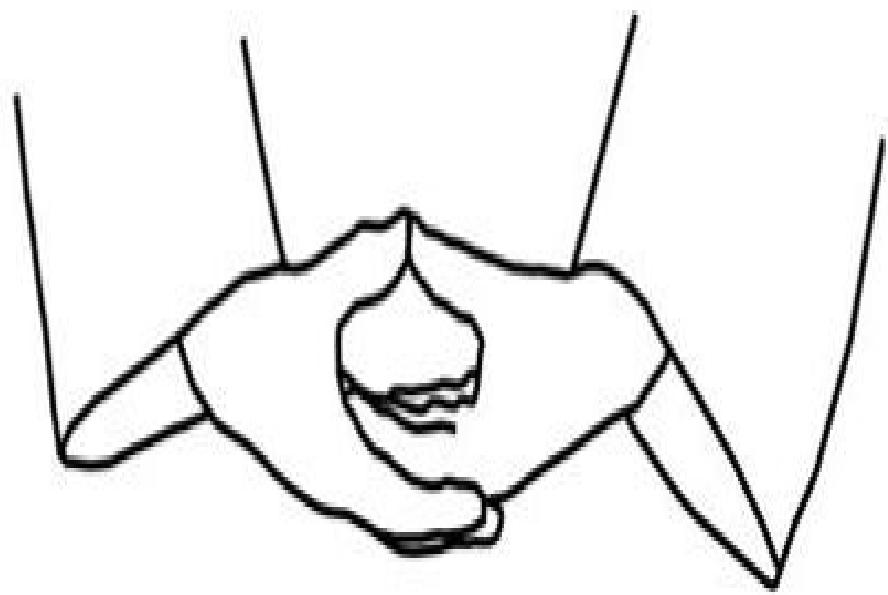
Once you are sufficiently prepared, relaxed and your mind is turned towards the present time and space, it is time to continue with practising Zazen. The technique that follows will probably be different from what you have expected and certainly sound a lot easier. Don't let this simplicity deceive you, previously unknown depths of awareness and understanding might be achieved, just by following the simple guide outlined below.

- Sit comfortably, with a straight back. The preferred sitting position is with crossed legs, sitting on a small pillow. Choose a pillow, or pillows as high as necessary to maintain a straight and upright posture. There are many ways to sit cross legged, some are easier, while others might prove more challenging. Usually cross legged sitting is preferred for the stability it offers.

It is important to sit in a position, which you can maintain for the full length of your practice, without experiencing too much discomfort. Until you learn to comfortably sit in a cross legged position, you might start with sitting on a chair. It is important not to be distracted by the discomfort you experience, so do not force cross legged sitting until you practised enough to maintain that position without too much strain.

Practise cross legged sitting daily, if you are interested in learning Zen meditation, but do not force your advancement, give your body time to accommodate to this new challenge.

- Your hands should be resting on your lap, palms facing upwards, your right hand partly covering your left from underneath, your thumbs touching over the resting hands, forming an oval shape.



The cosmic mudra hand position

This hand position is called the cosmic mudra, in Zen tradition. You should keep this mudra (hand position) in front of your belly, just below the belly button. This should help you keep your focus there, and on your breathing, during your practice. The area below your navel, or rather the area behind this point, inside your body, coinciding with your centre of gravity, is also known as the lower DanTien in Chinese tradition, regarded as the centre (or garden) of energy.

You may leave some soothing music on, if the environment is too noisy but you would preferably be in silence. You can close your eyes, it may help, especially when you are just starting, although this is not required. You can keep your eyes open, or half open. Keeping the eyes half open is the most traditional way of practice. Advanced practitioners, who meditate for a great length of time at once, prefer not to close their eyes. Keeping the eyes open helps to maintain awareness and not to drift off, or fall asleep.

If you chose to keep your eyes open, or half open, find a spot, not far in front of you, and focus your gaze on the floor. Alternatively, you may choose to stare at the wall. Make sure, whatever direction you are looking, is free of distracting vivid colours, images, or objects. If your eyes are closed and you feel you are drifting away, just open your eyes to bring your mind back to the present. Once you've regained your focus, you can close your eyes again, or keep them open if it helps, as you see fitting.

- Start breathing consciously, use abdominal breathing, at any level. If you are not sure what this means, please read the relevant chapter in this book. Do not try to control your breathing, unless you are only just learning the abdominal breathing technique. Do not try to slow it down, or forcedly breath evenly, just breathe as you normally would.
- Remember, there is no good or bad way of breathing. Pay attention to your breathing and observe it closely, without attempting to change it. Notice

how your breathing will change by itself.

- Concentrate on either your nose, as you feel the air on your nostrils, or focus on your belly button (or the region just underneath it) rise and fall as you breathe. Traditionally, focusing on the abdominal region would be most advisable, but focusing on the nostrils should be fine, especially for beginners.
- You may also envisage the whole route of air pouring in through your nose, through your bronchi and into the lungs, then back out. It is up to you which method you follow. For advanced practitioners, especially if you are using advanced or full abdominal breathing, it may be beneficial to direct your attention towards your lower DanTien.
- Start counting your breaths. Count every inhale and exhale, such as one – inhale, two – exhale, three – inhale, four – exhale until you reach ten (with an exhale). Once at ten, start again at one (you should be inhaling now).

Do not worry if you miss a count or drift off, just start over again at one. Do not stress yourself, if you feel you are not doing it right. You are doing it right, because you are doing it. Be patient with yourself, with practice comes mastery, but, just like with everything in life, mastery needs time and devotion. There are no short-cuts in meditation.

- If thoughts, or mental pictures occur, let them be. It is only natural, to have thoughts. Focusing on suppressing your thoughts, would take your focus away from your breathing. Just let the thoughts come and go, and try not to linger on any one of them. Most of these thoughts will be just noise, they *will* eventually quiet down.

The best way of letting go of thoughts is *not trying* to let go of them. Just come back to your breathing, once you catch yourself thinking about anything else. Do not worry about it too much. It is natural. Just come back to your breathing any, and every time you drift off. Keep counting to ten.

- Some thoughts will go away instantly, others will be stubborn and keep coming back, such as important issues in your life or things that keep your mind occupied. Do not worry, you are not doing anything wrong. Take this as a part of your practice. Do not fight these thoughts, let them occupy your mind for a while, let them flourish. Observe them closely, but be constantly aware of what you are doing, do not lose yourself in the thoughts. Once they have exhausted themselves, let go of them, and come back to your breathing. Count one to ten.

It is always a good idea to let go of your thoughts with a gentle smile. As stubborn thoughts keep reappearing, it is easy to become annoyed with yourself. The more annoyed you get, the more difficult it will be to let go of the disturbing thoughts. Getting annoyed will also distract your attention from your breathing. If you smile at every thought that comes, you will have less chance to get annoyed with either your thoughts or yourself, and you will probably find it a lot easier to let go of them. Just a small, nearly invisible, gentle, but heart-felt smile will suffice. Smiling also reinforces positive feelings and emotions, that in turn will aid your concentration.

If you find you are counting very easily, but concentrating solely on counting, you need to come back to your breathing. Counting should only be an aid, not your main concern or focus. If you focus too much on counting, come back to your breathing immediately, and while still counting them, turn your full attention to your breaths.

- Once you have counted several times one to ten without any distraction (this might or might not happen in your first practice, you need not rush), change your way of counting. If counting each inhale and exhale separately becomes effortlessly easy, you may combine one inhale and exhale as the count of one. The next inhale and exhale as the count of two, and so on once again, up to ten.
- Count like this: One – inhale, then exhale; two – inhale, then exhale; three

– inhale, then exhale; until you reach ten. Then start again at one.

Here the same principles apply. Do not worry about anything. Thoughts are natural and will occur. Just let them be and let them go, come back to counting your breaths and focusing mainly on the breaths themselves, without considering them further. Do not fight your thoughts or try to suppress them, you will only feed them. Watch them and observe them as they appear and disappear effortlessly.

Once you are at this stage, you can keep practising just like that for a long time to come. Many would never go beyond this level and it is perfectly fine. You are already enjoying most of the benefits of meditation, apart from probably those of the highest spiritual level. If your goal and purpose is general well-being and health, this is all you need to do. You will notice, how your thoughts will come disturbing you less and less with practice, and you may eventually reach a state of inner silence, when the chatter in your mind subsides. You will find that your focus becomes sharper and your practice will deepen with time.

Some would continue on counting breaths as this can be a great aid of maintaining the state achieved. If you want to proceed further, you have to make sure you are counting to ten, with one inhale and exhale being one count every time, without distraction and most of your thoughts have been quieted, without attempting to quiet them yourself.

- At this point you may stop counting and concentrate purely on the breathing. If you feel you lose concentration, start counting again. You can maintain longer and longer pauses in counting, until you are confident that you can maintain your focus without it. Your thoughts should have been subsided by now, with a perfect, probably previously unknown quietness of your mind. You are *now* sitting in Zazen.

Do not rush your practice. In no way is it beneficial, or even possible to reach any given stage by desire to get there fast. If it does not happen naturally, you

will defeat the purpose. The longer you practise any stage of breath counting or just sitting, the deeper your practise becomes and the greater will be the benefits you get from it. This journey is not about the destination, it is all about the journey itself.

- Once in Zazen, start observing your silence. Pay close attention to yourself, never losing focus of your breath. The revelations and realisations at this stage may be startling.

Instead of attempting to describe anything here, that might be a very different experience for you anyway, you are strongly encouraged to go ahead and try it for yourself. There is some more to the Zazen practice, but for a beginner, this much and plenty of practice should suffice. By the time you will have reached the state of quietness, through your intuition and experience you will know how to proceed. Remember though, that you must give it time. Patience is the only way to Zazen. ■

MANTRA MEDITATION MANTRA MEDITATION
GENERALLY CONSISTS OF REPEATING A
CHOSEN MANTRA, UNTIL THE DESIRED STATE
OF MIND AND CONSCIOUSNESS IS REACHED,
CLOSELY RESEMBLING THE PRACTICE OF
CONTEMPLATION. THROUGH THE
MONOTONICITY OF THE WORDS REPEATED AND
THE INTENSE FOCUS IT REQUIRES TO KEEP
REPEATING OR CHANTING, ONCE THE WORDS
APPARENTLY LOSE ALL MEANING, IT WILL
EVENTUALLY RESULT IN AN EXPERIENCE
SIMILAR TO ZEN PRACTICES.

Mantra meditation is closely related to contemplation, as the practitioner would often recite texts of philosophical, religious or spiritual importance. In this case, the desired goal of the meditation is a greater understanding of a given text or teaching. Whichever mantra meditation technique you might chose, it is worth reading more detailed books or instructions about it, or preferably seeking out a real life teacher, if such would be available.

When choosing your mantra, it is usually very important that you understand the words and their deeper meaning, therefore it helps if the mantra is in your own language. It is popular to chant mantras originating in Sanskrit or other eastern languages, but you must not forget, the people these mantras were

originally intended for, do or did understand those languages, therefore the mantras would hold a much deeper meaning for them. ॐ

THE OM OR AUM MANTRA

For those who don't understand eastern languages and still wish to practise a traditional mantra meditation, the OM (AUM) mantra may be the easiest to learn.

OM, or AUM is one of the oldest mantras known today. There are several explanations and translations of the syllable, each offering a different approach, according to the symbolism and beliefs of the authors, but all approaches usually agree upon OM being a representation of the universe, one's connection to the universe itself, or the higher power(s) that govern it, in one way or another. OM is considered a sacred word in most eastern traditions and is often used before and after reciting religious texts.

OM can become an excellent mantra for meditation practice, for the beginner and the experienced practitioner alike. OM meditation is simple and effective, it can serve as a meditation of its own, preparation for other meditation practices or preparation for nearly anything, that requires focus and a calmness of the mind.

There are several ways to practise the OM mantra some of which require a deep understanding of the meaning and symbolism behind the word and are more spiritually inclined. The two most basic methods, accessible to the beginner, will be discussed here.

These two methods are very similar in principle, inasmuch as the focus will be on the sound and its effects. The only real difference will be whether OM would be pronounced out loudly or heard only inside, without any audible sound.

HOW TO PRONOUNCE OM

There are several ways you can say or hear OM, the most common you would find a short ‘O’, followed by a long ‘MMMM’, especially popular in the west, something like

‘OMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM’

There are other, less often heard, or discussed ways to sound OM as well. Some would say, you should give an equal importance to both ‘O’ and ‘M’, sounding both parts at an equal length, sounding

‘OOOOOOMMMMM’

Others would advise OM is in fact pronounced from the sounds ‘AU(O)M’, that meaning, the first half is in fact longer than the second, advising to sound the vowel ‘O’ longer than the closing ‘M’, becoming

‘OOOOOOOOOMMM’

It does not really matter, which way you choose to practise. You should definitely try all three and choose the one, most suitable for yourself.

HEARING OM INSIDE

You may try chanting the OM mantra in your mind, without loudly uttering the word. Once sitting in the right position, start repeating the mantra inside. You choose your own speed and pace. Do not force it, let it flow naturally, let it go at its own pace, try not to interfere.

- To begin, wear loose fitting clothes and sit down, ideally with crossed legs, although if you do not feel comfortable sitting like that, you may as well use a chair.
- Place your hands on your thighs, palms facing upwards, with the forefinger and your thumb touching lightly, the other fingers stretched out, resting on your thighs. This hand position is known as the chin mudra, one of the most basic hand positions to be used in any meditation practice.
- Close your eyes, and breathe naturally. Use simple abdominal breathing as this will interfere the least with your mantra.
- Your focus should be on the mantra itself, your breathing should not interfere with your practice. That said, if you feel comfortable with a more advanced breathing method without much conscious effort, you are free to breath as you like.
- Let the word ring in your mind, as fast or as slow as seems fitting. You may go by any rhythm you find in yourself, be it your heartbeat, or your breathing.
- You may sound OM several times on each breath, or you may go with one OM at inhale one at exhale.
- You can also skip inhales and sound OM only on the exhales or the other way around. It does not matter which way choose, it is only important that you go with the way that feels the most natural.

Within minutes the pace will naturally slow down. You should not rush

this. If you feel like sounding OM several times a second, that is just as good as having a long everlasting OM over several minutes. Its pace will slow down eventually, as your mind becomes quiet, along with your breathing becoming deeper and slower and your heart-rate decreasing.

CHANTING OM AUDIBLY

You may prefer to hear yourself chanting OM. This method is not preferable, neither is it inferior to the previous one, it is just a matter of your personal choice. If you chose to chant OM audibly, you should do so in the same manner as you would have chosen for quiet practice, choosing your preferred way of pronouncing the syllable. People often find it easiest to follow the method of a short ‘O’ and a long ‘MMMM’, as sounding a loud ‘MMMM’ with closed mouth requires less breath and could be held longer, while if you choose to stay with a longer ‘O’, you may find you run out of breath quicker.

- You should wear loose fitting clothes and sit either cross legged or in a chair, with a straight back and upright posture, crown high.
- Your hands would ideally be in the chin mudra position, as described above.
- The preferred breathing method would be abdominal breathing, alternatively you can choose your favourite technique, you have mastered as much as it will not interfere with your focus.
- Chant OM at each exhale with silence on the inhales. You should not pause your breath between inhales and exhales.
- Do not try to control your breathing, just inhale naturally and sound OM in a low steady voice as long as your breath lasts.

As you practise, you will notice how gradually your OM chants will lengthen. This happens surprisingly fast during OM meditation. When you chant the syllable audibly, it creates a certain vibration in your body. You will feel it in your chest, in your tongue, in your mouth and teeth, in your skull, in all your head. This vibration is the sound itself, you are producing, but it will quickly transfer into your mind. Your brainwaves get in synchrony, your mind will calm down, your thoughts will smoothen out. You will notice how your emotions will be quieted and the negative thoughts cease.

If you can keep sounding OM shorter than you expected that is perfectly fine, that is just your natural pace. The length of OM will differ each time you practise, depending on your mental, emotional and physiological state. If your voice is not smooth or it quivers, do not worry, it will eventually smoothen out, just as your thoughts and emotions do.

It is important not to fall asleep during practice. Meditation is about mindfulness and focus. Once your thoughts have quieted, focus *all* your attention on the mantra. Examine OM, examine the effects of OM in your body, your feelings that arise and how the vibrations fill your entire being.

Of course this is only a beginning of a long journey. If your wish to deepen your OM practice, you are advised to research the mantra further, there are many excellent books and other sources to get more information from, according to your spiritual stance or beliefs. 

A NOTE ON TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION

Of the several schools and methods of mantra meditation, probably the most well-known and popular is the Transcendental Meditation (TM), that enjoyed and probably still enjoys enormous popularity in the western part of the world. TM requires a certain initiation, wherein the practitioner would be given their personal mantra, which they may not ever disclose to anyone. While this mantra is said to be unique to the practitioner, some critics of the school implicate it might even be the same word for everyone or a collection of few phrases, as there is no way of knowing anything about the mantras provided to others.

Some accuse TM to be a sort of cult. It is definitely noteworthy that TM is marketed much the same way any *product* would be and is claimed to be superior to other methods, while it is in fact just the same effective as other meditation techniques are.

Whatever your thoughts on TM may be, you must keep in mind: TM is not a fast track course of meditation. One cannot simply buy their way into deep meditation practice. The high price tag and the excellent marketing might indicate otherwise, but TM will in fact need the same amount of dedicated practise as any other meditation method would. Even if TM is proven to be very effective, it is not better or worse than any other method or school of meditation, that is freely available.

If you do have money to spare, it is interesting to note, that the money collected from the sales of TM is claimed to go to a non-profit organisation, and much of it is said to be spent on your own education. One-to-one instructions from certified tutors certainly sound like a great way of learning meditation but you should keep in mind: Whatever its followers claim, TM is in no way superior to any other, often more traditional technique, nor is it inferior to any. TM is just as good as anything, only more expensive. ☸

A NOTE ON CONTEMPLATION PRACTISES

As there are literally limitless ways and variations of contemplation practices, it should require another volume or several volumes to discuss the subject in more detail. Many excellent books have already been written, focusing on different aspects such meditation practices, therefore this chapter will only present a general overview of the subject, in connection with mantra meditation.

Contemplation is a form of mantra meditation (although often not regarded as such), where the centre of attention is a word, a phrase, a text, emotion, or idea; but instead of focusing on the sound, through contemplation the focus is mostly on the *meaning* of the chosen word(s), idea, sentiment or feeling, *etc.*

As mantra meditation itself often involves contemplating the specific meaning of a mantra, the boundaries between mantra meditation and contemplation are blurred. The most significant difference appears to be that in mantra meditation the repetition of the mantra is of great importance, while in contemplation practice such repetition is not essential, as moving on with intuition, or just the natural flow of the subject, often takes precedence.

Such boundaries between mantra meditation and contemplation practices are not hard-set, and are often permeable. A good example of this is religious prayer, that could become both mantra meditation, where short prayers are repeated numerous times, or contemplations, where the meaning of a specific prayer is deeply felt and observed.

There are several other ways you may practise contemplation as well, the position can be seated, standing, or even lying down, the breathing technique is entirely of your own choice, so is the subject of your contemplation. You may repeat the words in your mind or read them, from a book or paper, feel the emotion of your choice deeply in an all-encompassing way, or contemplate the idea deeply and attentively.

Contemplation is probably best practised alongside other meditation methods. You may choose to contemplate a word, that has a special meaning, a religious phrase, a teaching, an anecdote, or a longer piece of text. Your focus might be on an idea, philosophy, or an emotion. People often choose to contemplate positive feelings such as love and compassion, goodwill and helpfulness towards others, and similar positive ideas, or emotions.

Death meditation, although it may sound otherwise, is basically a form of contemplation, where the meditator will focus on either their own death, or the general idea of death and the illusory nature of life, helping to shift their consciousness towards what is most important in life and away from the illusion of material riches. Death meditation is probably most effectively practiced together with the yoga asana called ‘Corpse Pose’ or ‘Shavasana’, which will be discussed later in this book.

An example of contemplation practice, is described in the chapter ’Preparing for Zazen – Contemplating here and now’, in a previous chapter of this book, but the subject is truly too broad to be discussed in greater detail here. ■

MENTAL IMAGERY AND VISUALISATION

Mental imagery is of great importance in many meditation methods, and can be used to extend or deepen any meditation practice. While being familiar with visualisation methods is not absolutely essential for the above meditation practices, or to learn meditation at all, they could also become a useful addition.

Practising mental imagery is a way of training your mind's ability to envisage images within. For some people, this comes rather natural (if you tend to day-dream a lot, you may experience this inadvertently), yet for other people forming and holding a sharp detailed image in their minds can prove to be quite a challenge.

The ‘mind’s eye’ or ‘third eye’ is often believed to be located in the centre of the brain, manifesting itself as the pineal gland, a pine cone shaped organ. The third eye is popularly associated with inner sight, enlightenment, clairvoyance, and similar phenomena, though others simply believe it to be the origin of their imagination and visualisation capabilities, as whatever they imagine and visualise, usually appears to be inside their heads. Of course, the pineal gland, as its name implies, has a function as an endocrine gland, secreting the hormone *melatonin* into the bloodstream, that is responsible for the regulation of sleep cycle.

Even though the afore-mentioned connection to the third eye is not confirmed by science, it is worth noting that in some non-mammalian vertebrates the organ resembling the pineal gland often has cells and tissues very similar to the eye’s photoreceptors. Some early vertebrates had a physical opening through the forehead (a foramina), forming a real third-eye, that was capable of photoreception (sensation of light), and in some species this has been attached to hormone secretion. While the human pineal gland has lost such qualities, only

being aware of changes in natural light via the ‘translation’ of the central nervous system, associations of the pineal gland to the third eye have been around for many centuries.

Calcification and fluoridation of the pineal gland (the build-up of calcium and fluoride within the organ) is often linked to the loss of internal vision and capabilities of internal sight or visualisation. If you do believe or accept that the pineal gland is in fact the anatomical manifestation of the spiritual third eye of inner sight and you find difficulties in visualisation exercises, you should consider changing your diet, excluding substances than can upset your system’s calcium and fluoride balance.

Whether the role of the pineal gland can or cannot be confirmed, visualisation exercises can enormously benefit your meditation practice. If you find it troublesome to visualize things, you are encouraged to practice nevertheless, as this ability can be trained.

To attempt to discuss all possible techniques of visualisation would be like attempting to count the individual sand particles in a desert. There is an infinite number of possibilities and you can create one for yourself every time you decide to practise. Guided meditation usually relies heavily on visualisation and many other meditation techniques use visualisation as an integral part of the practice. The subject of your mental imagery can range from a single object to an elaborate landscape.

Although simple visualisation can be used as a meditation exercise on its own, visualisation is better thought of as a tool, you could integrate into your daily meditation practice, just like the various breathing techniques and exercises. To train your ability of visualisation, and practice a simple form of meditation, a very simple mental imagery exercise may serve the purpose best. ☸

A SIMPLE VISUALISATION EXERCISE

- To start, wear loose fitting clothes, sit comfortably, either cross legged or on a chair, with a straight back, crown up tall. Use the breathing technique of your choice, probably the one you would use for your daily meditation. Simple abdominal breathing would suffice.
- It is advisable to do some sort of preparation, such as OM mantra, Zen contemplation or a short Zen meditation for a few minutes, to calm your mind and emotions.
- Once your mind has quieted somewhat, begin with the imagery: Choose between two objects: a beautiful flower, or a simple white candle.
- Where you place this image is up to you, but the most beneficial would definitely be inside yourself as this will help diverting your attention inwards. The easiest will be probably to place the image inside your head, as this is where it would most probably occur naturally.
- If you are preparing or practising for a more advanced meditation technique, that requires you to direct your attention somewhere else, you should place your mental image right there. This will help to train your mind to keep focusing on the desired area. You might want to place it inside your chest or the abdominal area, it is your choice. Now that you have the image in place, start observing it. Turn all your attention towards the image. Examine it closely.

THE FLOWER

- If it is a flower, ponder over the colours of the petals and the stem. Is the flower perfect? Are there little irregularities? Turn it in your head, examine from every angle. How does the light fall on it? Does it change much as you turn it? Does the light shine on it in a right angle, or is it diffused, equally distributed over it? Does the flower change over time as you examine it, or does it stay the same?
- If the picture is blurred or not sharp enough, you may only need to practice more. Remember, how you have seen your flower and the next time you practise, you can compare the images. Did the new image become sharper?
- Thoughts will come to your head, maybe different pictures or worrying issues. Let them pass, keep focusing on your flower. Do not try to push away your other thoughts or suppress them, simply let them pass. Just keep your attention on the flower, nothing else matters now, the flower must fill all your perception. Nothing else exists for the duration of this exercise.

THE CANDLE

If you choose to go with a candle, you can follow a similar scheme. Imagine the candle, place it where you like, then start observing it. The light comes from the candle, around it: darkness. Do let the light draw you in, draw your attention, but do not let yourself be lost in it. Stay in control. Remain observant.

- First just watch the candle as a whole, observe the warmth of its light, as it stands alone in the darkness around it.
- Next, turn your attention to its body. Is it white? Or does it have some other colour? Is its surface smooth and even, or is it rough and irregular? Are there any motives or decorations carved in it? Is it thin or thick?
- Now move up on the candle onto the flame. Is the flame still or does it quiver? How large is it? Does it give plenty of light or does it just smother, struggling to stay alive?
- When using the candle, you can incorporate an additional exercise, involving your occurring thoughts. Each thought as it comes pressing its way through, trying to grab your attention, would upset the flame of the candle. As the thoughts come, imagine the flame starting to tremble.
- Your aim and goal will be to stabilise the flame. You want the flame to be unmoving, perfect. As each thought comes, the flame trembles again. Do not worry about your thoughts, or about dealing with them. Just watch the flame and focus on it being still.

15-20 minutes practice a day will be sufficient. Do not forget, this is a mental exercise and as such it can potentially be very taxing at first, especially if you are not used to such mental imagery activities and strong focus. You may find yourself tired at the end. Go outside, or exercise a bit. It will refresh your body after sitting and your mind after the hard work.

You will also find that even though your mind may be tired, your stress levels will reduce as all the time you've been busy creating your mental image, your brain had no power left to worry. This simple exercise will teach your mind

discipline and focus, enabling you to engage in more advanced meditation exercises and deepen the practices you might already follow. ☸

A VISUALISATION EXERCISE TO HELP LETTING GO OF THOUGHTS

The following simple exercise is best practised while preparing for any form of meditation, or as a standalone meditation to train your mind for the task of letting go of your thoughts. The setting, the position, and way you are sitting are not important. You can do this whenever you have at least five minutes for yourself. It is also an excellent relaxation method, to quickly quiet your mind of rushing thoughts, when you feel your head is full. Also, practising before bedtime might help falling asleep faster. This method is an excellent way to teach meditation to children as well.

- Close your eyes, and assume a comfortable, least disturbing position. The breathing method you use is not important, simple abdominal breathing is sufficient, just breathe the way you normally would. Do not try to control your breathing, do not try to breathe evenly, just keep breathing naturally.
- Now, turn your attention towards your thoughts. Try to observe your thoughts, as if assuming an outsider's point of view. This may be difficult at first, as you are most likely accustomed to experience your thoughts from 'the inside', but with a little effort and imagination you should soon be able to 'see' them as they come. If you cannot 'see' them as you would like, it is enough to be just aware of their presence.
- Once you have succeeded to view these thoughts as if observing them from outside, you will use mental imagery to be able to let them go easily. As each thought appears, blow a bubble around them. Imagine, and see through your mind's eye some nice colourful bubbles around your thoughts. The colour of the bubble is entirely up to you, use one that you like most and find easiest to keep the image of. They might consist of a single colour or be multi-coloured, like soap bubbles in the sunlight.
- Keep blowing bubbles around every new thought. You will eventually be

able to separate the individual thoughts and mental pictures, each enclosed to its own bubble. See the bubbles fly or float away in any direction, preferably in a way outside of your head, probably thought the top of your head. Once outside, the bubbles can just fade away or burst, letting the thought fly free, far away from you.

- Just keep blowing bubbles around each new thought and let it fly out of your head, out of your mind. Do not worry if new ones keep coming, the goal is not to be thoughtless, just to be able to let them go without attachment or emotional reactions. Practise as long as you feel comfortable or as you have time.

You can do this during the preparation phase of any meditation practice, or any time throughout the day when you feel you should relax a little. You will find this exercise is very refreshing and relaxing for a busy, over-worked mind. The exercise has the additional benefit of strengthening your capability of mental imagery. As colourful bubbles are fun to imagine, this method makes it easy to teach mindfulness, focus and meditation to children. ■

QIGONG MEDITATION

QiGong or Chi Kung essentially means the art and cultivation of internal energy, called Qi or Chi in Chinese. Qi is often represented in the west as the life force itself, the unseen power within, but in traditional Chinese medical terms, Qi means much more than that.

Qi is the name given to the essence of life, consisting of your bloodstream, lymphatic system, the oxygen you breath, digestion and the energy you gain from food (essentially glucose/glycogen), the electrical impulses travelling along the nervous pathways, the electric charge around and inside your cells and an unseen, yet in-measurable power, or life force, science only starts becoming aware of. Qi refers to the collective of every process of your system that keep you alive, whether material or immaterial.

The goal of QiGong meditation on the most basic level is to become aware of your Qi and be able to cultivate it, so you may later learn, how to consciously use it and direct it to where it is needed. The higher goal of QiGong meditation, for the experienced practitioner is no less than spiritual enlightenment, through a process of redirecting a great energy abundance accumulated from within the abdominal region, to the brain. If you are not spiritually inclined, or just don't believe in enlightenment, you may still see the benefits of strengthening your mind in such way, feeding the brain with excess energy and nutrients, enhancing its capabilities, even further than meditation alone would allow.

It is generally advisable to learn Zen meditation first and become to some extent experienced with it, as QiGong meditation shares many similarities with the aforementioned method. It is also necessary to master embryonic breathing

or at least be able to use it without great effort. Being more confident with these basics, you would be able to better concentrate on QiGong meditation itself, which would most possibly require considerable effort at first.

- To start practising, you would sit cross legged, hands in the cosmic mudra position, as described under Zen meditation. Just like with Zazen, cross legged sitting is not essential at first, although you should strive towards it later in your practise. You should definitely cross your legs, whatever way you sit as this is meant to close some energy pathways.
- Sit with a straight back and start with abdominal breathing. You may even want to practise Zazen shortly, as a way of preparation.
- An important detail is the placement of your tongue. You should rest your tongue against your upper palate, where you feel there is a small recess, your tongue fits perfectly into. Keep your tongue up there, your mouth and your teeth closed, but not too tightly. This tongue position is believed to close certain energy channels. Whatever your take on the energy question, experience shows that it certainly helps your meditation, so do not omit this important detail. If you salivate, do not be afraid to swallow anytime during practice. 

LEARNING TO SENSE YOUR QI

- Close your eyes and start practising embryonic breathing. If you are not comfortable with embryonic breathing but have mastered full abdominal breathing, it should be a good substitute, although embryonic breathing would be preferred, as the breathing method traditionally used with QiGong meditation. You should be aware of your lower DanTien and be able to focus on it. If you do not know what this means or do not know where to find it, please refer to the ‘Embryonic breathing’ chapter.
- You can incorporate counting your breaths, similarly to what you would do in Zen meditation practice, once the inverted breathing becomes natural. Although this is not absolutely required, it can aid your concentration if you feel it is necessary.
- As for the emerging thoughts, you should treat them just the same as you would in nearly any other meditation method, letting them pass without lingering over them. Practising a simpler meditation technique of your choice, to quiet your mind just before QiGong meditation, will help to reduce the amount of thoughts that come to disturb.
- Keep your attention at your lower DanTien at first. Observe it closely, feel how it compresses with every inhale, expanding with every exhale. Your DanTien, like a dynamo, creates fresh energy through this process. The closer you observe it, the more aware you will become of this new-found energy within yourself.

Do not rush it, do not try to force it. If you do not feel anything, that is perfectly fine. The energy is there, everything is working perfectly, all you need is more patience. You will have to train yourself to be able to sense it. Your senses might not yet be accustomed to feeling it.

Think of it like this: When you are in a brightly lit room, and somebody suddenly turns the light off, at first you will see nothing. Your eyes will have to

get used to the lower light conditions, as they were accustomed to the abundance of light, but sooner or later you will start to see some shapes and sense the objects around you.

Essentially the same happens during QiGong meditation practice, as you learn to sense something new inside of yourself, where previously other, much stronger sensations would have dimmed this subtle sensation of energy. As you get more used to the quietness inside, these delicate internal sensations become more pronounced if you practise patiently and give it sufficient time.

At first, when you shut off the stimuli from your many senses, when the myriad of sounds and lights and pictures and thoughts disturbing you subside, you will not be able to sense anything. There will probably only be emptiness and your breathing. As you keep practising, you will soon be able to sense previously unknown depths of your body and the energies accumulating in your lower DanTien. This sensation is your Qi, made up of all your bodily processes and internal energy, manifesting itself as a new, previously unknown, yet familiar sensation, you are now ready to explore.

The more your practise, the more easily distinguishable this sensation will become. All you really need to do is to keep a strong focus on your lower DanTien, breathe with a natural pace, using embryonic breathing and keep your mind open. You do already sense the Qi, only you are not aware of it. Such awareness will emerge from the quietness inside, but you will need time.

To attempt to describe the sensation of Qi would be akin to trying to describe the sensation of heat, without using terms like ‘hot’, or ‘warm’. Everybody understands these words and the concept of heat, as they know, what those words mean by experience; yet to explain them to someone who has never felt warmth, could prove very challenging. The sensation will be unique to you and though you may not be able to name it, or describe it, you will know it, when you feel it. Once you are intuitively aware of having the right sensation, that will be the one you will strive to strengthen. Keep practising like this, until you can

easily distinguish the energy abundance accumulating inside.

This will probably not happen anytime soon. You will need to practise for many days, weeks, or even months. Again, dedicating time and effort are the key, and patience is essential. Once you are able to sense this accumulating internal energy with minimal effort, you are ready to move on. ☸

LEARNING TO MANIPULATE YOUR QI

There are various methods and exercises to learn what you can do with this ‘newly found’ Qi now. Some include circulating it in different ways and energy paths, while the ultimate goal would be to find your upper DanTien, that is located in your head and direct the accumulated energy excess there. Though such goals are beyond the scope of this book, the following simple exercise could be easily learned and followed by anyone.

When you are aware of the Qi in your lower DanTien, it is time to connect it to your breathing, although this has most possibly already happened, as it is closely related to your breath. The ‘ball of energy’, or ‘ball of Qi’ as it will be referred to from now on, will shrink as you inhale and it will expand as you exhale.

This is a natural process and it follows the compression and release of your internal organs through the shrinking and expansion of your lower DanTien. This is caused by the breathing technique used, as the inverted inhale compresses your lower body, while during the exhale everything relaxes, allowing for the expansion of the area.

- Try to follow this compression and expansion inside and once you have found it, similarly to the way you have formerly found the sensation of your Qi, you may be able to take control of it.
- As you inhale, try to compress the ball of Qi even further, making it smaller than it would become by itself.
- Similarly, as you exhale, you could try and blow up this ball of Qi, making it bigger with each breath, until it is bigger than your torso, and surrounds your body in an enormous ball of energy.
- Start with small steps, first only observing as the ball changes its size, then slowly, gradually work your way up to making it shrink smaller with each inhale, and grow larger with each exhale.

It may help to think of it as a balloon, into which you breathe air as you exhale

and from which you withdraw air when you inhale, only the amount of air used will continue increasing, so the size of the balloon will change accordingly. This air will be in fact the Qi itself, that consists partly of your breath, but you should not linger on the balloon example very long.

As you inhale, you are not really withdrawing Qi from this ball, but rather compressing the ball itself, as your lower DanTien compresses naturally, as a result of the inverted breathing.

Similarly, as you exhale, you are not really blowing Qi into it, rather just expanding this already accumulated energy, much like an elastic ball would expand, while being released after you invested energy into it by way of compression. This is also in synchrony with the expansion of your lower DanTien as you exhale.

Once you are quite experienced at this, you have already come a long way. You have found your way to sense your own Qi and are able to manipulate it in a way. You can still take the exercise one step further however, if or when you feel comfortable with it.

- When you inhale and the ball of Qi compresses, its centre would be one with that of your lower DanTien.

On each exhale, apart from making the ball bigger, you should try and move its centre upwards, to your solar plexus.

- As you inhale, the ball would move back down, sharing its centre once again with that of the lower DanTien.

Do not be discouraged if this proves rather difficult, even though you have been able to manipulate the size of the ball with relative ease. Moving the ball will require much greater effort.

You may lose the sensation of the ball occasionally, but that is perfectly fine. Just keep practising and the results will come if you are persistent. Some find it

useful to use visualisation techniques to see this ball of Qi, as it will definitely make it easier to cultivate your senses towards being able to feel it. Be careful with visualisation though. The visualised energy ball is only a product of your imagination, and this is not what you are looking for. This is not a mental imagery exercise, or at least it should not be. Using proper visualisation would only *aid* you in finding the *real sensation* of the ball of Qi and you should never forget, that this is what you are really looking for, feeling and sensing the presence of the Qi, not only imagining it.

Mastering these two methods may prove an excellent basis to moving onto more difficult and complex QiGong exercises, or could be a great way of meditation in itself. This is, of course, only the beginning. If further interested, you should seek the advice of an experienced teacher or further research the subject for yourself. ■

ADVANCED MEDITATION METHODS

The following techniques and meditation exercises are probably less well-known and rarely even mentioned in popular sources. These exercises require considerable experience as a meditator and a cultivated ability to obtain and maintain strong focus throughout. These techniques could be treated and used as exercises to aid your regular meditation practice, just like training your mind with advanced methods for even sharper, stronger and longer focus, and they would of course offer enormous benefits as a regular daily practice for those prepared to follow through. ☸

BREATHING IN SYNCHRONY

This is a very interesting meditation method, not very often mentioned and not widely used. This is the only technique described in this book, that is probably best practised as a partner task, although practising alone has its own, slightly different benefits.

HOW TO PRACTISE AS A PARTNER MEDITATION

Practise breathing in synchrony as a partner-meditation with someone who is close to you emotionally, physically or at any other level, be it a relative, spouse, life-partner, child, parent, sibling or even just your neighbour. The eventual goal would be to bring your breathing and thus your heartbeat into complete synchrony. This, at the most basic level, should help you strengthen the feeling of connectedness and togetherness, deepen and reinforce your feelings towards the other, on several levels.

- To start practising as a partner task, both of you should wear comfortable clothing, and sit in front of each other, either cross legged, or otherwise. Choose a breathing technique, you both are most comfortable with, be it abdominal breathing, embryonic breathing or square breathing, just make sure you are using the same method.

Only symmetrical breathing techniques will work for this meditation. All breathing methods described in this book are perfectly suitable, but if you choose to use a method learned from a different source, you should keep this important detail in mind. Certain breathing techniques call for longer exhales than inhales, or longer inhales than exhales, and some would instruct you to pause your breath after exhale, but do not hold your breath after inhale, or the other way around. Such techniques will *not* work for this way meditation, as every action requires a mirror action, that your partner can do synchronously.

If you choose to go with the breathing techniques described and discussed

in this book, feel free to use any one of them, as those could all be considered ‘symmetrical’.

- Start calming your minds. As always, a short meditation practise of your choice might be beneficial as a way of preparation, be it Zazen, the OM mantra, mental imagery or anything you feel most comfortable with.
- Once you have both reached the desired inner calmness, begin focusing your attention on your partner’s breathing, while not completely neglecting your own. Watch your partner breathe.
- Inhalations and exhalations should be apparent through many visible signs, be it the shoulders rising and dropping, or the navel expanding and flattening again. Whatever breathing method you are using, let your experience guide you.
- Once having closely observed your partner’s every breath, and you are fairly certain you can distinguish inhales, exhales and holding of the breath, or pausing after exhale, start to synchronise your own breathing to that of your partner. Although this might already have happened to some extent, do not go through the same cycle, try not to mirror the breathing of the other, but rather do the opposite of what your partner does.
- When your partner inhales, you should exhale. When they exhale, you should inhale. If your partner holds the breath after an inhale, you should pause after the exhale, if your partner pauses after exhale, you should hold your breath after inhaling.

To be able to reach a perfect synchrony, you should both be experienced in the chosen breathing technique and be able to use it without considerable effort, keeping a good rhythm.

- Once your breaths are in considerable synchrony, it is time to use some mental imagery. This mental imagery includes visualising yourself to have

inhaled the air your partner just exhaled. Once you exhale this air, your partner will inhale it, at least in your mind. Imagine, you are both sharing the same air, exchanging it continuously.

- Imagine, the air you are exchanging is your life force, it is your living energy, your Qi if you like, that you are exchanging with your partner, sharing it with them and experiencing together. Keep on practising and *do* let yourself be carried away by these mental images, although not as much as you would lose focus on each other's breathing. You are on the way to a wonderful emotional experience.

To bring a deeper meaning to your practice and if you are fairly comfortable with keeping your breaths in synchrony, you can add some further imagery to the exercise, involving exchanging good emotions or turning each other's negativity into good. You can do this in any of the four ways presented below, in order of increasing difficulty.

All four methods described here, could be incorporated into a single meditation session, if you have considerable experience, and sufficient time at hand. To do that, you would go through each in order, following a pre-agreed time-scale or some sign to know, when you should both step onto the next level. If your connectedness is already so strong that you can feel each other's intent, these pre-agreed times or signs may be omitted permanently.

MINDING YOUR OWN EMOTIONS

The first and probably easiest way would be, to let your partner turn any negativity inside yourself into good and give it back to you. This would strengthen the feeling of being cared for in both of you.

- As you exhale, you would exhale all your tension and negative feelings and thoughts.
- At the same time, you would imagine your partner inhale these and turn them into positive feelings, thoughts and emotions for you; then exhale them, so that you can inhale these good things again.
- In the meantime, in your partner's mind, you would be turning their negative feelings and emotions into good and exhaling it back to them to be taken in through breathing.
- You should both be concentrating on your own emotions, as they pass through your partner and yourself.
- You would ideally continue this, until you have nothing bad, or negative to exhale, and neither does your partner. When you reach this point, you can enjoy all the good you exchange between each other as long as you like, or move on to the next level.

MINDING YOUR PARTNER'S EMOTIONS

To make it more difficult, you can choose to turn the above exercise upside down. Instead of giving away your tension and stress and letting your partner deal with them, you can choose to consciously take in your partner's negative emotions and worries, and turn them into good for them in yourself. This will be a lot more advanced and difficult to follow, but it will strengthen the feeling of caring for others and selflessness in general.

- Imagine, that with each breath, your partner exhales all their negative emotions, and worries, all the tension they have, all the bad feelings. You would inhale all these bad things and, through love and compassion, turn

them into good, clean them and exhale it all back as good.

- You would then watch your partner taking all this goodness in, through their inhalations.
- Your partner, in the meantime, would be busy with your negative emotions. In their mind, they would inhale your negativity and turn it into good, exhaling it back to you.
- Continue this, until you feel your partner has given away all their negativity and all they have left is positive emotions.
- If that happens, just enjoy exchanging all things good between each other. It would take true compassion and connectedness, to be able to sense your partner being rid of all negativity within them.

If you choose to follow one of the above methods, it important, that both you and your partner would follow the chosen path, either minding your own emotions or those of each other.

BOTH MINDING ONLY ONE OF YOU

You can combine the two methods described above into an even more advanced exercise. You and your partner can agree whose emotions you should both be concentrating on. For this example you will start with your own emotions, as this way will be easier to follow. It will strengthen the feeling of being cared for in yourself and the feeling of selflessness and caring in your partner.

- Exhale, and with it let go of all negativity, bad feelings and stress, giving them all to your partner.
- Imagine your partner inhaling these and turning them into good for you,
- In your partner's mind they should do exactly the same: Inhaling all your negativity and turning them into good for you, then exhaling it all back. This way, you would both be minding your emotions and cleaning your

negative feelings turning them into good.

- When you have nothing more negative to get rid of and you both feel it, you should switch roles and do the same for your partner. Now you would be taking in their negative emotions, turning them all to good, while they would be busy letting their negativity exit their minds through their exhales, inhaling all good things you give them.

FOCUSING ON POSITIVE EMOTIONS ONLY

If the above proves challenging, or does not feel right to let your partner take in anything negative from you and prefer to only enjoy the positive emotions you have towards each other; or if you have both gone through all the desired stages and want to enjoy the exchange of goodness between yourselves; the final step of the four levels described here, will allow for just that.

You will both focus on exhaling all good things, not meaning to let go of your positivity, but to give all those to your meditation partner. This can be love, compassion, gratefulness or just general good-will, anything you like, or care to give to each other. This could further strengthen the feeling of caring love and compassion towards others.

- Exhale everything you have to give to the person sitting in front of you. The closer you are emotionally, the easier this may be, but do not neglect the importance of this exercise even if your meditation partner is not so close to your heart. Find positivity inside yourself towards this person and show it to them through your exhalations.
- Your partner would inhale these and exhale in a similar manner, all the good that they mean for you, which you will inhale in turn.

BEING TRULY IN SYNCHRONY

If you practise long enough, another phenomenon may occur, although you might not be consciously aware of it at the time, it will certainly be felt by both of you: Your heartbeats are soon going to come into synchrony as well.

The reason for this is very simple: Your breathing has a direct impact on your heart-rate. It is the same area in your brain that holds the centres regulating both heart-rate and breathing and it has also much to do with the amount of gas being exchanged in your bloodstream.

The similar rhythm of breathing will aid your bodies to regulate your heartbeats a similar way. Having similar thoughts and focusing on similar subjects or emotions will help your brainwaves to come to synchrony, and such similarities in your emotional and mental states will further aid your hearts to synchronise.

If you are thus inclined, you will certainly find this a deeply spiritual experience, but even if you only regard it as an interesting biological fact, it is undeniable, that synchronising your heartbeats this way, will strengthen the feeling of connectedness with your chosen meditation partner.

Keep breathing in synchrony for a pre-agreed length of time, or until both you and your partner are comfortable with it. If you practise often and long enough, you may even be able to sense in each other, when it is time to move on.

Do not be afraid to communicate with your partner however, especially in the beginning, do not expect them to read your mind straight away. Building up such awareness of the other takes time. Also, the time spent together in this exercise could become a great way to get closer to each other.

There is of course much more to practising this method, the basics described here might only be the beginning for some. If you and your partner engage in practising QiGong or any sort of ‘energy exercise’, be it TaiQi, Reiki, etc., you could take a step further and exchange more than just breaths.

Of course this is beyond the scope of this book and it probably would not be of everyone's interest. Feel free to experiment, do not let yourself be caught up in what is considered traditional. Your practice will take you as far as you are willing to go.

HOW TO PRACTISE ON YOUR OWN

There is, of course, a way to practise synchronous breathing meditation alone. If you do not find a suitable partner, your usual partner is not available and you still would like to practise, or you merely wish to practise on your own, there is a way to do this in perfect solitude.

You will probably require some aid, although it is not at all necessary. It is up to you how exactly you will set your environment up. The easiest way is, to take a plain sheet of paper and draw or print a dot, approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch in diameter, on the very middle of it.

- Fix this paper up on the wall, a piece of furniture, or anything that can hold it, right in front of you, approximately at the height of your eyes, as far a distance away, as your partner would sit, or you would prefer your partner to sit.
- Start your meditation, exactly as it is described above, only replacing your partner with the dot. This would include some mental imagery, you will have to visualise this dot to be 'breathing'.
- Whenever you exhale, the dot inhales it, and whatever the dot exhales, you would inhale. This may sound strange, but it is a great mental exercise nevertheless, requiring serious concentration and focus, enhancing the benefits and effects of regular meditation.
- Whether you will involve any emotional cleansing or turning bad things into good, is only up to you. Any or all of the previously described methods could be practised with the dot only, although it might prove a lot more challenging to do so.
- You can further evolve this method, once you are comfortably able to

follow it with the drawn or printed dot. You can take the dot off the wall, or whatever holds it, and continue fixing your attention on something else, using the same visualisation of it breathing in synchrony with you.

- If you need even more challenge, or feel like you are capable of something much more advanced, you can either close your eyes, or keep them open, and imagine something that is not there, be it a dot, an object, or even your partner.

This might be easier if you normally have a regular meditation partner you practise this method with, but it is not by any means necessary. If you can visualise someone sitting in front of you, breathing with you in synchrony, the focus and concentration to maintain this exercise will present its positive benefits in a very short time.

If you choose to go with a visualised partner and you are able to maintain focus at such high level, you may even try to include some of the additional exercises found above. Again, you only set your own limits, the possibilities of the technique are endless. 

MANDALA MEDITATION

The term ‘mandala’ originates from Sanskrit, meaning ‘circle’. These elaborate pictures or diagrams have long been used as a meditation aid in various ways in different cultures, most particularly in Hinduism and Buddhism. There are a great variety of mandalas, differing in shape, colour, pattern, religious meaning and importance; so many in fact, that this book will not be able to even attempt to introduce them properly.

The use of mandalas can be as varied as mandalas themselves are. Mandalas could aid religious practices, simple meditation, could be the subject of focus or even that of contemplation, as the practitioner contemplates the deeper meaning of a form, diagram, colours or symbolism. Creating mandalas could also become a meditation practice, as it requires strong and undivided focus and attention.

An interesting and somewhat unusual mandala and its use will be introduced and discussed below. Although the shape proposed here is rather simple, the principle of the method described and discussed next, resembles certain mandala-meditation practices rather closely.

OBSERVING YOURSELF THOUGH THE ‘OUTER-EYE’

A non-conventional method is observing the eye that is observing you. This technique will possibly require the greatest amount of focus and concentration and could be regarded as the most esoteric, advanced and probably mystical of all methods described in this book, as it has the potential to aid you into experiencing extra-sensory perception.

Of course it will only become truly mystical if you believe in such phenomena and it can always be explained by more earthly means. Neither type of explanation will be offered here, but, as always, you are encouraged to experience it first-hand. It will become eventually nothing less than what you shape it for yourself.

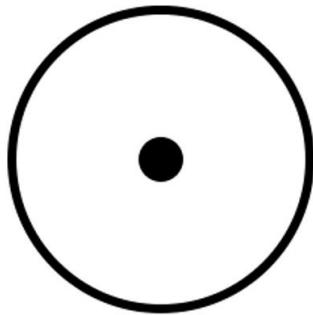
As much as the previous technique described had an aim of strengthening the feeling of connectedness, this method does help you connect to yourself through disconnecting from yourself. This might sound like an abstract idea. As it is difficult to explain such experiences, your personal understanding through practice is most encouraged.

This technique will require great mental power and will be most exhaustive. This is not a relaxing meditation by any means. It is very time consuming and taxing, but a very interesting one nevertheless, and it is much worth the effort. Not everybody is capable of achieving its final goal at first, most people would require repeated sessions and much devotion.

Practising other meditation techniques, to sharpen your focus and some sort of mental imagery meditation, to enhance your capabilities of visualisation is very much advisable, as you will rely heavily on both of these abilities in this meditation technique.

Unlike most other methods, this meditation will be explained from a perspective of how you might experience it, as you go through the steps. Having some idea of what it is likely to be, would probably be the most effective way to recreate it in your own mind. Please note, you will need one or two hours on average, while some people require considerably less, some would need considerably longer, to complete this meditation.

Do not attempt the below method, if you have any objection of what you have read, or if you would not be comfortable to seriously exhaust yourself over such a long time. This is really for the seasoned meditator, who is looking for a new experience, or to deepen their practice. Just like heavy weight lifting is the most effective method of strengthening your muscles, taxing mental tasks, such as the one described below, will definitely strengthen your mind, although it comes at a price of being difficult, exhausting and time-consuming.



Example of the schematic eye used in the exercise

To begin, you will need a prop, specifically a piece of paper, with a circle drawn or printed on the middle. Inside the circle right in the centre, there should be a dot. This simple image of the concentric dot and circle will function as a schematic eye.

Some advantages of this schematic picture, over using the picture of a real eye, or something resembling it more closely, is the ultimate simplicity of the image. It is easy to make and reproduce, for repeated use, even if you lose, or misplace it, the differences between the pictures will not distract your attention.

Also, a well-drawn eye will have so many details, observing it might distract your attention, as your mind wanders about the drawing. A schematic eye makes it easier to just accept it to be an eye and get on with the practice.

HOW TO PRACTICE

- As always, sit comfortably, wearing loose fitting clothes. Place your paper in front of you, fixing it on the wall, or any object, approximately at the height of your eyes.
- Choose your breathing technique, whichever you feel most comfortable with. Calm your mind and thoughts, use any other meditation method if necessary, as a way of preparation.
- Once your focus is sufficiently strong, fix your gaze on the eye in front of you. Never for a moment let your breathing slip away from your attention, but direct more and more of your mind's power over the eye in front. Sit for a while, contemplating the eye and your breathing.
- When you feel ready, turn *all* your attention towards the eye. Watch it, as it watches you, gaze at it, try to look into it. Imagine it being a real eye that is observing you, with the same sharp focus as you are observing it with.
- Watch and contemplate how the eye is watching you. Observe the attention of the eye, the intent, the focus, the way it is watching you. You have to accept the eye having its own life.
- Although you might remain conscious that this is in fact only happening in your own mind, let the idea take over your perception. Now you and the eye are watching each other, both focused deeply contemplating one another. The eye is ‘doing’ the same as you are.
- Try to familiarise yourself with the idea, that the eye is in fact focusing hard to visualize, that you are watching it. From the eye’s point of view, you are just a figure, sitting in front of it. As far as the eye is concerned, it is watching you. The eye is in fact trying to visualize that you are watching it. Try to place yourself in the eye’s position. Linger on the idea, contemplating how the eye is trying hard to envisage your own effort.

- Now, you are starting to *become* the eye. Focus sharply, on the idea, that you *are* in fact the eye. The fact, that you have created the eye and you are now creating the imagery that it is watching you, makes the eye part of you. The eye is part of you, it is your eye.

You are the eye now, watching yourself. You see yourself from the eye's point of view, sitting in front of you and watching yourself.

This will be the hardest part and the most difficult to achieve for most. Do not rush, do not force it. If you practise enough, it will eventually just happen, and this is exactly what you are looking for. You need to keep your mind open, strive for this result, and accept the possibility that it could happen, even if in your mind only.

It is now time to contemplate, observe yourself. All the little details. How do you see yourself? What does it feel like to see yourself like this? Pay close attention to your emotions as they emerge. Observe yourself closely, how and what you see, and contemplate your observations.

- When you feel it's time to finish, come back into your own mind, leave the eye, seeing it once again just as a drawing on the paper. Then close your eyes, once more calm your thoughts and emotions. Such experience can be quite disturbing at first. Then finish your meditation, as you usually would.

It is impossible to prepare for the experience of seeing yourself from the outside. It is nothing like seeing a mirror or photograph. There is a chance that upon the first successful attempt, the impression this makes on you will be so intense, that you will instantly lose the sensation. Do not allow yourself to be discouraged, the more you practise, the easier this will become.

Of course this short description is a rather condensed interpretation of the

experience. If you choose to go through the meditation, you will spend a considerably longer time at each of these stages. You will need much patience and persistence to reach your goal, but you will be capable of it, regardless of what you would have previously thought. If you chose to give this method a try, the most important part is never to give up. ☸

OPENING THE CROWN CHAKRA: A MEDITATION FOR SPIRITUAL CONNECTEDNESS

The following meditation method has its origins in the yogic traditions of India. Originally this method has been developed to open one's 'crown chakra', thought to be found on the top of the head, often referred to as the crown, enabling the spirit to leave the body and connect to the higher realms of the spiritual world.

This method will probably prove to be very difficult to follow, requiring considerable practice and experience as a meditator. You should be fairly confident with several other meditation methods to be able to successfully practise this technique and experience what it has to offer at the highest level.

Needless to say, such mystical goals may not be appealing for everybody. While some will regard this method as the ultimate experience of connecting to the spiritual world, others may see it as a way of self-hypnosis or connecting to their subconscious, intuitive self. Whatever your view, the experience is certainly worth the effort.

Set aside a considerable amount of time for practice. This exercise can be very time consuming, ranging anywhere from 30 minutes to several hours. If it sounds scary to sit in meditation for so long, you are not yet ready for this exercise. You should then practise more basic methods, until you feel more confident.

- Sit in a comfortable position, preferably cross legged, but sitting in a chair would suffice as well. Wear loose fitting clothes and ensure that you are as free of distractions as your environment allows.
- You may choose to use music to filter out the background noise, or a pair of earplugs, but preferably you would be in complete silence. Whichever way you choose, it is imperative that nothing disturbs you during

meditation, this method will require your fullest attention.

- Your hand should either rest in your lap in the cosmic mudra position (see the ‘Zen meditation’ chapter for details), or on your thighs in chin mudra (see the ‘OM mantra’ chapter for details).
- Prepare yourself for meditation with your usual method, be it Zen contemplation, Zen meditation or OM mantra or anything else you prefer. Continue as long as you feel necessary, for your mind to become quiet. You would ideally have as much experience in meditation, as quieting your mind would not require longer than 5-10 minutes. There is still a long journey before you, so be mindful of the time you spend on preparation.
- Now, choose your preferred breathing technique. You should use one, that does not interfere with your focus, such as you can maintain naturally, without effort. Simple abdominal breathing is sufficient, but if you would like to go with a more advanced method, it is really up to your preference.
- If you chose to begin with Zen contemplation, you should continue with Zen meditation from here. If you started with OM mantra, you can continue practising, although it is much preferred that you keep chanting only internally.
- If you have chosen to practice QiGong meditation, you can continue in that manner as well. (Only follow that method if you are sufficiently experienced in it and you have probably even researched and experienced it deeper than the basics, this book can offer.)
- If you are using any other method for of preparation, it is now time to move on.

Mental imagery will play an important role in this meditation later on, therefore it may be also beneficial to proceed with a mental imagery exercise, but only if you are able to maintain this image while focusing on the

technique described here.

- As you continue your preferred meditation practise, now direct your attention to the inside of your head, never losing focus on your meditation.
- Turn your eyes upwards in their sockets. Such eye position is used for different meditation techniques, by traditional shamans to attain their state of raze and even during hypnosis or self-hypnosis, as the subject's attention would be drawn to something that forces them to look upwards. This eye position fatigues the muscles of your eyes and is believed to help direct your attention inwards. Look up, as much as you comfortably can. You should not experience pain or extreme discomfort, only mild fatigue of the eyes themselves.
- Keep your chosen meditation practice sharp all the time. Your attention should be shared between your breathing (if you are practising Zazen), your mantra (OM, or any other), your mental image, or anything you chose to focus on – and the inside of your head.
- While never losing attention of your original object of focus, you should slowly divert most of your attention towards your head now. Your eyes are looking upwards and so should your focus. Observe the top of your skull from the inside, as if you have had an eye in the centre of your head.
- If you are using mental imagery, you may as well change the object of your image into an eye inside your head that is looking upwards. Instead of observing the eye itself, you should use this eye in your head and see through it, see what the eye sees. It is now your eye, an eye in your head, observing your skull from below.
- Keep this practice, until you feel a sort of swirling motion in your head or at the top of your head. It may or may not happen for the first time.

Becoming aware of this slight movement is your first goal during this

exercise and it may require several practice sessions to get here.

- Once you become aware of this movement, focus all your attention to the motion. Do not try to resist it, just go with it. If your head feels like moving, let it move. If your head feels like moving in an increasingly large motion, all the better. Be inside the movement, become one with it.
- You may want to come back several times to this practise, for many days or weeks. Just staying here, becoming more and more aware of the movement, deepening the motion and living in it, will be the way to practise for the next couple of times you sit down to practise, until the movement becomes more pronounced, less flat and more three dimensional.
- If the movement in, on or of your head becomes more shaped in three dimensions, most like a doughnut or a torus, you are in fact now sensing the movement of your own crown chakra.

Having a sensation of the crown chakra and its movement may only be a first step on a long journey. According to some traditions, through this portal of energy one may leave their body, to take on spiritual journeys, or visit different worlds and realms.

Whether such experiences be true or appealing to you or not, by the time you would have ventured so far, you will certainly have more and probably more detailed guides on the subject than this short introduction can offer. Whatever your belief or understanding dictates, such mental exercise will be beneficial all the same.

Do not be surprised if your own sensations are not matching to what you have read or previously learned of chakras in general or of the crown chakra itself. You may have expected to see some colour, hear a sound, see or feel a different shape. You are not doing anything wrong, if your experience differs from your expectations. You must bear in mind, this is a most personal experience and as such it is unique to each practitioner. In fact, if your experience differs to some

degree from what you have previously known, is a sure sign that you are on the right path and your experience is more real, less imaginary or dependant on other people's descriptions.

To proceed, it is probably best to follow your own intuition and go wherever it may take you. If you are able to proceed, whatever comes next could be more time consuming than any other method you have previously tried. Further researching the yogic traditions of India will of course give you an idea of what you may use this newly discovered gate of awareness for. ■

FINISHING MEDITATION: SELF MASSAGE

When you have finished meditation, do not stand up too quickly. Sitting for a long time, especially cross-legged, your blood circulation will have to be revived in all your body, mainly in your legs. The following sequence can be repeated after sitting meditation practice, regardless of the technique or method used.

This is only a proposed sequence that, although working quite well, could be expanded or even shortened, according to your individual needs and preferences. Experiment and find the way most suitable for yourself. Some of the movements described are gentle stretches and others will serve to move a limb or joint(s), restoring mobility and circulation after the long period of sitting.

Whenever you do a stretch, you should do so gently. No pain should be felt, and only a minimal discomfort. Your muscles are most likely tense and you are not warmed up. Too much or too forceful stretching could easily lead to injury. Even if you are usually flexible, after sitting for a longer period, especially sitting cross-legged, some muscles will be temporarily shortened. The stretches described here serve to return these muscles to their original lengths or as close to it as possible. These exercises must never be mistaken for stretches of flexibility, even if you regularly engage in such exercise. Please perform every movement slowly and with gentle care.

THE PROPOSED SEQUENCE

- Once you've finished your meditation practice, if you have had your eyes closed do not open them immediately. First, start moving the fingers of your hands, drawing three to five little circles in the air, with each finger, one by one.
- Next, make a fist with both your hands, and curl your toes up, then release and open your hands, stretching them out, while flexing your toes back. Repeat three times.

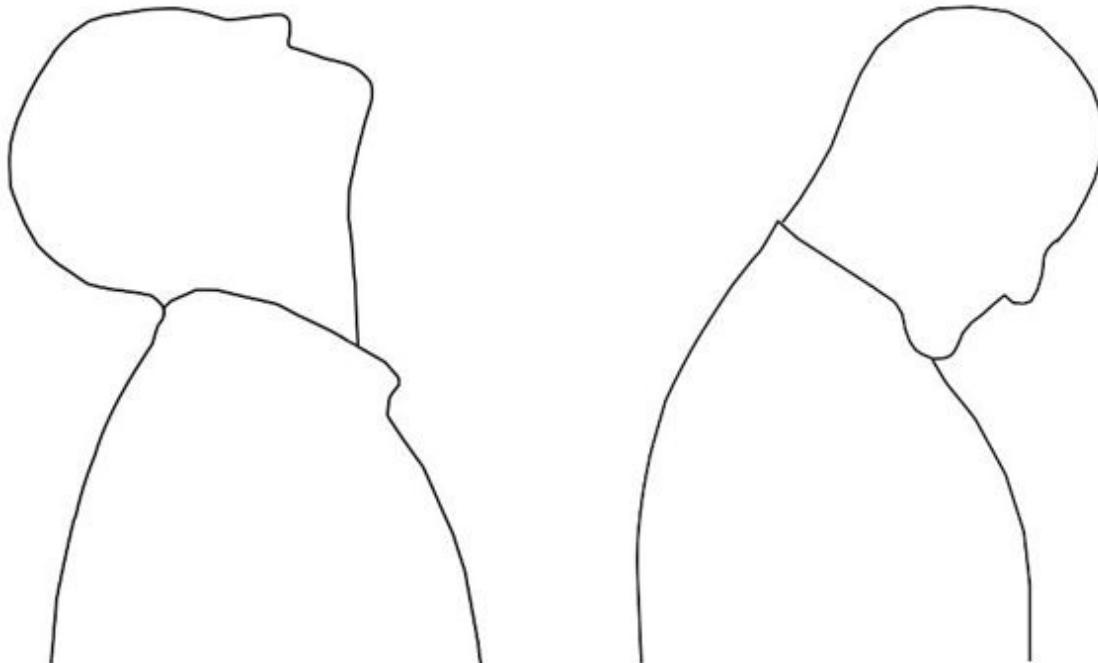
The following eye and neck movements include no stretching, only gently moving the joints and muscles. Please make sure you do not feel a stretch as you go through the movements, do not move forcefully. Always use caution, the neck is very easy to get injured.

- Now open your eyes, if they were closed, and turn them into every direction a few times. Look up with your eyes only, without moving your head, as high as you can without hurting.
- Pause there for a moment then look down, still keeping your head steady, only turning with your eyes, try to look at your own mouth.
- Pause there for a second, then look up again then down, repeating the whole sequence three times in total.
- Next, try to look over your left shoulder, with your eyes only, still keeping your head looking straight ahead.
- Pause for a moment, then turn your eyes over the right shoulder, head steadily looking ahead, then repeat this sequence for three times in total.

When you pause, looking either way, do not linger there, do not strain your eyes. It is more important to keep your eyes moving, so each pause should

really only be for a moment.

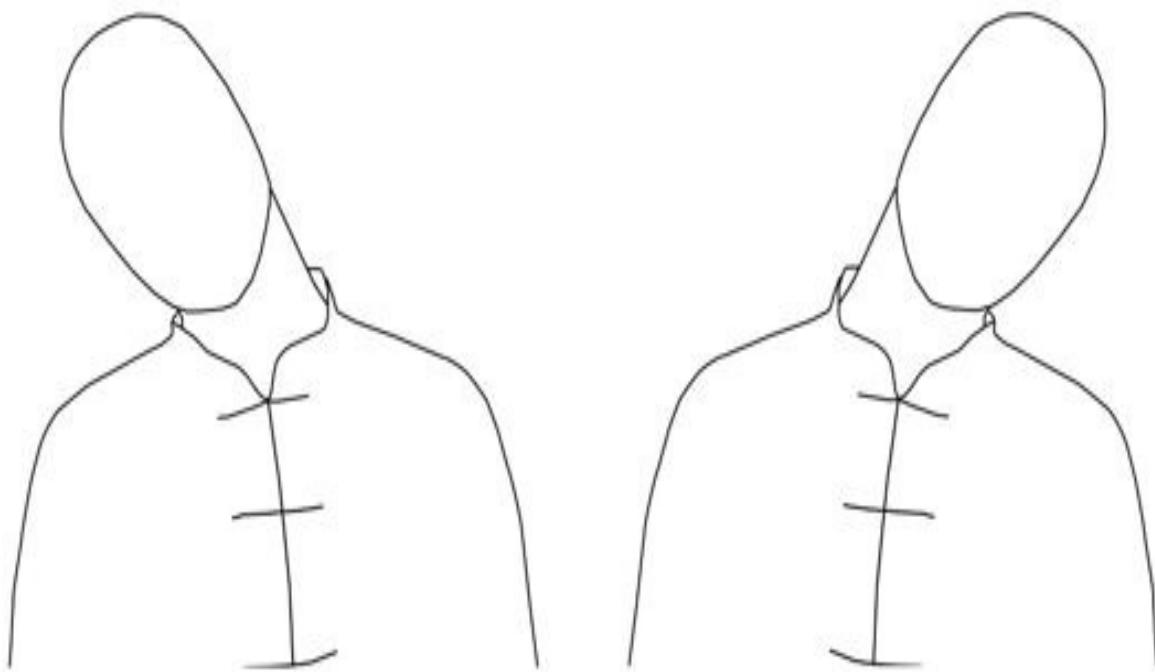
- Once you've finished, do circles with your eyes. First look up, then to the right, then down then to the left. Repeat for a total of three to five circles, trying to move your eyes as smoothly as possible, not pausing in any position.
- Once you've finished, start making the circles in the other direction for the exact same count. If you feel dizziness or discomfort, stop immediately.
- The head and neck will follow a similar pattern. First tilt your head backwards, keeping your back straight, trying to reach your upper back with the back of your head. Do not force it, only go as far as comfortable.
- Pause there for a moment, then tilt your head forward, try to touch your chest with your chin, keeping your back straight. Remember, these are not stretches, only movement, to aid and restore the blood circulation in your neck and head, so do not force them into stretching your neck. Do three to five forwards-backwards head-tilts.



Tilt your head backwards and forwards three to five times. Be careful, not to stretch your neck, and to move your head smoothly

This is followed by sideways movement. Tilt your head to the left, while looking straight ahead. Imagine, you want to touch your left shoulder with your left ear. Do not stretch your neck on the opposite side, and do not try to lift your shoulder, only tilt your head gently sideways.

- Pause at the bottom-most position, that you can reach without stretching your neck, and move your head to the right in a similar fashion. Remember to move slowly. Do the same amount of repetitions as you did on the forward–backward tilt.



Tilt your head sideways, ears moving towards your left and right shoulders, three to five times. Be careful, not to stretch your neck, and to move your head smoothly

If you feel any dizziness or other discomfort, stop here and skip to rubbing your hands. If you are still comfortable, you can proceed with neck circles

Once you've done tilting your head, it is time to put the movements together into circles, similarly as you have done with your eyes.

- First, tilt your head forward, trying to touch your chest with your chin. From here, without raising your head, move to the sideways tilt position,

to your right shoulder.

- Do not pause there, but move on immediately to the backward-tilted position, from where you will proceed to the left, then finishing the circle tilting your head back down forward.
- The whole movement should feel like rolling your head around your neck and on your upper body, even though you may not actually touch any part of your body with it. Do three full circles in each direction, stopping immediately if you feel dizzy or have any other discomfort.
- Now, start rubbing your palms together, until they are hot. Once they are hot, put them over your eyes, covering them perfectly. Keep your eyes open. You should not be able to see any light.
- Do not put pressure on the eyes, just place your palms firmly *around* them. Keep them on for three breaths. Repeat from rubbing your hands together, three times. Your eyes should feel relieved and re-energised.
- Start to massage your face, with your palms and fingertips. Start from your forehead, making small circles with both hands, then around your eyes and the eyebrows, down the cheeks and to the chin.
- Go with one hand above your head, pressing against your scalp rub down from the top of your head, through the back of your head, right down the neck, followed immediately with the other hand in a similar fashion. Repeat three times.
- Massage the back of your neck, with both hands and fingertips, moving up and down, following the muscles, then in circular movements.
- Lastly, massage under and behind your ears.
- When you are ready, make a fist with both of your hands behind your back, and massage in a circular motion, both of your kidneys and your lower back. Do nine circles in both directions.
- Now stretch out one of your legs. You will likely have a tingling sensation

after the long sitting. Massage your calf and work your way up, then massage your thigh. Repeat with the other leg.

If you are fairly flexible, you can attempt the following stretch (remember that you will probably have lost some of your usual flexibility):

- Stretch out one leg right in front of you, while drawing the other up, as if you were to sit cross-legged. Your sole should touch your inner thigh.
- You can hold this position, if you already feel a stretch in your hamstrings (the back of your thigh). It probably helps if you grab a hold of the foot touching your inner thigh with the hand on the same side, while pushing down on the straight knee with the other hand.



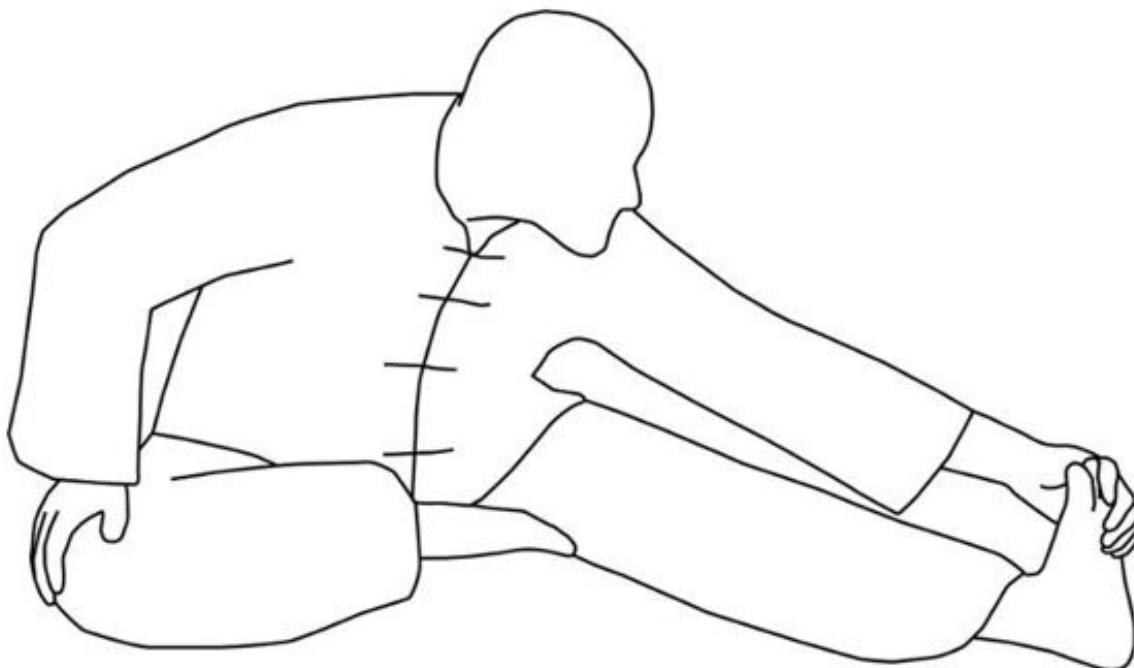
Draw up one foot, so that the sole touches your inner thigh, while keeping your opposite leg stretched out. It helps, if you grab onto the drawn up foot with the same-side hand, while gently pushing the other knee down

- If you feel comfortable and feel no stretch in this position, you can attempt to reach the toes of your stretched out leg with the hand on the same side (i.e. if you are stretching your left leg, you should use your left hand).

It is very important, that the gentle stretch should be in your hamstrings (back of your thigh) and/or your gluteal muscles (your buttocks), but *never* your lower

back. If you feel your back being stretched this way, stop immediately and either adjust your position or revert to a less advanced stage. To make sure you are not stretching your lower-back too much, keep your back straight at all times, tighten your abdomen, and slightly withdraw your belly. If you still feel the stretching in your lower back, abandon this step entirely.

- It does not matter how deep you go, it only matters that the right body part should get gently stretched, that is your buttocks and/or the back of your thighs. When you have assumed the right position, hold the stretch for one to three breaths and repeat on the other side.



From the previous position, reach forward for your toes, while pushing the opposite knee down (now the bent knee) with the free hand. This would add a gentle stretch to your calf. Never stretch your lower back in this position, it should either bend smoothly, or rather try to bend your upper back in a hunch. Keep your abdomen tight and drawn in.

Remember: you will have lost some of your usual flexibility after the prolonged sitting

If you practice yoga, or have some favourite stretches, you can include them here, while keeping in mind that your flexibility will have temporarily suffered, so you may not be able to get into the stretches with the usual depth or intensity. If you have no more stretches to do, you can now stand up slowly and

carefully. ■

PART 4

MOVING MEDITATION

THE IMPORTANCE OF MOVEMENT

Meditation is not only practised sitting. While the most commonly known techniques are those of sitting meditation, others can be practised in or through movement, laying down, or in many different postures, as you might see in yoga.

Even though sitting meditation offers great benefits for both mental and physical health, prolonged sitting has its drawbacks. Sitting is one of the most unnatural ways, you can hold your body. Too much sitting weakens the bones and muscles, stiffens the joints and weakens the lower back and may eventually lead to back-pain. Sitting too much also weakens the heart, has adverse side-effects on the cardio-respiratory system, digestion, and almost all other bodily systems recognised by western medicine, and even on those only known, or accepted by eastern traditions.

Sitting on a chair or sofa is completely unnatural and anatomically damaging. Sitting encourages the total relaxation of the abdominal wall, that leads to a collapse of the ribcage. The many abdominal muscles have an essential role in maintaining an upright posture, but while sitting too much, these muscles become lazy. This leads to bad breathing practices and as the spine and the muscles of the lower back take over the role of the abdominal muscles, many people experience lower-back pain. Too much sitting can be held responsible for many different health issues, people usually would not directly connect with sitting. Modern science has also found, too much sitting will shorten one's life significantly.

While most of these adverse effects can be easily countered with adequate preparation and after-practice stretching, movement in general is absolutely essential in maintaining good health. The human body was designed for movement, yet many people sit almost all day long. Of course, practising sitting

meditation is not the real problem. Twenty to sixty minutes sitting a day may even be healthy. Modern societies however, are increasingly shifting towards a seated lifestyle. Sitting at home in the morning, then in the car or public transport on the way to work, sitting at work, unless doing physical labour, sitting on the way home, then sitting at home once again, seems to describe an average day for many people.

It is not only sitting itself that is or can become problematic, but the lack of quality movement in general. Even though you may have a job where you stand all day long, or one that involves some – usually repetitive – movement, this would often also have its own negative side effects: No, or ineffective movement can be damaging to the joints, the bones, muscles, the internal organs, the circulatory system, the heart, the lungs, the immune system and digestion, cognitive function and the central nervous system in general.

If you regularly move the ‘right way’, you will maintain the health of all of the above, nourish your body and mind with fresh oxygen, better circulate the nutrients ingested, through more effective flow of blood, lymph and Qi, helping the body to maintain its overall health and repair any damage suffered, more effectively.

Your joints need movement to maintain the healthy levels of synovial fluid, a natural lubricant in joint structures. Muscles need movement to maintain their function. Your heart will pump faster during and after exercise, helping to maintain its health. The increased blood-flow, respiratory rate, neuro-mucluar activity, among the many benefits of moving right, all work together to keep a healthy body and mind and let you live a healthier, happier and longer life.

The importance of moving seems obvious, but if you have little time to move or exercise, you could incorporate some meditation practices into the movement, or some movement into your meditation practices, to further enhance the quality and benefits of both your movement and your meditation practice.

There are several ways to incorporate meditation into movement, with different additional benefits, each has to offer. There are certain methods

practised traditionally with the intention of doing meditation, yet other activities may become meditation through the right mind setting, during practice. ■

WALKING MEDITATION

The simplest form of moving meditation is probably walking meditation. Walking is one of the most primal activities. People learn to walk at an early age, and look at walking as natural thereafter, regarding it as little more than the most basic way of transport.

Walking however, has great health benefits. With enough walking daily, most of the aforementioned negative effects of sitting can be countered. Walking is good for your heart, your lungs, your muscles, tendons and bones and even helps to keep your joints healthy. Walking, as one of the most underrated human activities, could also be incorporated into your meditation practice.

There are several ways of walking meditation, practised traditionally, while you may as well create your own, unique way or method. Walking meditation can be practised indoors, or outside in the nature, in the city, and even in a small room, with limited space, if there is room enough to take a few steps.

The basic principle of different walking meditations appears to be the same: walking itself. Knowing what meditation really means, an important question is, where to put your focus during a walk? The place or direction of focus is, in fact, the greatest difference between walking meditation practices, not the setting, length, or room, you may walk in.

When practising walking meditation, the focus can be on several different things. You can focus on breathing, it can be the environment, it can be the experience of walking itself, where the focus is on your soles, and it can even be the rhythm of walking. The following methods will describe some of the simplest forms or possibilities, but you are not limited to these simple

techniques. Feel free to follow your intuition during practice to help you discover the way you should be walking. ☸

WALKING ‘YOUR WAY’

It is easy to turn any casual stroll into walking meditation, the most important thing is to find your own way of practising, that you could regularly repeat, whenever you have a chance for a light walk. While some of the below methods offer greater relaxation response, soothing the body and mind, others may become serious and intense mental practices when done the right way.

BEING IN YOUR SURROUNDINGS

Of course many of the preparatory steps, proposed under ‘Part 2 – Sitting Meditation’, could also be applied to walking meditation practices. By way of preparation you may choose anything you like, to soothe the mind and the spirit, that helps you gaining a deeper focus. The following simple practice may also be used as a preparation for a more difficult ways of walking meditation, or in itself to calm your body and mind.

- Probably the easiest way to start, is to place your focus outside of yourself. This is best done in the nature, but if you thoroughly enjoy cityscapes, it may be practised anywhere. This way, you would literally take a walk outside, observing your environment with great attention and in great detail.
- If you are in the nature, you may listen to the birds or wildlife (if any), observe the colours of the trees or plants, the shape of the clouds, whatever you choose. If you are in the city, the same can be done contemplating the architecture, the cars or whatever grabs your attention and gives you pleasure.
- You can keep your attention on one chosen thing, and try not to get distracted, or simply keep your senses open, while trying to absorb as much outer stimuli as possible, becoming increasingly aware of your environment as a whole and feel the connectedness between all things.

With this simple technique, your attention will be shifted from your thoughts and your worries, offering some time for your mind to relax. This technique might offer the benefit of a great relaxation response with as little effort as possible.

FOCUSING ON YOUR BREATH

- If you prefer to direct and keep your focus internally, your breathing once again offers a great ‘anchor point’. While having a walk outside, you can choose your favourite breathing technique and simply keep your focus on your breath.
- You can even try and follow some of the sitting meditation practices, you have learned earlier. Zen meditation could be relatively easy, even during walking, although it could never be practised as deeply as sitting, due to the need of paying attention to your path. This way, you can concentrate on your breath and have the walking as an additional background activity. This way, you could transfer your usual sitting meditation practice into movement, and practise more dynamically.
- Alternatively, you can pace yourself by the rhythm of your breath, either by making every half breath a step, that is, one step on the inhale, one step on the exhale, which would mean always inhaling and exhaling on stepping with the same foot; or making every full breath a step, that is one step on a full inhale-exhale cycle.

Of course pacing your steps on the rhythm of your breathing is more difficult, requires more effort, but it can also result in a much deeper meditation experience. Practise this way, if you are comfortable with keeping a strong focus at multiple points, that is your breathing and the rhythm of your steps themselves. Learning to focus on your breathing during walking and even connecting it to the paces of your steps, may be a great preparation for some more difficult walking and other moving meditation methods as well.

FOCUSING ON WALKING ITSELF

Walking as an activity could also serve as your main point of focus. Though the most obvious way (focusing on the rhythm on your steps) was discussed above, you could also have a sort of external source of rhythm, such as a metronome, or even music playing. This can be great, if you like listening to music while walking, and turn your stroll into a music meditation. There are limitless ways on how to pace the steps, or what tempo to choose. You may count them yourself, if you cannot, or do not like to use an external source of rhythm, try and be creative, but consistent. If you find a given way comfortable, stick to it, both with your current practice and for any following occasion as well, so that it can set in much deeper.

One way to focus on the walk, is keeping your mind focused on the process of the stepping. This is, of course best done barefooted, so your opportunities may be limited by weather or terrain, but you may also practice indoors, if there is adequate space to stroll a few paces.

- While stepping real slowly, be very deliberate to make every step, every little move and keeping your balance, as your heel slowly touches the floor. Do not let your bodyweight control your movement at any point.
- Try to stretch out your sole, and slowly place your full weight from one foot to the other, maintaining balance and fluidity of the movement, almost rolling on your outstretched sole. You can focus on the movement itself at first.
- Do this uninterrupted and in silence, or with non-intrusive sounds, like those of the nature. If you are walking indoors, try to go in circles, so that nothing gets in your way and you do not need to turn around and nothing would distract your attention from the walk.
- At the beginning, and for the first few occasions of such practice, you can just keep following your steps this way. Once you feel ready — when all the movements come natural, and you do not lose focus, when nothing

interrupts your meditation, be it internal, or external stimulus — you can transfer your entire focus onto your soles.

- As your heel touches the floor, start focusing on your front foot's sole. Feel the way it touches the ground, how it responds to the surface. Try to feel every inch as you get on that foot deeper and with more and more weight. Focus on the surface of the skin, the pressure and the heat or cold as it touches the surface of the ground.
- For example assume you are stepping on the left foot. Once your full weight is on the left foot, try keeping your focus on it, as you bring your right foot in front, up to the moment when the your right heel touches the floor. Then shift your focus from the left foot to the right as smoothly, as you shift your bodyweight. Repeat for every step hereafter.

Keep walking this way, either in a straight line or in a circle as long as it feels comfortable. Of course to keep things smooth and fluid, you will need some practice, but with time and determination, you might be surprised how deep your meditation may eventually become, by only following these simple steps. ☸

TRADITIONAL WALKING MEDITATION PRACTICES

Walking meditation is also practised in accordance with different traditions. The examples mentioned below may resemble some of those above, yet the main difference is that the setting and execution of these traditional walking practices would usually follow some rules, traditions or teachings.

There is, of course, much more to the below methods than these short introductions could possibly indicate. The descriptions offered here should be sufficient for anyone to try any one of these methods for themselves and go with the tradition, instead of their own intuition, if they like. If you feel like one of the below methods are more suitable for yourself, you are strongly encouraged to conduct further research to make sure you correctly perform any additional rituals, or other religious traditions, if there be any,

IN BUDDHISM

The different traditional Buddhist methods of walking meditation usually place the emphasis on rhythm. In Buddhism, walking meditation is called *Kinhin* in Japanese or *JingXing* in Chinese, often practised by monks or priests, after, or between long periods of sitting meditation (Zazen). While the focus is constantly kept on the rhythm, the way this rhythm is produced may differ.

In Chinese Ch'an Buddhism (the original, Chinese Zen Buddhism) the rhythm of the walk is set by the rhythm of the breathing, where one full breath (an inhale and an exhale) means one step, a straight continuation of sitting meditation practice. In Japanese Zen, the source of the rhythm would be set by an outside source, the beats on a wooden fish (*mokugyo*), that is also used in different chants and practices with a similar role of determining rhythm.

In both traditions, the practitioners would walk in a room, clock-wise, to the rhythm set either internally (breathing) or externally (*mokugyo*), covering one fist with the other hand's palm, either in front, or behind the body.

Though the difference of setting the rhythm internally or externally may seem small, it has a very different impact on the practitioner. Internally setting the rhythm through the breathing means, the focus will not change from the previous Zazen practice, still being kept on the breath, but also extended to the movements. The focus expands, but still remains internal. The difference is mostly in being in motion, after having been motionless for a long time, while still focusing inwardly.

The Japanese method however, placing the source of focus outside of the practitioner, might have a very different effect. The focus changes, shifting from inside the body and mind to an external instrument, and the rhythm of its beats. Focusing on the steps is still important, but the focus is now split between the internal and the external, taking off some of the strain of focusing inwardly. Practising such way could also be seen as a way to come back to the outside world, after a long and deep inward journey.

IN DAOISM

The Daoism (or Taoism), there are several ways and methods for walking and other dynamic meditation practices. One such way also emphasises on the steps and their rhythm, while moving the legs in certain ways, following specific stepping techniques, that may help soothing the mind and soul.

Probably one of the easiest traditional ways of stepping is letting the knee slightly kick up with each step, before slowly placing the foot on the ground and transferring your bodyweight as slowly and evenly as it would not break the rhythm. This would usually be accompanied by chanting mantras, either aloud or internally, performing breathing techniques or other meditation methods.

Another Daoist way of walking meditation is basically performing a QiGong meditation through walking. First, the practitioner would start counting their steps, and performing an inhale and exhale on any number of steps, that seems comfortable, for example five steps of inhale followed by five steps of exhale.

Once this becomes natural and comfortable, the practitioner would change their breathing to embryonic breathing, and a basic QiGong meditation would follow, with the ball of Qi expanding and shrinking on each step, or each breath, first just in and around the body, then also moving up and down. (A more detailed explanation of this technique could be found in the ‘QiGong Meditation’ chapter.) This is very similar to performing sitting QiGong meditation, and may be considered an extension to it, that could be performed afterwards, or in place of the sitting practice. ■

QIGONG EXERCISE

QiGong is one of the most ancient exercise methods known to man. QiGong originates from ancient China, its name literally meaning the art and cultivation of internal energy (Qi or Chi – The concept of Qi or Chi is described in the ‘QiGong Meditation’ chapter.)

The origins of QiGong are obscure, both Buddhist and Daoist traditions may claim to be the inventors of certain practices, but QiGong may as well be much older than it is known or thought today. Even though different schools and traditions offer different approaches to QiGong with different methods, what they all have in common is the health and spiritual benefits of active practice. On a physiological level QiGong practice is beneficial for the joints, bones, circulatory system, lymphatic system and digestion, among many others. QiGong exercise is in fact shown to be beneficial to every bodily system, while how strong an effect it would have on a certain area, would mostly depend on the form of exercise. QiGong has numerous forms and approaches, all of them advocating general health and longevity.

QiGong is a very broad concept. It includes certain breathing, meditation and exercise techniques, on a higher levels even medicine, healing, nutrition, and many more areas of holistic health and well-being. Apart from the obvious health benefits, QiGong is widely regarded to have certain spiritual aspects. What is more interesting from the meditator’s point of view however is QiGong exercise being essentially a form of meditation in, or rather through movement.

The basic movements, a very gentle exercise sequence introduced here are

suitable for anyone, regardless of age or fitness level. The movements are to be practiced slowly and gently without rush or exertion, in synchrony with your breathing. Although this book can only offer a simple introduction, the following sequence can be practised daily, even multiple times a day, requiring only a few minutes of your time. ☸

BADUANJIN

The sequence of movements introduced here are best known as the standing exercises of BaDuanJin, the famous ‘Eight Pieces of Brocade’, or ‘Eight Treasures’, with origins as obscure as QiGong itself. According to the Shaolin Buddhist tradition, this health and longevity practice was introduced by the Bodhidharma in his book *YiJinJing*, or ‘Sinew Changing Classic’, as part of a longer set of QiGong exercises, from which the eight best moves were distilled. These have been, at a later date, extended to include twelve movements in total, into what is commonly known as BaDuanJin today. Other sources date these exercises from much earlier, and some legends even claim BaDuanJin to be originated from one of the eight legendary immortals of the Daoist traditions.

Regardless of its origin, BaDuanJin practice can benefit your health greatly, both physiologically and mentally, positively affecting your joints, muscles, bones and help to relieve stress and anxiety. Often called the Chinese yoga, BaDuanJin is probably the most simple form of moving meditation, after walking.

Most QiGong practices are very similar to the popularly known TaijiQuan (or Tai Chi Chuan) forms, often seen to be practised by people of all ages and backgrounds. Sharing a very similar basic principle, the most important difference between QiGong and TaijiQuan is the latter being a form of martial art and could in fact be used for self-defence. If practiced for such purpose, TaijiQuan movements have real martial applications which could either inflict damage or be used to defend against attacks.

The reason for TaijiQuan being excluded from this book is partly that it mostly consists of long and elaborate forms which could be difficult to learn from a book or without adequate guidance, like an instructor or teacher. In TaijiQuan, the practitioner moves almost continuously, while QiGong forms often involve some static positions with the movements leading from one

position to another. Neither QiGong nor TaijiQuan is in fact superior or inferior to the other, but BaDuanJin QiGong is probably somewhat easier to learn from books or descriptions.

The movement sequences described over the following pages are only one of many approaches known and practiced today. Known practices of BaDuanJin are as many as there are people teaching them. With no claim to be more or less beneficial than others, the following exercises will focus as much on physical health of the external body, the bones, sinews and musculature, than the health of internal organs, considered most broadly, when talking about QiGong.

The movements of the standing exercises of BaDuanJin can be performed at any time of the day, with or without previous warm up and preparation. The sequence consists of very gentle movements and is thought to affect the health of the whole body, including the limbs, all internal organs and the triple burner, consisting roughly of the inner cavities of the torso, recognised as a separate organ in Chinese medicine.

Although it may be performed any time of the day, it is particularly useful to perform the sequence (or at least the first movement) in the morning, as soon as you get out of bed, to help start the day; once again around midday; and lastly right before going to bed. It is also a great way to finish off regular sitting meditation practice, although in this case it is probably most beneficial to continue with the full sequence of BaDuanJin, as it includes some movement and stretching of your legs, that could feel numb and restricted of circulation after longer periods of sitting.

The sequence can be performed in one of two ways: The ‘soft way’ would be done with totally relaxed limbs, concentrating inwardly on your breath, eyes closed. The ‘hard way’ is performed with a gentle stretch of the limbs, creating imaginary resistance against your palms as you push away from the body, or clenching the fists hard, where applicable, still focusing on the breathing, but giving equal considerations to the movement and physiological energy involved, with eyes open. The latter method is possibly most suitable for early morning

and midday practices, while the former would be suitable as a complimentary method after sitting meditation and before going to bed.

HOW TO BREATHE DURING PRACTICE

For the following sequence of movements, you may choose your preferred breathing method. The suggested breathing technique would be embryonic breathing, or abdominal breathing on any level.

Even though the BaDuanJin forms presented in this book have their origins in Buddhist traditions and Buddhists would usually advocate abdominal breathing, for the individual practice this is not important. You may use (full) abdominal breathing or embryonic breathing, as is more comfortable, feels more natural, whichever helps the practice. It is useful to feel the energy in the DanTien, as would be the effect of embryonic breathing, although not essential. BaDuanJin can be practised purely as a mobility exercise and gentle stretching. To become a moving form of QiGong meditation, the same breathing should be practised as during sitting QiGong meditation. This will allow for greater awareness of the Qi accumulating in the body.

Of the other breathing techniques introduced in this book, square breathing is the least suitable for the practice, as the movements that follow will be very much synchronised with one's breaths and there is often no room for the pause phase. Diaphragmatic breathing may also prove less useful, as the depth of breath is crucial during practice, and as the exercise involves physical movement, it is most possible that your body would need a lot more air than diaphragmatic breathing would allow for.

TONGUE POSITIONING

- Slide your tongue across your upper palate, you will find a little recess, it fits into almost naturally. This is the position to keep your tongue throughout practice, as it is said to close energy circuits in the body (also, on a more subliminal level it does help maintaining proper posture).

FOOT POSITIONING

- You would ideally be barefooted, unless you are standing on a cold floor. Your feet should ‘grab the floor’ throughout practice.

GongFu students will probably need no introduction to the concept of grabbing the floor with the feet. This method may be observed by the non-martial artist practitioner as well. Holding your feet this way will help maintaining proper posture, providing the minimal amount of tension necessary, it helps to feel ‘grounded’ and is said to aid the various energy systems of the body, throughout the practice.

- It is important to understand how to grab the floor with your feet. Though it does involve curling up your toes, it does not mean fully curling them up. To grab the floor, stand with feet shoulder width apart, your weight equally distributed over both legs. Now, attempt to curl your toes, while at the same time pressing them against the floor. Let the natural resistance of the floor stop your attempt of toe curling and stay in this position.
- To better understand why this is commonly referred to as grabbing the floor, or if you have still problems picturing the way to do this, you can try standing on a towel, on a slippery surface, like a wooden or stone floor, and try to make a little lump of the towel right under the pits of your toes, without fully curling your toes up. Once you get a hang of it, try it without a towel, it will most likely have become easier.

PREPARING FOR BADUANJIN PRACTICE

The following movements are closely synchronized with your breathing and it is very important you keep them in synchrony. If you feel your saliva accumulating any time during practice, just swallow it and continue. Do not keep saliva accumulating in your mouth, always swallow it immediately.

- Stand with feet shoulder-width apart, toes pointing forwards, feet grabbing the floor.
- Gently tuck your tail-bone in (a slight, squeeze of the gluteus muscles, or buttocks), having your knees relaxed, and your pelvis open.
- Stand tall, with your crown elevated high. Imagine your spine is a string of pearls, hanging from your crown loosely. Rest your hands besides your body, hanging naturally.
- Now slide your tongue up to its resting position. Close your eyes. Whether you are going to continue the sequence with eyes open or closed, it is best to close your eyes here for a moment.
- Focus on your breathing. Take three deep inhales and exhales, inhaling naturally, followed by a long, slow exhale.
- *Do* control your breath, trying to breathe as deeply as you can, but *do not* try to slow its natural rhythm. Observe it, as it may slow down naturally, following the long exhales.

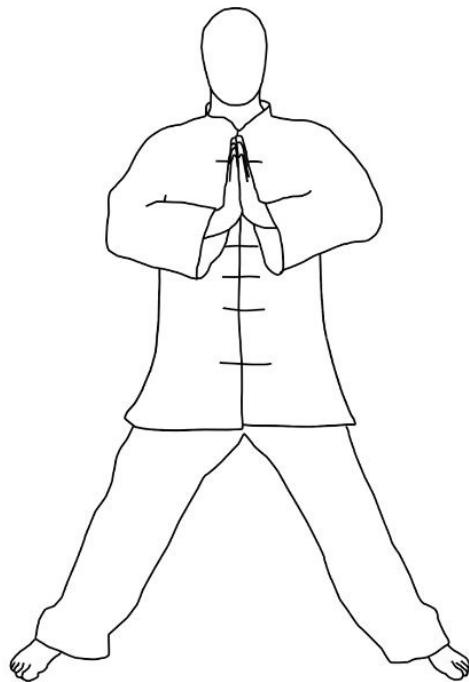
While going through the movements, it is important to move slowly and smoothly. Don't pause, unless the sequence calls for a pause. Between the positions you hold, always keep continuously moving, fluidly, smoothly, even between inhales and exhales. If there is an abrupt change in the direction of a movement, try to make the transition as smooth as possible, without pausing, unless a pause is called for. 

BASIC STANCES THERE ARE FIVE BASIC STANCES KNOW IN TRADITIONAL GONGFU AND QIGONG PRACTICE. TO PRACTICE BA DUAN JIN, IT IS ONLY IMPORTANT TO BE FAMILIAR WITH TWO OF THESE, WHICH WILL BE USED THROUGHOUT THE DIFFERENT SEQUENCES.

MABU OR HORSE STANCE

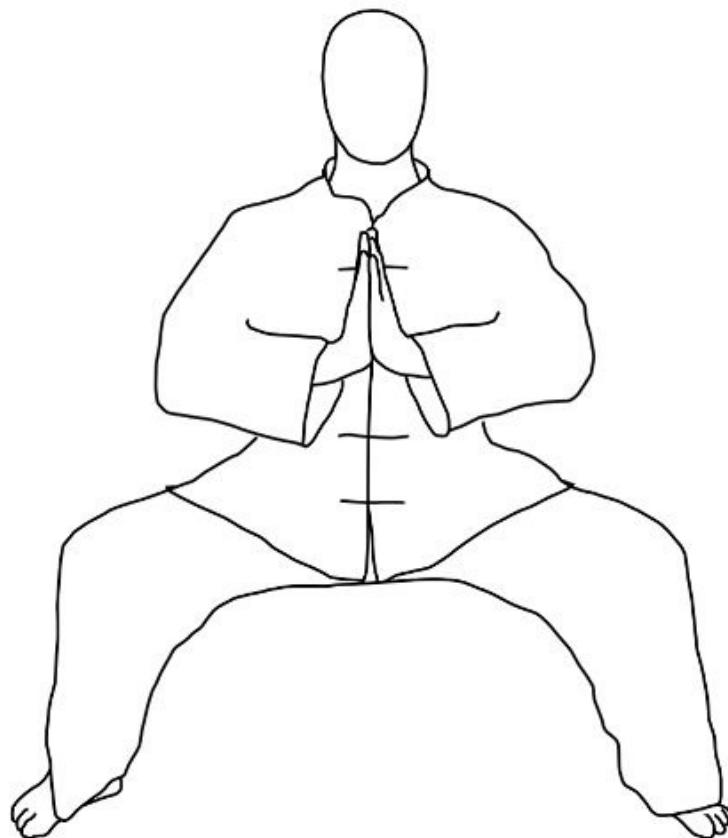
The first and most important stance is Horse Stance. This stance is well known and practiced across different styles and schools of martial arts and also adopted to QiGong because of its major benefits on one's health and strength. MaBu is a difficult stance to correctly hold for an extended period of time, although there are easier variations of it as well. This stance strengthens the legs, the knees and the back, while helping you to feel grounded. It is a very stable body position, due to the centre of gravity being quite low.

- To stand in MaBu, start with feet wider than shoulder width apart. The exact width of the feet advised, would vary from school to school. For QiGong practice you should experiment and find the way you find most comfortable. Your feet should be pointing straight forward, or if that proves difficult, turning out as little as you can maintain.



Starting position for MaBu

- Grab the floor with your feet, and slowly lower your torso, by bending the knees. Ideally in the lowest position your thighs would be parallel with the ground, but this is not at all essential. Do not go lower than parallel thighs.
- The position of the knees is very important, they should always follow your toes. This is the anatomically safest and most effective position to stay in Horse Stance, so make an effort to keep your knees in line with the toes. Regardless of the depth of your stance, when you look down, you should always see the tip of your toes, that meaning that the knees never extend over them.



MaBu or Horse Stance Unlike when you are going to a squat, your buttocks should not stick out very far, only slightly. Tuck in your tail-bone, but not too forcedly. Overall, your body should look as flat as possible, if viewed from the side. Do not tuck all your buttocks underneath, let your gluteal muscles take part of the work, and do not allow your knees to go over your toes as this would cause pain in the knee and damage your joints in the long term.

- Your hand position is not yet important, you can have them in a ‘praying’ position in front of your chest, as this would help to keep your back straight.

There are many variations of MaBu some of them are meant to be more challenging, while others would make it easier for the beginner to hold the stance over a longer period of time, some of these are pictured on the next page. ☸



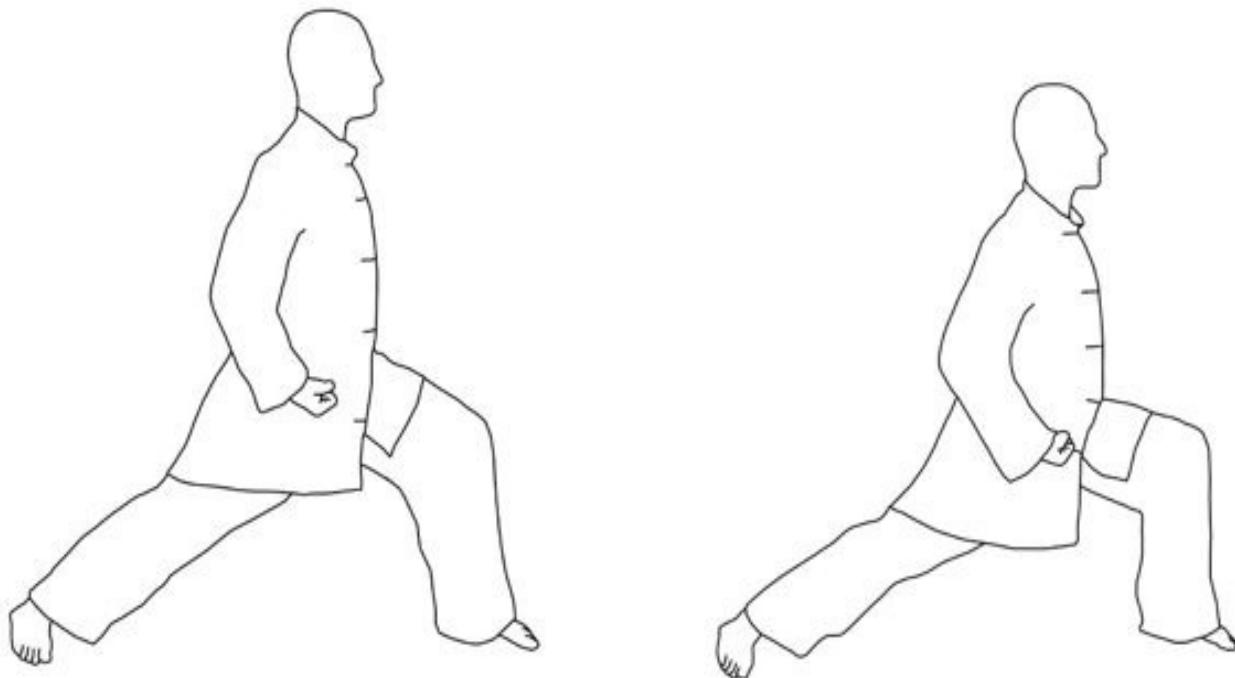
Broad variations: If Horse Stance seems too easy, or becomes so with practice, a more challenging form is to broaden the stance, while keeping the thighs as parallel to the ground as you can manage

High variations: If horse stance is too challenging, try to keep your body in a higher position, with a slighter bend at the knee. This way you will be able to keep a good stance without much exertion. Do this if you are less experienced or trained, or if you would like to keep your QiGong practice less physically demanding

GONGBU OR BOW AND ARROW STANCE

This stance is usually the second, each GongFu practitioner would learn, and it is also very important in QiGong. Unlike MaBu, this is an asymmetrical stance.

- Start in a slightly broader Horse Stance. Starting with a left GongBu, you would turn your left foot out in a 45 degree or slightly greater angle, then turn your torso towards the left, placing more bodyweight on the left foot.
- Your left knee should never go over your toes, to keep your knee position healthy. This is very important with both MaBu and GongBu. Ideally, your shin would be perpendicular to the ground, even in the lowest position.
- In the meantime, your right leg would straighten out behind you, never losing contact with the ground. Do not let your right heel rise, rather turn your foot in an angle, that would allow it to rest on the floor. Your hands come in beside your hips.
- You should feel a stretch in your right calf and your right hip-flexor. Approximately 70% of your bodyweight should be on your left foot now. Hold for a few seconds, then repeat to the other side, pausing for a moment in MaBu, before you turn to the right.



GongBu or Bow and Arrow Stance. In the low variation of GongBu your left thigh would be closer to parallel with the ground

These two stances, MaBu and GongBu and transitions between them will be essential in some of the movements of BaDuanJin. Find a variation and depth that suits your strength and flexibility, but always be aware to perform the stances correctly throughout your practice.

In the beginning, it helps to practise the stances alone, timing yourself as you do so. Start with 2–5 seconds in each stance, then gradually work your way up to at least 30 seconds in each. Practice will strengthen your legs and back and enhance your QiGong practice. If you master these stances, you would be able to concentrate on the movements and breathing, worrying less about standing correctly, or getting too tired.

On the following pages the bullet points, marking instructional paragraphs, and most image captions, will be omitted, as most of the text will consist of instructions, while the images will be illustrations for the text. The breathing phases, such as inhale and exhale will be **marked with bold type**. When you

see ‘**inhale**’, you should continue inhaling, until you read ‘**exhale**’. When you read ‘**exhale**’, you should continue doing so, until you see ‘**inhale**’. There will be no need to hold your breath after inhaling, or pause it after an exhale. Pace your breathing in synchrony with the movements, try to breathe smoothly and continuously.

Note for the Kindle edition: While all care has been taken to try and preserve the original layout of the printed book, Kindle’s fluid layout makes this quite difficult. The following instructions with the adjoining illustrations have been organized to pages, as much as such fluid layout would allow. This is to ensure that most of the illustrations will stay right beneath the instructions and always on the same page. This would work best with 'font size' set to '3' on your reader, or reader app.

Wherever such forced pagination appears, these intentional page breaks have been marked with the ellipsis (...) symbol for consistency and to ensure an undisturbed reading experience. When you see this symbol, it means the next page still contains instructions belonging to this movement, and so you should keep on moving with it, until you see the  (OM) symbol, marking the end of each sequence.

If you are reading on a Kindle Fire HD or larger, it would be fairly easy to follow these, although on some larger screens, the images would possibly look too small and not filling all the available space. Unfortunately, for smaller screens and especially on e-ink devices, this pagination might appear out of proportion.

The (...) symbols should usually align with the bottom of the screen, wherever they stand directly under images. If there is some text before the (...) symbol, it is possible that it would flow to the next screen on smaller devices. If you find that on a larger device the (...) symbols flow to the top of the next page, please decrease the reader's font size temporarily.

While much care has been taken to eliminate unnecessary white spaces and other issues, any feedback regarding layout problems will be much appreciated

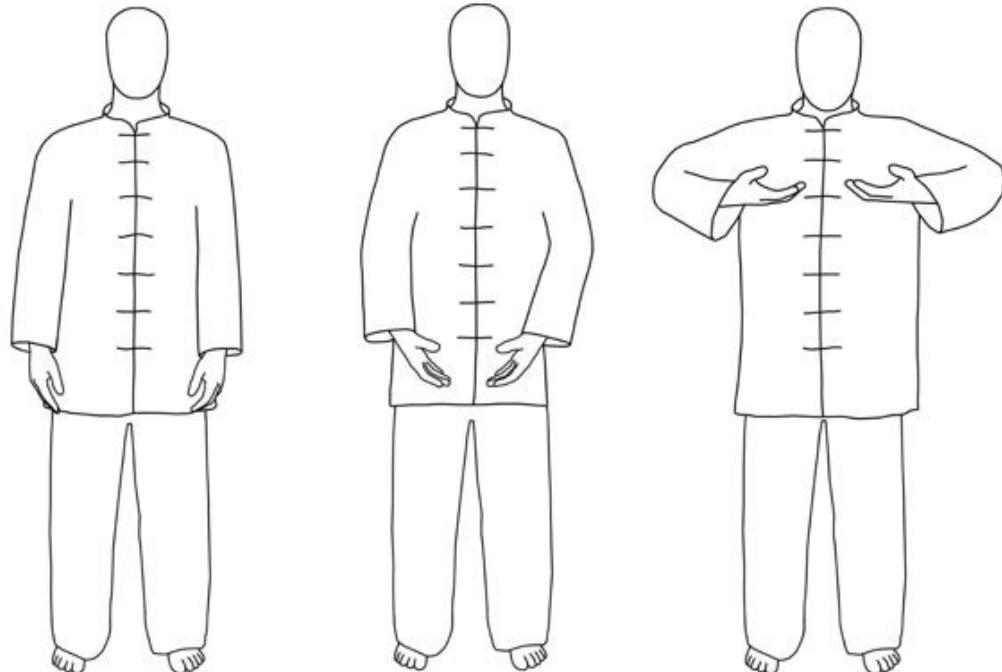
by the author and editor, preferably via email (you will find the author's email address at the beginning of the book). Thank you for your understanding and enjoy the rest of the book – *The author* ॐ

OPENING AND CLOSING MOVES THE OPENING MOVES BEFORE, AND THE CLOSING MOVES AFTER EACH OF THE SIX COMBINED SEQUENCES (THE EIGHT OR TWELVE MOVEMENTS COMBINED INTO SIX SEQUENCES) INTRODUCED BELOW, WILL BE DESCRIBED HERE. THE FUNCTION OF THESE OPENING AND CLOSING MOVES IS MOSTLY TO REGULATE THE BREATHING, THE HEART-RATE AND THE ENERGY SYSTEMS.

...

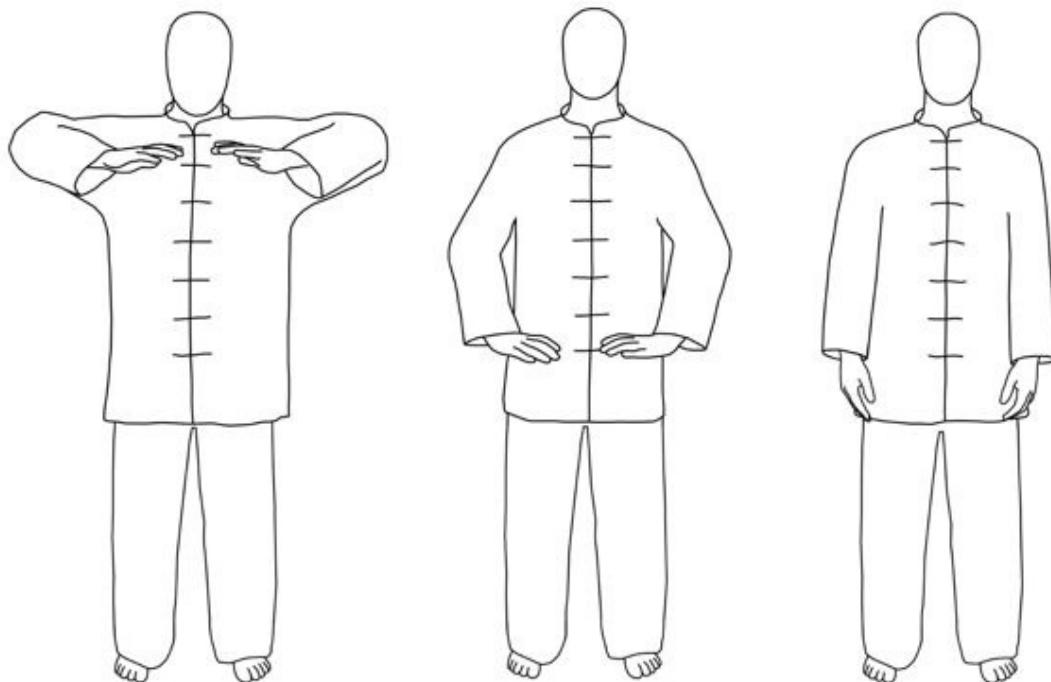
THE OPENING MOVE

Stand upright, with feet shoulder width apart. With an **inhale**, start slowly lifting your hands, palms facing upwards, fingers pointing at each other, as if you were about to wash your face and were just lifting some water up, elbows pointing out.



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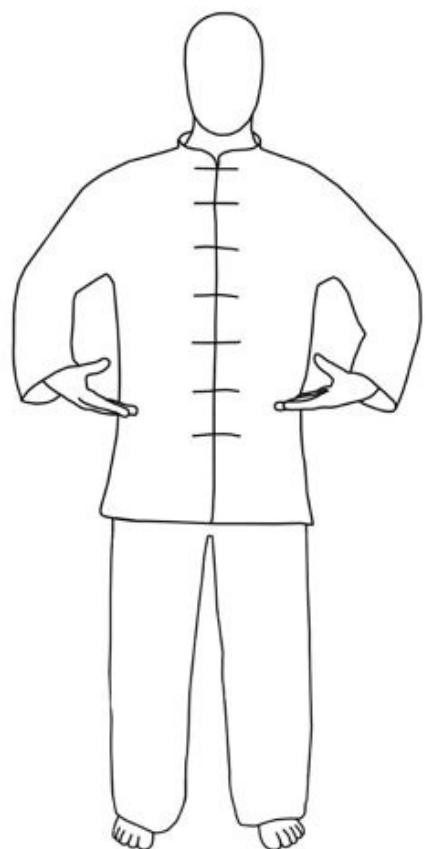
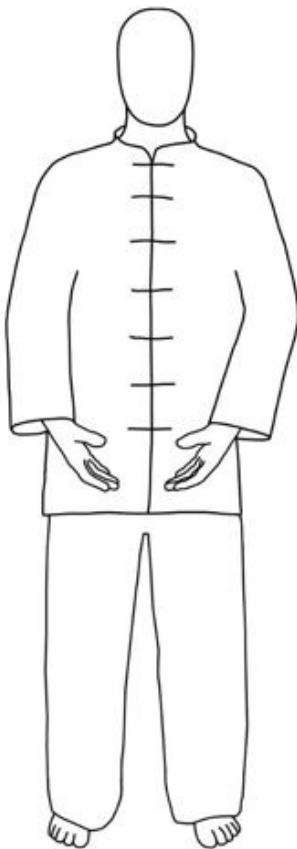
When your hands reach chest height, just under your neck, turn your palms down, and with an **exhale** start pushing them down, just like you were trying to press a large ball under water, keeping the elbows out, until you reach the bottom position, where you cannot reach further with palms facing down. Then turn your palms onto the starting position.



Repeat this movement for three inhales and exhales. This concludes the ‘Opening Move’. You will need to do this before every other movement sequence. ☸

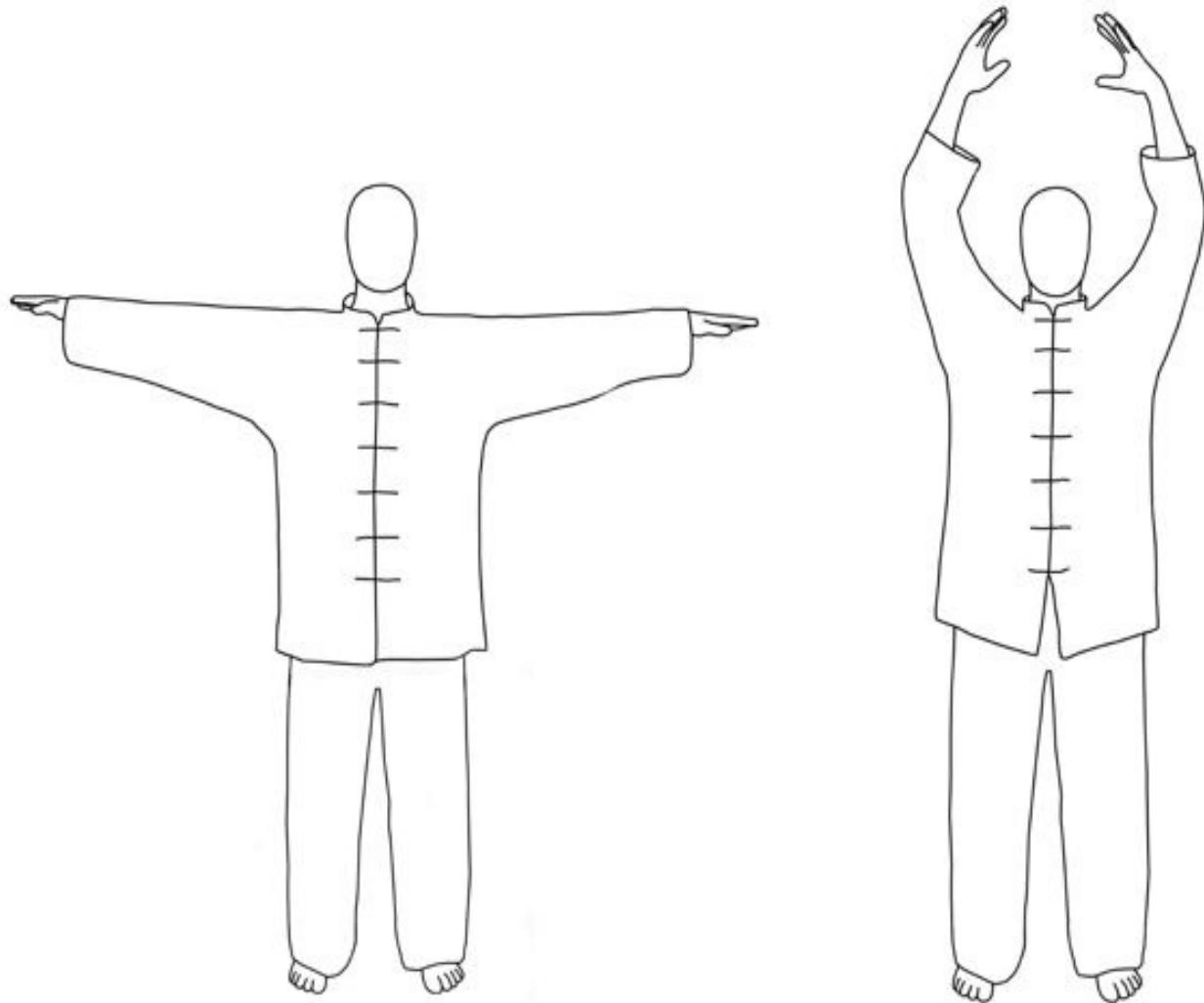
THE CLOSING MOVE

Start to **inhale** and turn your palms towards each other, then begin pulling them away, leading from the elbow, fingers facing each other, palms up, until you make a large circle with your arms. Then, still inhaling, straighten your arms up, lifting them sideways, until you reach overhead, your palms never changing position, your hands almost hanging loosely.

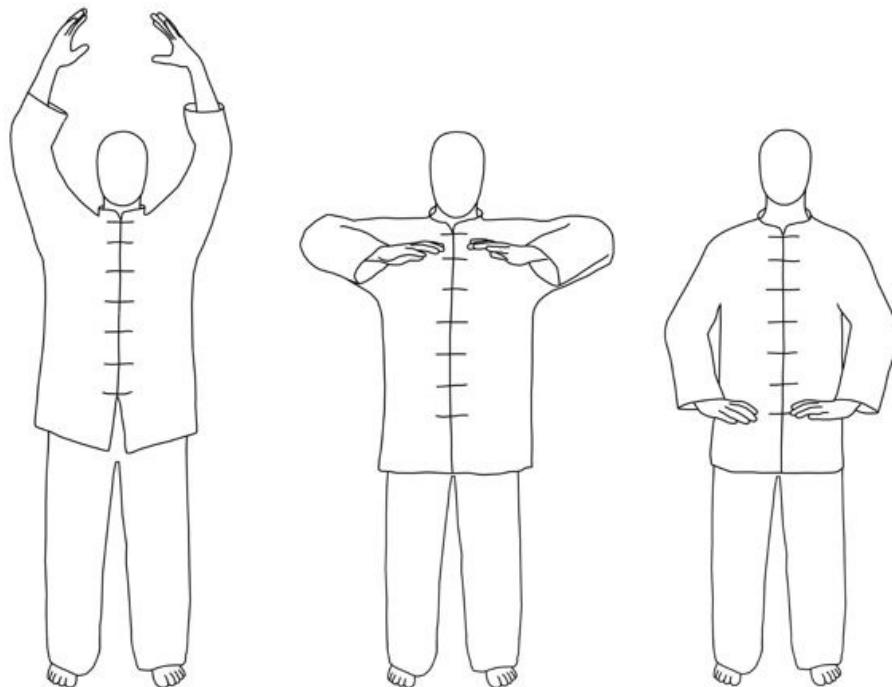


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Once your outstretched arms are pointing up, turn your palms inside, facing each other, and fully extend your arms upwards, fingers pointing up, while continuing to **inhale**.



As you begin to **exhale**, bring your hands down, with your palms never changing position, like you were lowering a ball between them, until you reach the height of your chest, at which point your palms turn downwards, elbows pointing to the sides, and as you continue to exhale, keep pushing them down, as if you were trying to submerge the ball in chest-deep water.



Repeat the last inhale and exhale, with the corresponding moves two more times. This concludes the ‘Closing Move’. You will need to do it after every individual movement or sequence.

Some of the movements that will follow are combined into longer sequences, as could be seen from their respective titles or names. Such sequences are usually the combinations of movements that are logical continuation of another one. Such combinations are not essential and the movements can be performed in any order. This is one proposed sequence only. You may alter it as long as you keep the movements accurate and the breathing right. ☸

‘HOLD THE SPIRIT AND GUARD THE ONE’ AND ‘TWO HANDS HOLD UP THE HEAVENS’

This sequence of movements helps to regulate the breath and benefit the triple burner through opening it up in a series of stretches. As discussed earlier the triple burner is considered a separate organ in traditional Chinese medicine. It could roughly be described as your torso’s internal cavity, holding all your internal organs.

As the following sequence is meant to help maintaining the health of the triple burner and through this, it affects all of the organs within, this sequence is probably the most important of them all. If this is all you do for daily practice, your health will already enormously benefit from it.

You can take this as a separate set of stretches and do it first thing in the morning, when you wake up, in the middle of the day, even at work, as it can be easily practiced in a seated position, and last thing before going to bed every night. Theoretically, of course, repeating the whole BaDuanJin would be the most beneficial, to be practiced three times a day, but of course such dedicated practice could prove difficult to maintain.

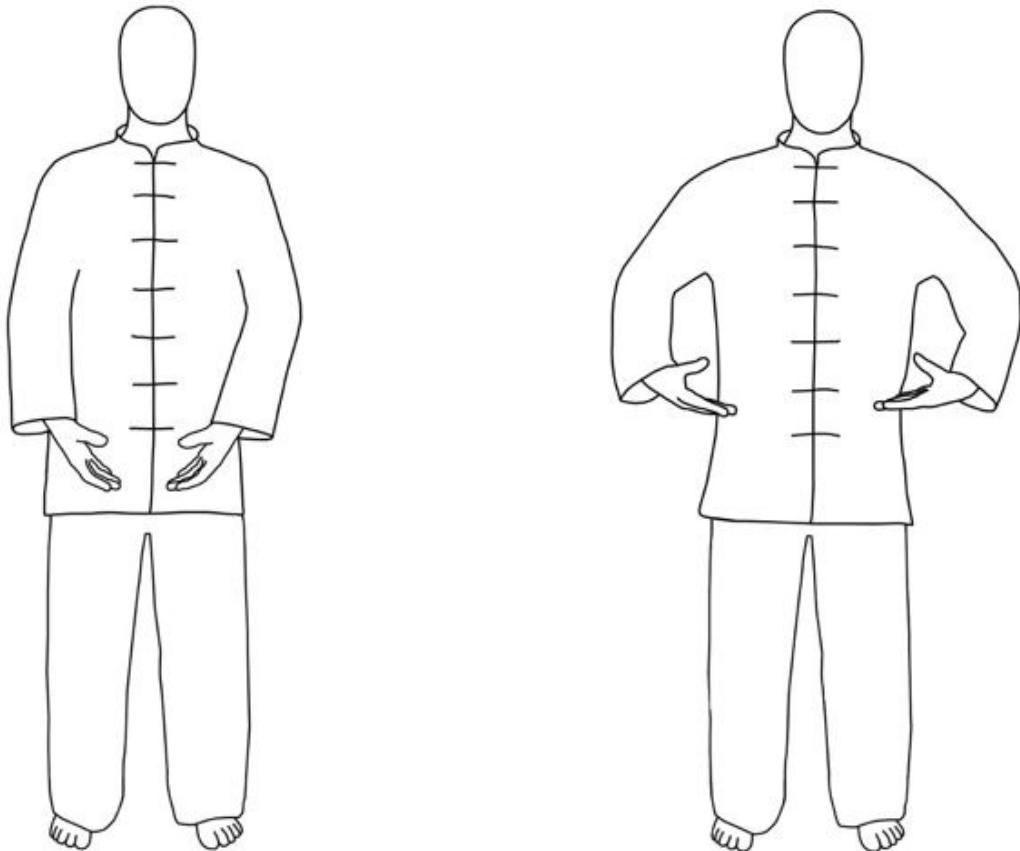
Repeating this one sequence alone however, takes a few minutes at once, and does not tire the practitioner either mentally or physically. If you do only one QiGong, it should be BaDuanJin and if you do only one series of moves from BaDuanJin, this should be it.

Do not forget the opening and closing moves, right before and after the sequence.

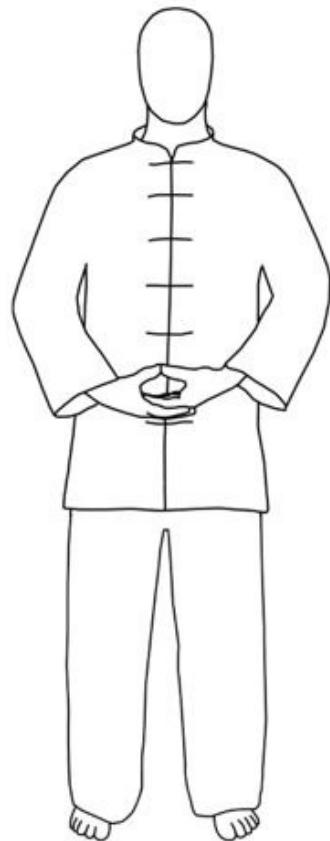
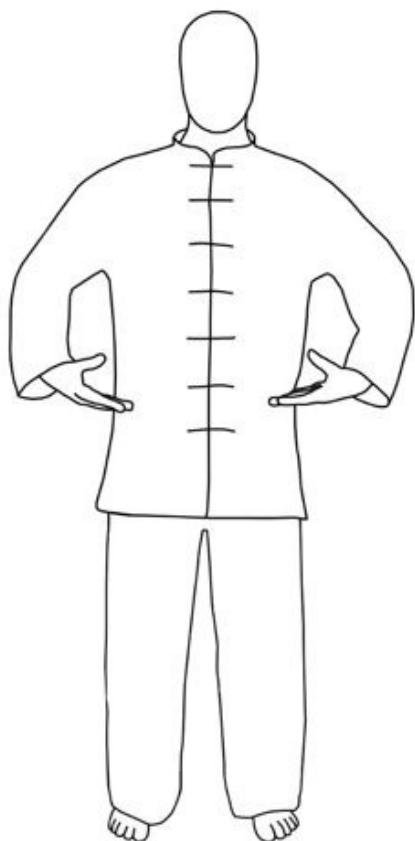
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HOLD THE SPIRIT AND GUARD THE ONE

As you **inhale**, bring your palms under your navel, while starting to pull them away from each other. Still inhaling, pull your hands apart, fingers pointing inwards and towards each other. Pull your whole arm, leading from the elbow, forming a large circle, just like hugging a very large ball from the bottom.

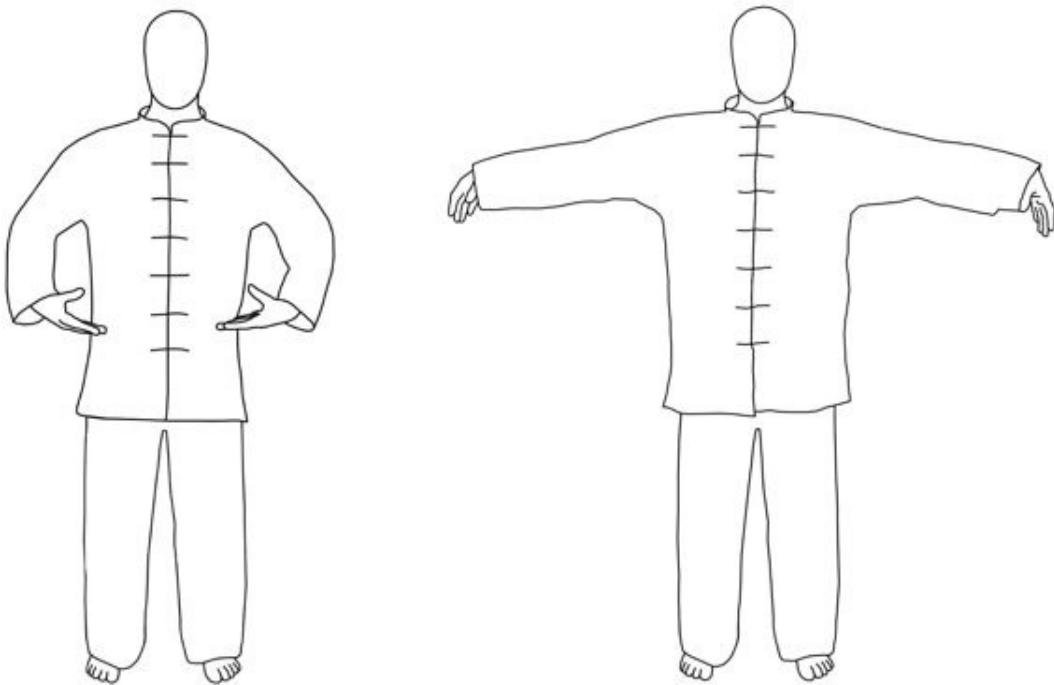


As you **exhale**, start moving your hands together, while your arms maintain their arched position, until your hands reach each other. Rest your hands in the cosmic mudra position (your left palm, facing upwards, resting on your right palm, your thumbs touching in an oval shape over your palms). Stay in this position for three full breaths, inhales and exhales.

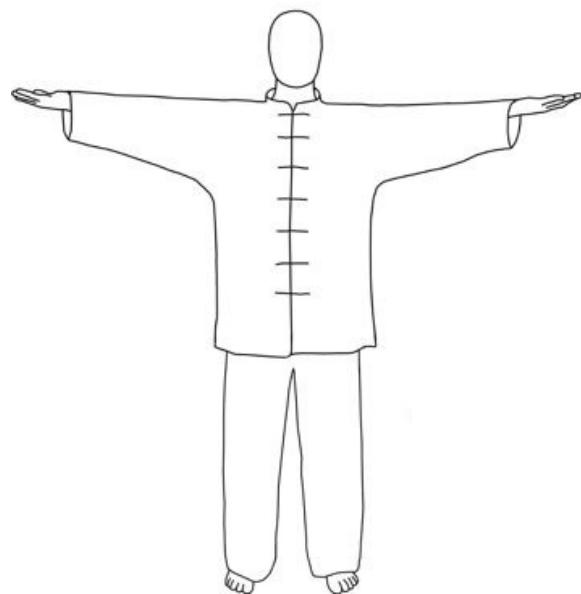
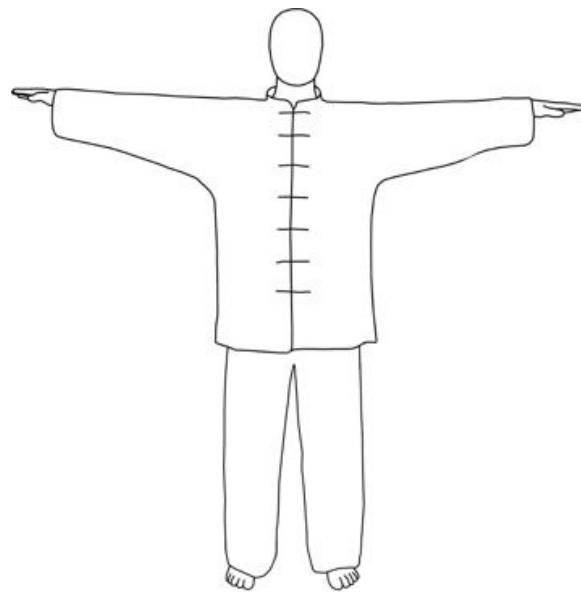


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With an **inhale**, start pulling your hands apart, in a similar movement as previously, starting to form a large circle, as if hugging a ball from underneath. Instead of reversing the direction of the movement, now continue outwardly, straightening your arms to your sides, palms facing down.

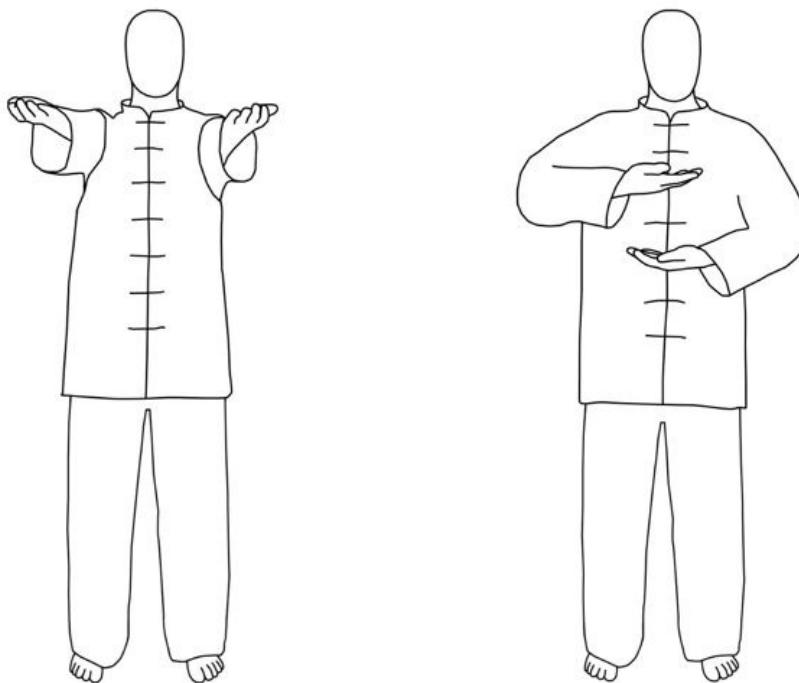


When both arms are fully stretched out sideways, at shoulder height. Turn your palms up, without pausing, arms outstretched to the sides, still **inhaling**.



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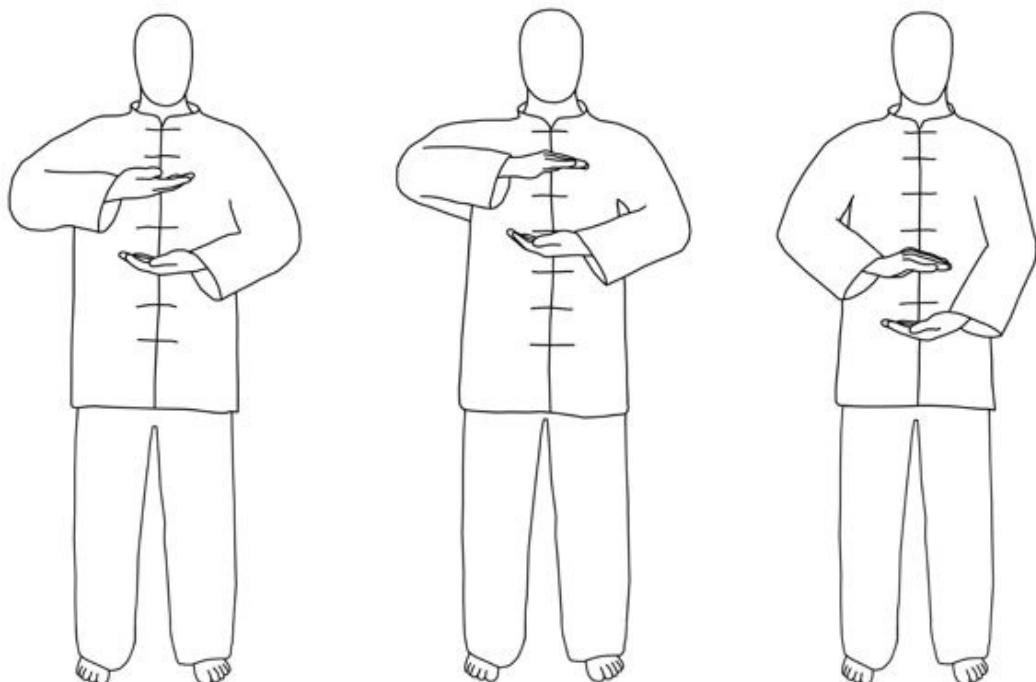
Continuing to **inhale**, start bringing your outstretched arms to the front, drawing two arcs in the air with your fingertips. When both arms are pointing forwards, start bending your elbows and bringing your hands in, towards your chest. Bring your left hand under your right hand, just in front of your chest, but not touching it, approximately 6–8 inches (15–20 cm) apart.



It is worth noting that this is a rather long movement for one single inhale. There is a possibility, that you will run out of breath, before the movement finishes. Do not worry, this is perfectly normal. Do not start exhaling, until the next movement, rather just hold your breath until the movement is finished. Alternatively, you can speed up the movement, so that it finishes before you would run out of lung capacity. Choose either way you feel more natural. Eventually your breath will deepen enough to finish the move with one inhale.

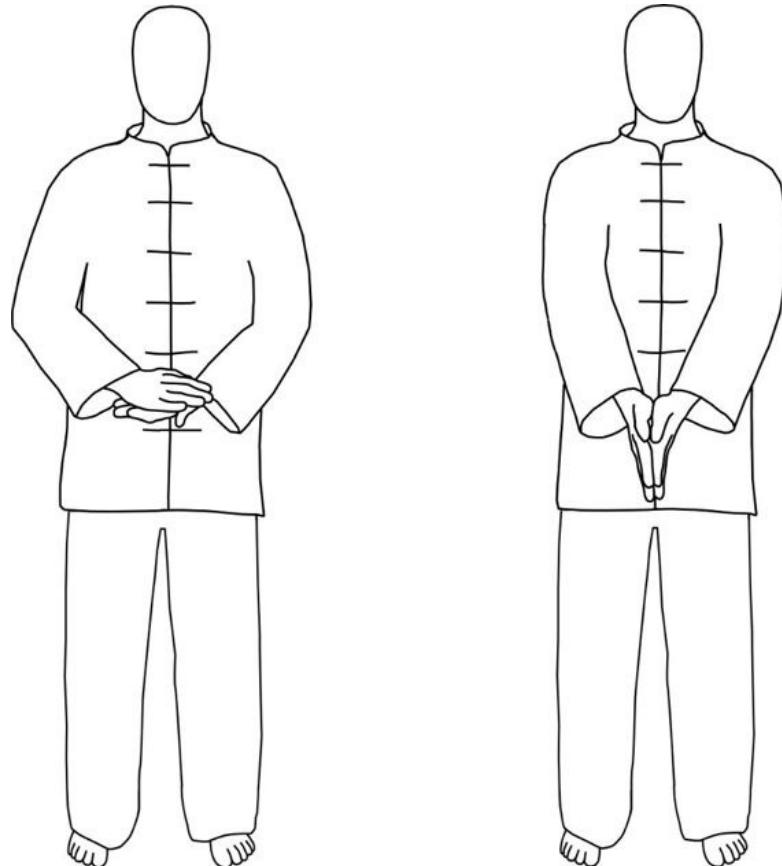
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Starting to **exhale**, turn your top palm (the right palm) facing down. Now the two palms are facing each other. Form two ‘cups’ with your hands, as if you were holding a small ball between them and continuing to exhale, bring this small ball down, in front of your abdomen. Once you are in a position holding a ‘small ball’ between your hands and a ‘large ball’ with your arms (i.e. your arms are arched in a way as if you were hugging a very large ball), hold this position for three inhales and exhales.

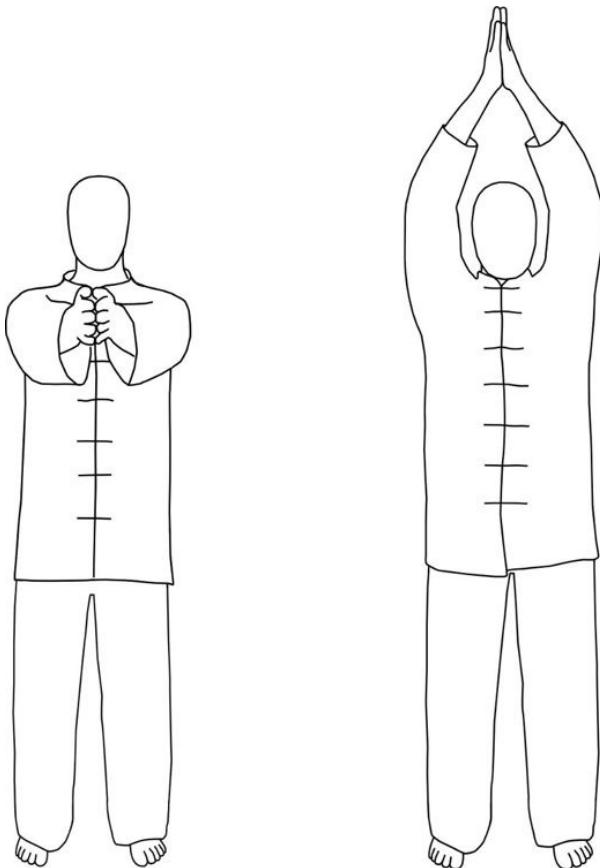


TWO HANDS HOLD UP THE HEAVENS

As you **inhale**, bring your palms together. Once the palms are touching, turn them both facing forward, rubbing them against one another. Your fingers should now point forward and slightly downward, palms touching.

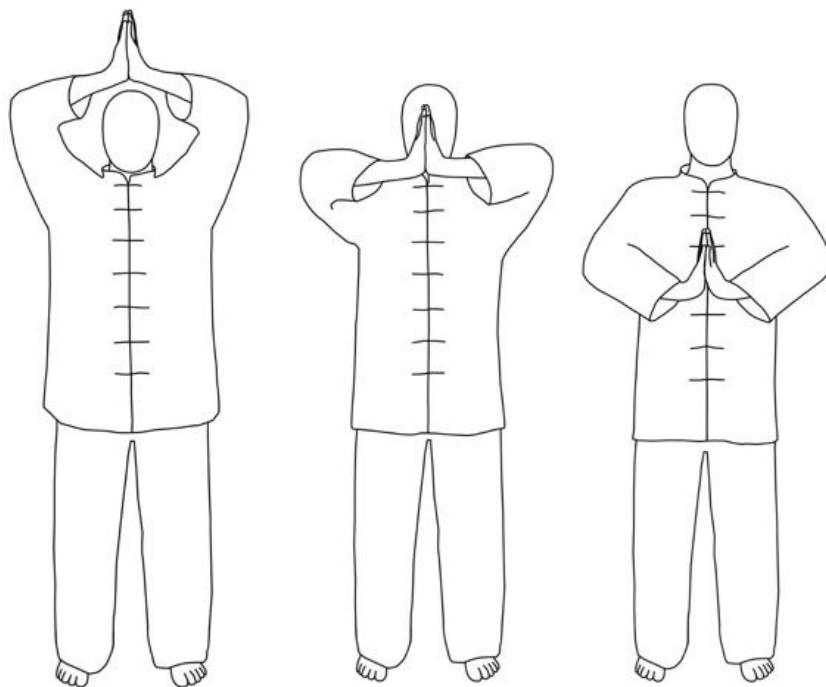


While continuing to **inhale**, extend your arms in front of you and slightly downward, following the direction in which your fingers are pointing, maintaining contact between your hands all the time. Once you cannot comfortably extend your arms further, raise your touching hands above your head, while keeping your arms straight, drawing a large arc in the air.



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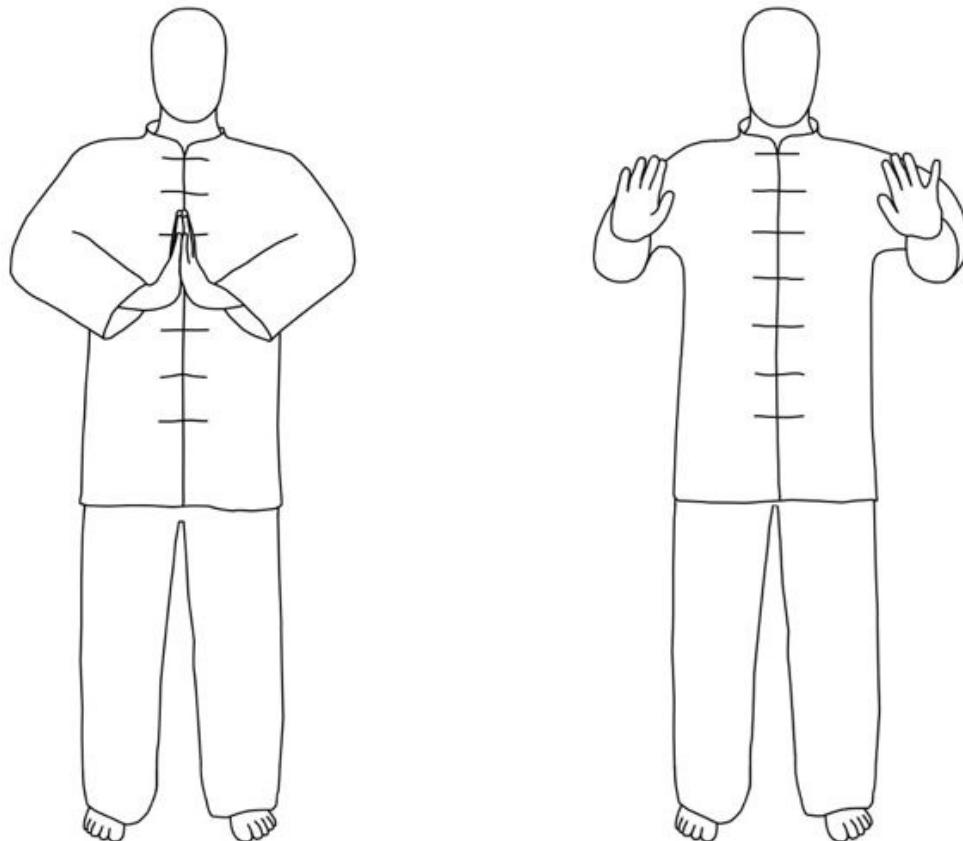
Starting to **exhale**, bend your elbows and let them move out to the side, while lowering your hands in front of your chest. Your fingers should be pointed upwards, palms and fingers straight and touching each other. Bring your hands down in front of your chest, into a ‘praying’ position, trying to keep your elbows up. Continue moving this way, until you start to feel some tension in your wrists.



You should keep your elbows up, as much as you can, and push your wrists down. If the bottoms of your palms separate, that is fine, but the larger part of your hands should keep touching each other. Do not let your shoulders lift up, continue holding them down. In this position the elbows will not be able to move up, but you should continue applying some tension, although only within your comfort zone. Hold this position for three inhales and exhales.

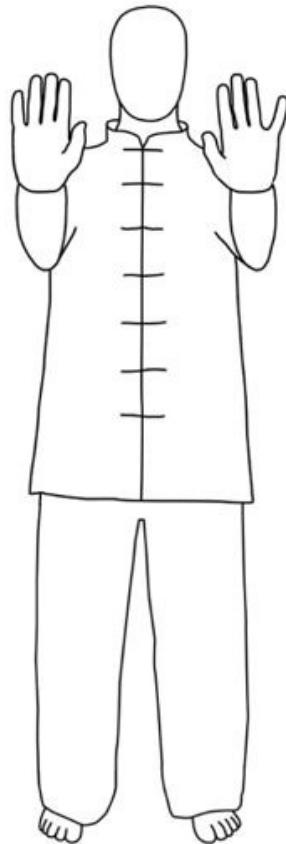
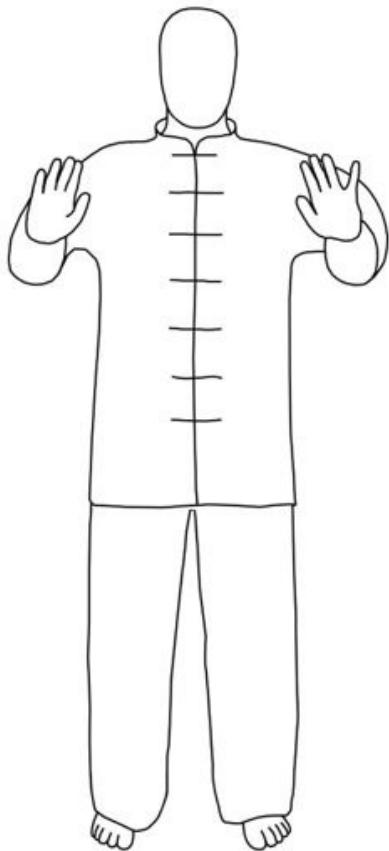
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Inhale and open your hands. Still keeping the elbows up, draw them behind your back, keeping your arms bent. Your hands should now be in front of your shoulders, palms open, facing forward, just like you were lying face down, with palms touching the ground right beside your chest, elbows tightly behind your back, not sticking out to the side.



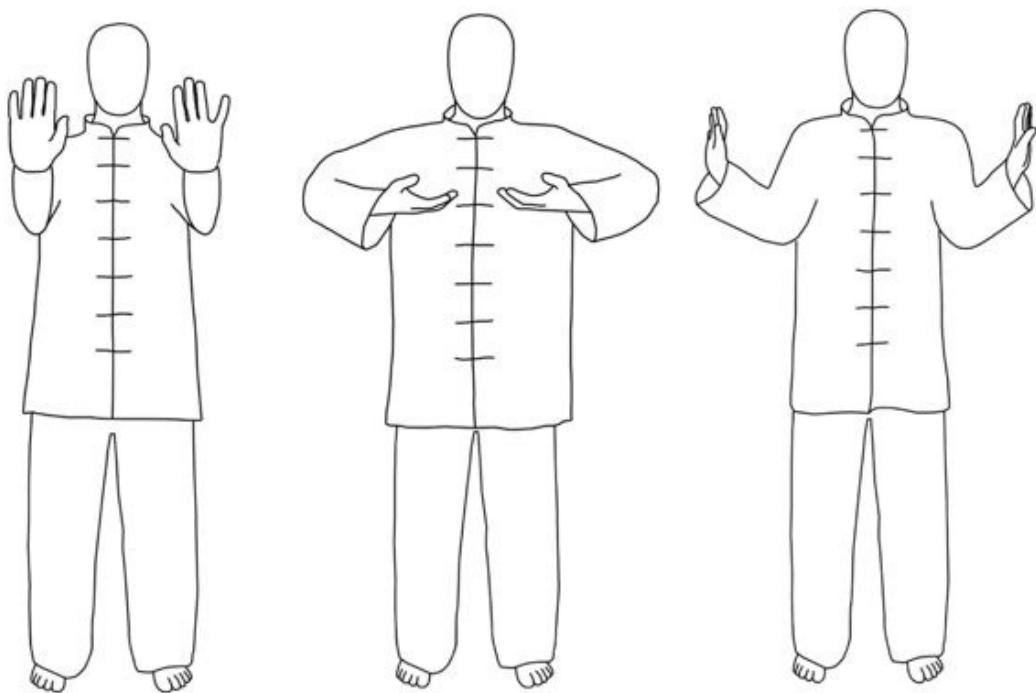
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Exhale, and press your palms forward. The end position should be just like you were pushing an imaginary wall away, arms extended forward, palms open, pointing forward, fingers pointing up. Hold this position for three inhales and exhales.

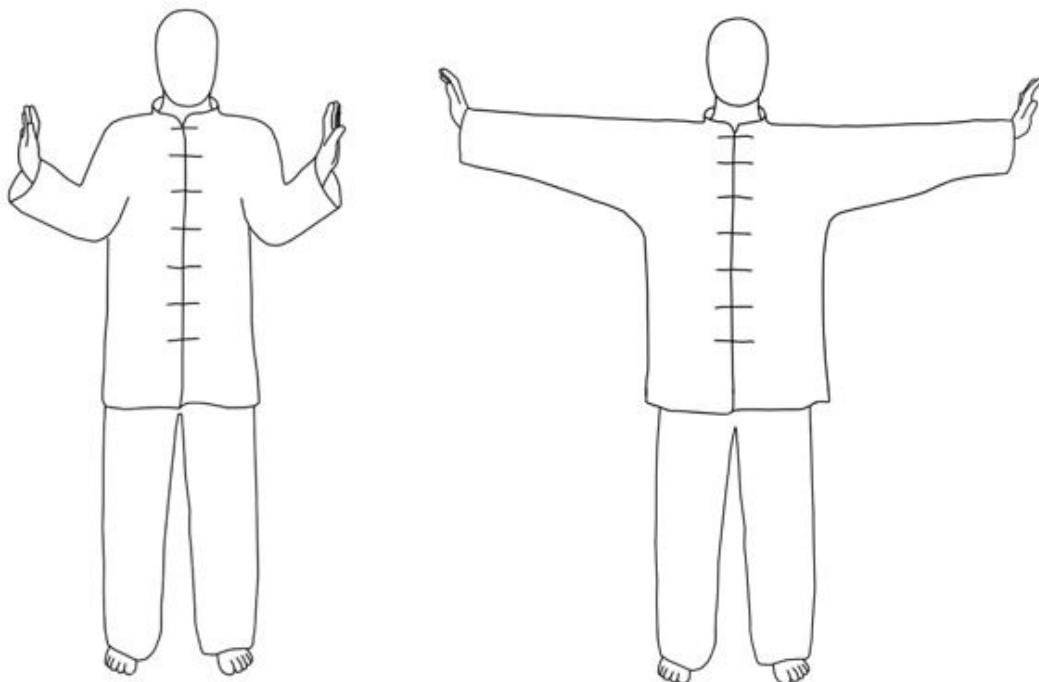


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With an **inhale** turn your palms up, and start drawing your hands in, towards your chest, elbows moving out sideways. Once your hands (palms facing up), reach the chest, turn the palms out to the sides, both facing away from your body, sideways, like you were holding very narrow walls next to your shoulders, letting the elbows drop, but still keeping them close to your torso.

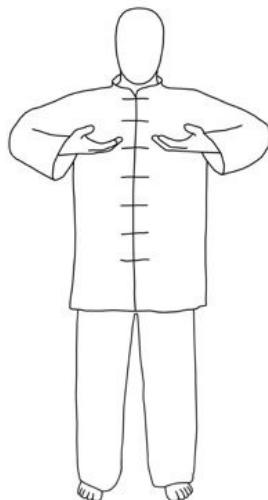
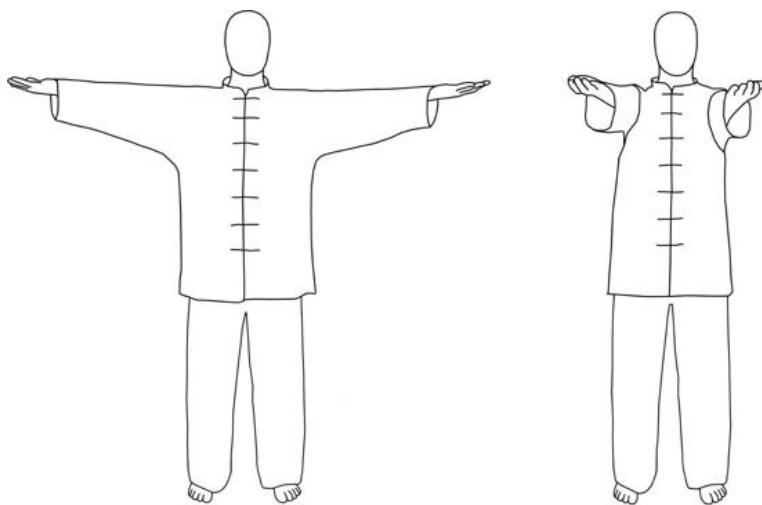


Exhale, and press your palms away, as if you were moving those walls and widening the space you are standing in. Fully extend your arms to the sides, palms facing away, fingers pointing up. Try keeping your shoulder-blades down and don't let your shoulders come up to your ears. You should feel a slight tension in your palms. Try to extend your fingers upwards and backwards slightly, continuing to push away with the base of your palms. Hold this position for three full breaths, inhales and exhales.



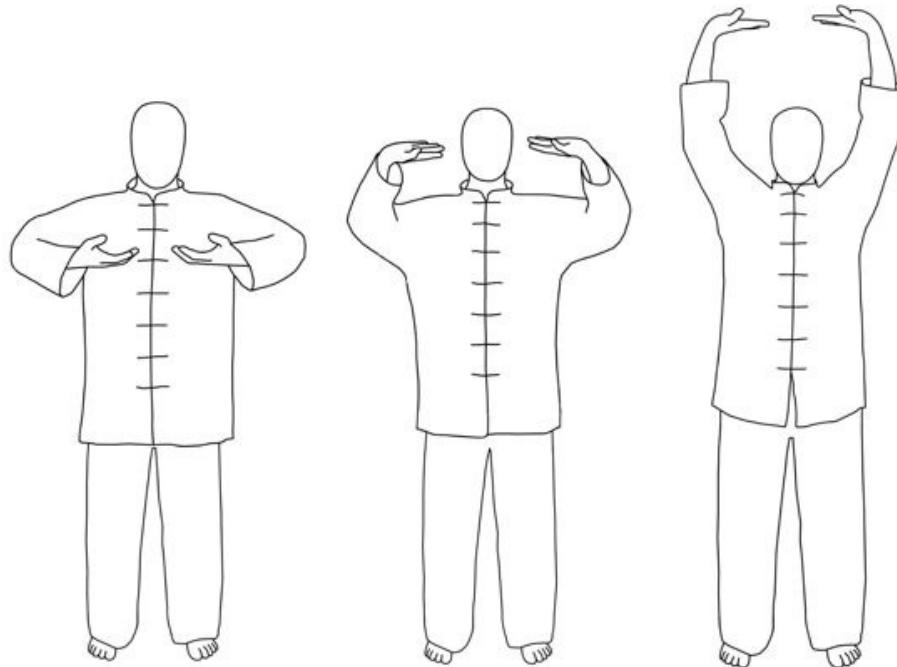
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With an **inhale**, turn both of your palms up, and with extended arms start drawing large arcs in front of you, until your arms are extended to the front once again. Continuing to inhale, draw your upward facing palms in, to your chest, as the elbows move outwards, just like in a previous movement.



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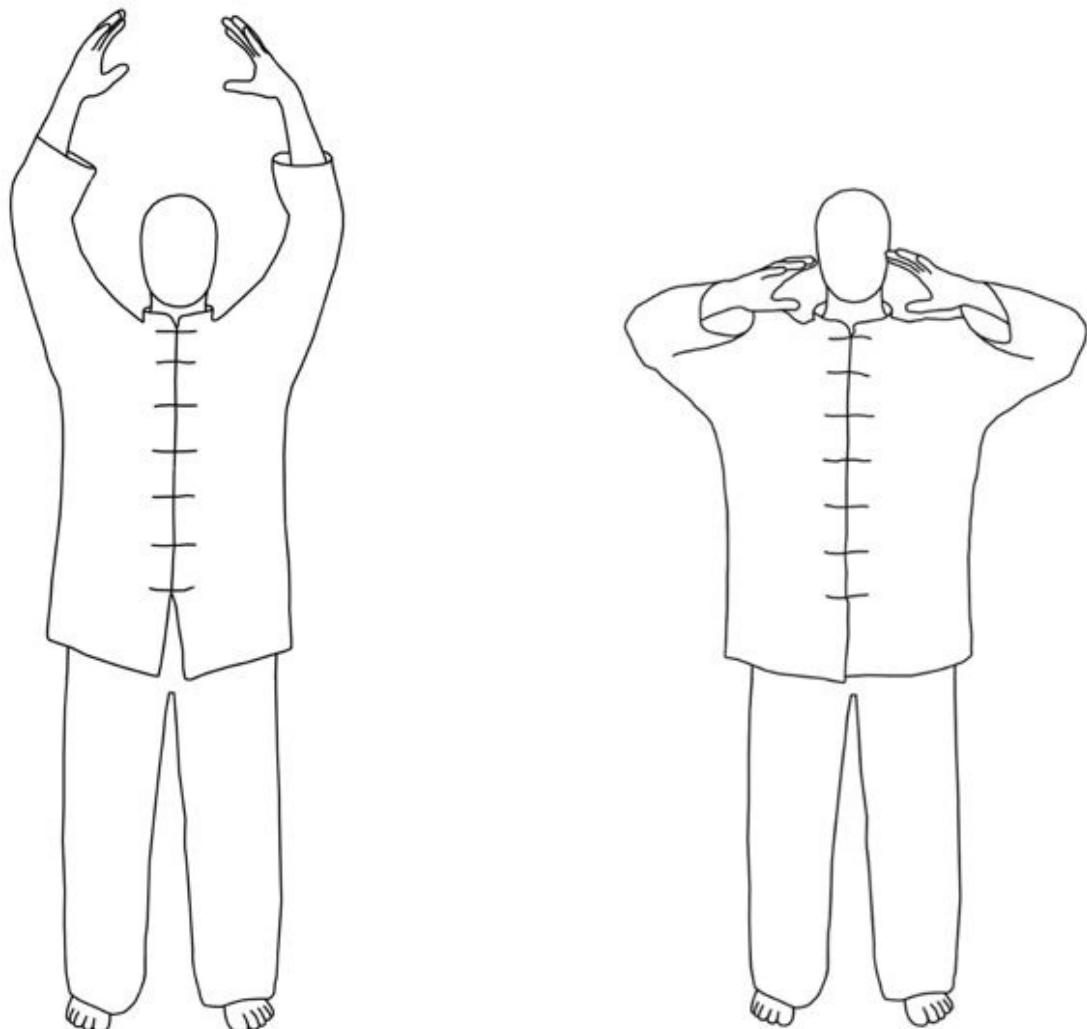
Exhale and turn your palms over your shoulders, elbows pointing outwards, palms facing upwards, fingers pointing inwards, as if you were about to lift something heavy over your head. Start pushing your hands upwards, fingers facing inwards and towards the other hand. Continue **exhaling** and pushing some imaginary weight up, until you cannot extend your arms any longer.



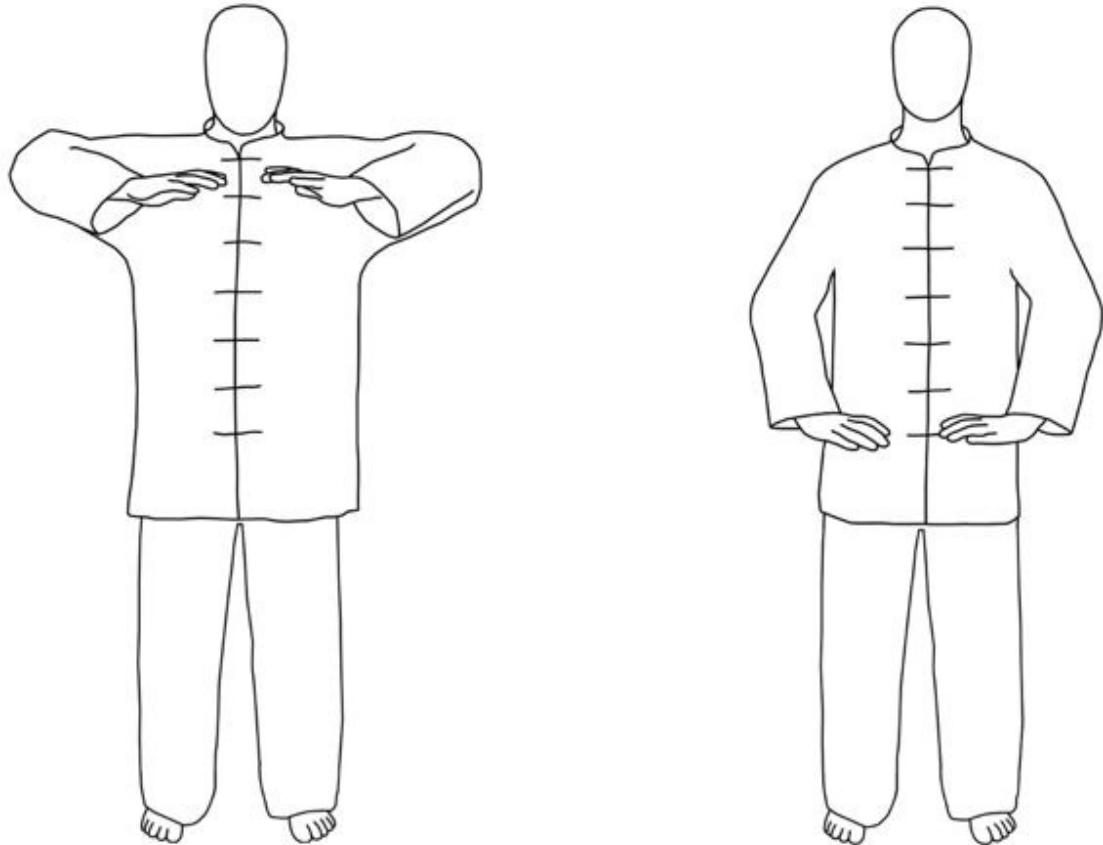
Stay in this position for three inhales and exhales. While you hold, make sure, that your palms stay flat, with fingertips facing each other, and arms extended as much as possible. Your shoulders should not lift up to your ears, try to keep them down. If you cannot fully extend your arms, that is perfectly fine, it is more important, that your palms stay in the right position, facing up, fingers pointing towards each other, as if there was some sort of flat weight you were supporting overhead, or reaching for a very low ceiling. Keep your shoulders down, never let them lift up to your ears.

...

With an **inhale**, now turn your palms facing each other and slightly downwards, lower your arms, while your hands follow a straight path in front of your face, until they reach in front of your chest, at which point your elbows go outwards once again as you keep your palms turned down.



Without pausing, **exhale** and push your downwards facing palms further down, as if you were trying to push something, like a large ball under water, as far as you can, keeping your palms parallel to the ground.



This concludes the sequence of 'Hold the spirit and guard the one' and 'Two hands hold up the heavens'. 

‘SEPARATE HEAVEN AND EARTH’ AND ‘WISE OWL GAZES BACKWARDS’ WITH DRAWING THE BOW TO SHOOT THE HAWK’

The second sequence is made up of three individual moves as the title suggests. While each individual move can be practiced separately, the first two, ‘Separate heaven and earth’ and ‘Wise owl gazes backwards’ could be connected and observed as one continuous sequence, just like shown here.

Given the similarly unilateral nature of the third move, ‘Drawing the bow to shoot the hawk’, it is a good idea to connect it up to the previous two. This will have the additional benefit of having to stand in MaBu for a shorter time at once, but the possible disadvantage of the sequence becoming quite long.

If you experience fatigue, or shortness of breath, do not be afraid to break down the sequence to individual moves. It is not important, in which order you perform the moves, you can mix them up in any way you like. This also holds true to the rest of the BaDuanJin exercise and to all sequences (with the exception of the last one), the order they are introduced in, is only a suggestion.

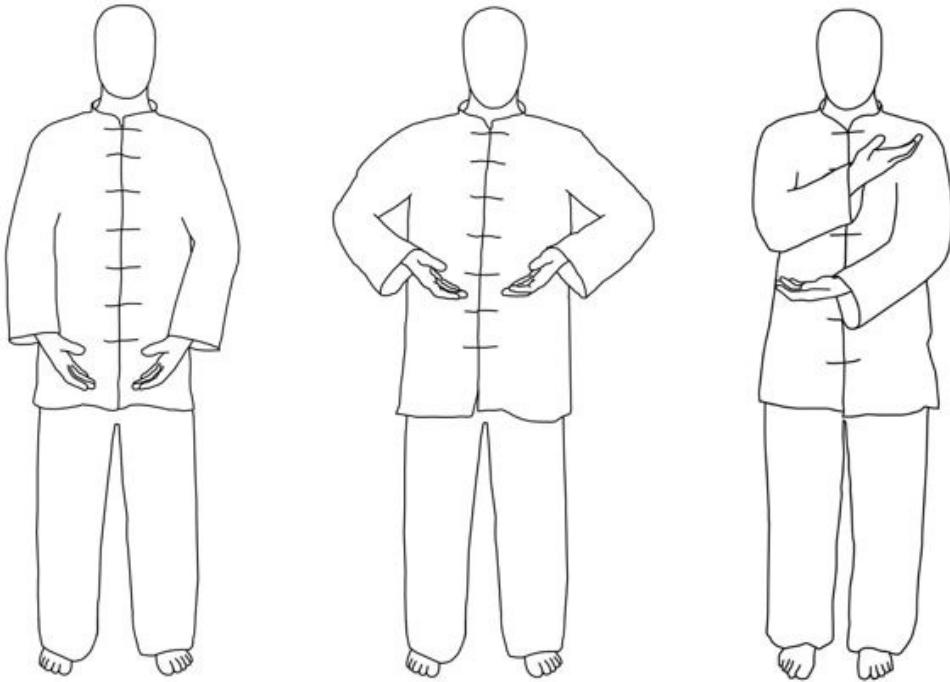
This sequence offers many health benefits, regulating and strengthening different parts of the body and many internal organs. The first move has positive effects on the stomach and the spleen, the second move helps to prevent injuries and strain, through turning the head and the neck and the whole upper body, while twisting the spine. The third move regulates the kidneys and once again the spleen, exercising the whole of the waist area.

Both of the aforementioned stances, MaBu, or Horse Stance and GongBu, or Bow and Arrow Stance are essential for the last movement of this sequence. The opening and closing moves are the same as for all sequences.

Do not forget the opening and closing moves, right before and after the sequence.

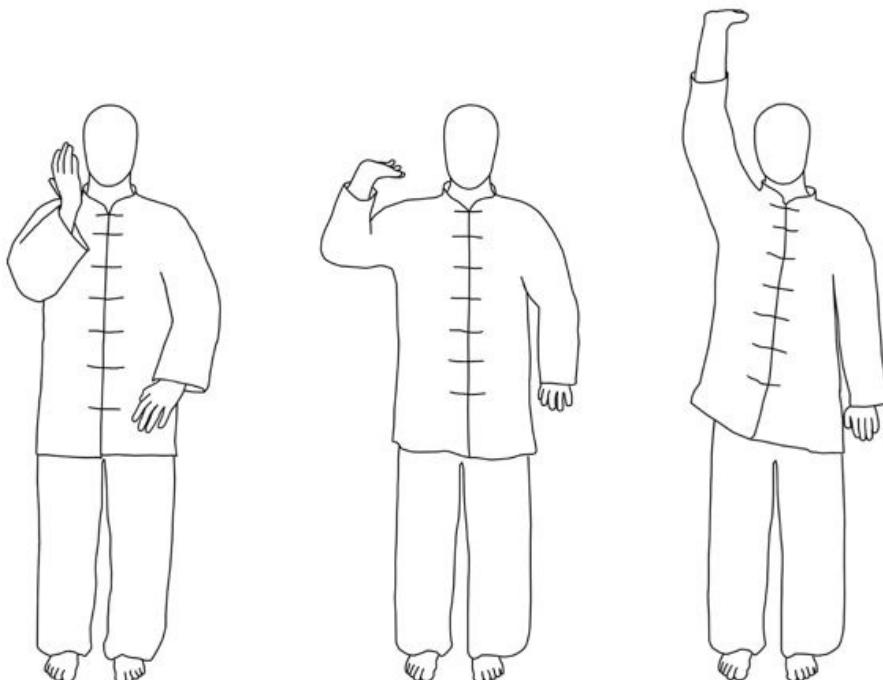
SEPARATE HEAVEN AND EARTH

As you **inhale**, bring both hands up, palms facing upwards. When you reach about chest height, start sliding your left hand under your right elbow, and your right hand would move across your body, just in front of your shoulders. At the same time, your left hand goes all the way under the right elbow, both palms still facing upwards.

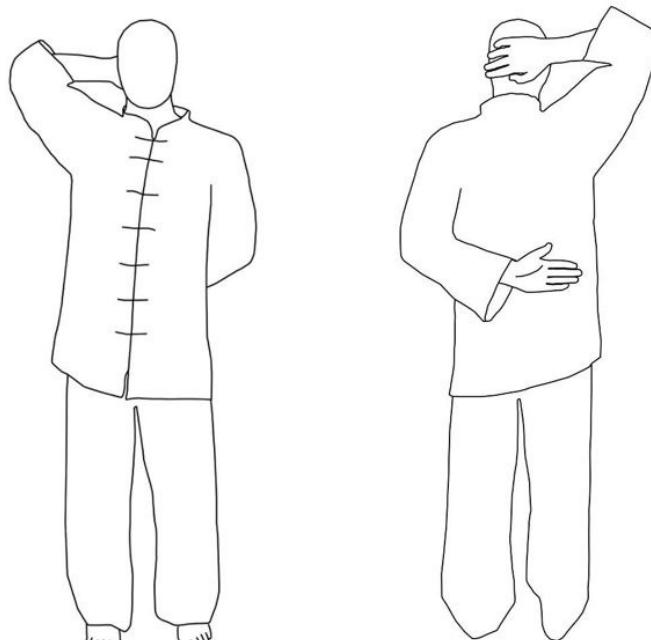


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Now **exhale** and turn your left palm down, bringing it down to your side. At the same time, turn your right hand out to your right side, next to your head, palm still facing up. Continuing to exhale, push your palms in opposite directions, right hand pushing up, left pushing down. Keep both shoulders down, do not let your right shoulder lift up to your ear. As you continue to push in opposite directions, palms stretched, fingers flexed backwards, hold this position for three inhales and exhales.



WISE OWL GAZES BACKWARDS Inhale, AND LOWER YOUR RIGHT HAND, WHILE KEEPING THE RIGHT ELBOW POINTED OUT TO THE SIDE. PUT YOUR HAND BEHIND YOUR HEAD, YOUR FINGERTIPS SHOULD BE ABLE TO TOUCH YOUR EARS (BUT KEEP YOUR FINGERS STRAIGHT). YOUR LEFT HAND GOES UP, BEHIND YOUR BACK, RESTING ON YOUR RIGHT KIDNEY, WITH YOUR PALM FACING OUTWARDS.

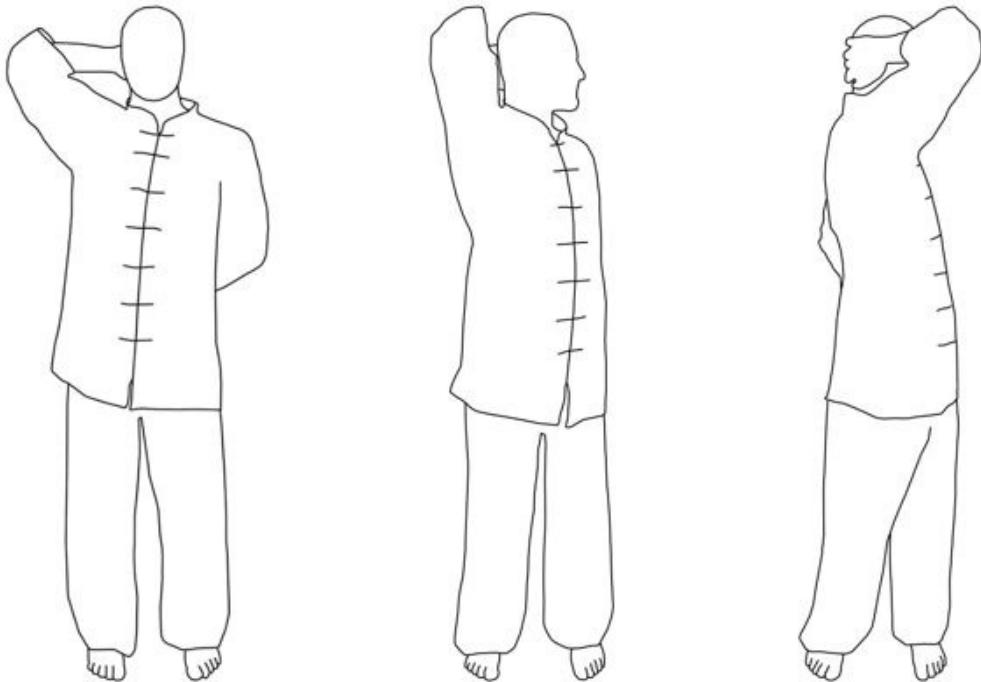


(Viewed from behind)

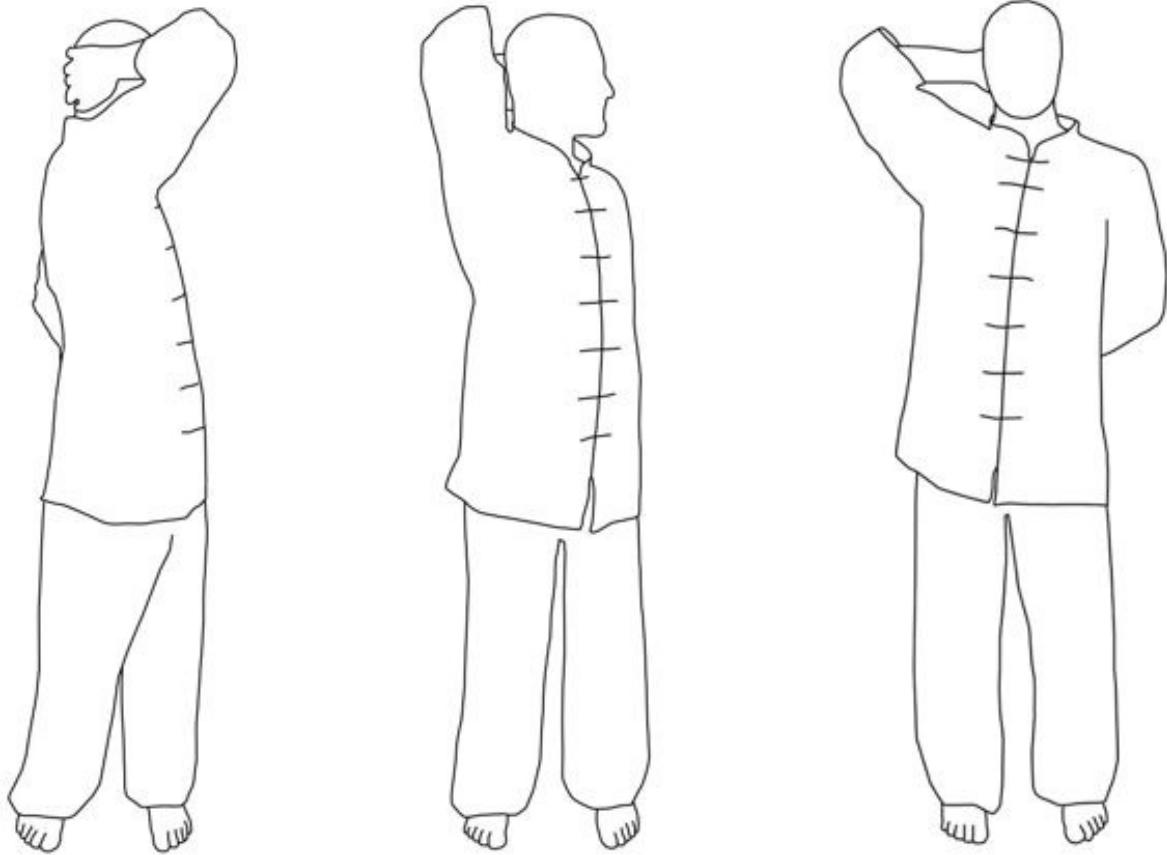
Keep your back as straight as possible, and try to minimize sideways movement of the torso. You should feel a slight stretch in your left shoulder and in your right side at the top of your back.

...

As you start to **exhale**, slowly turn your torso to the left, looking over your left shoulder. You should be able to look behind yourself this way, your hands and elbows staying in position, relative to your head and back. Try to turn from the waist, not from the knees.



With an **inhale** turn back to the starting position.

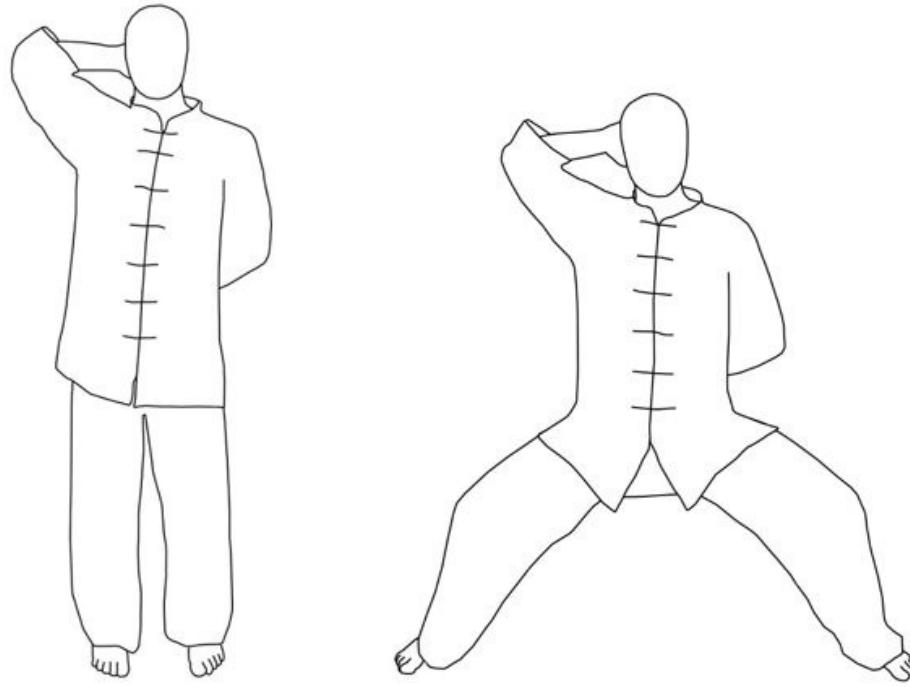


Exhale then inhale with turning similarly two more times. Finish the movement with a last **inhale**.

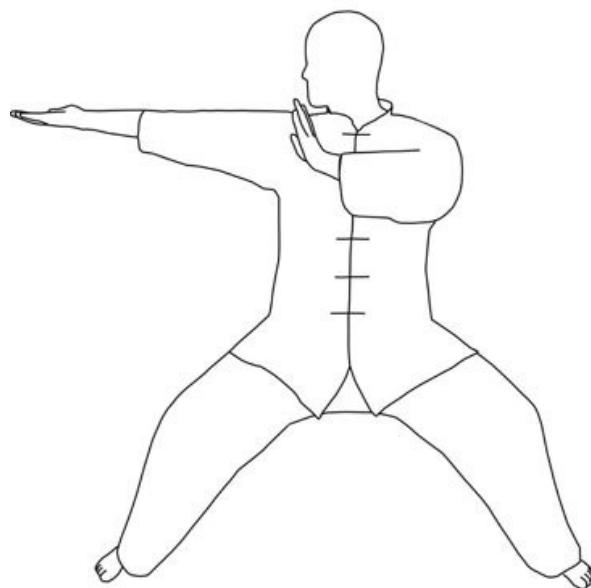
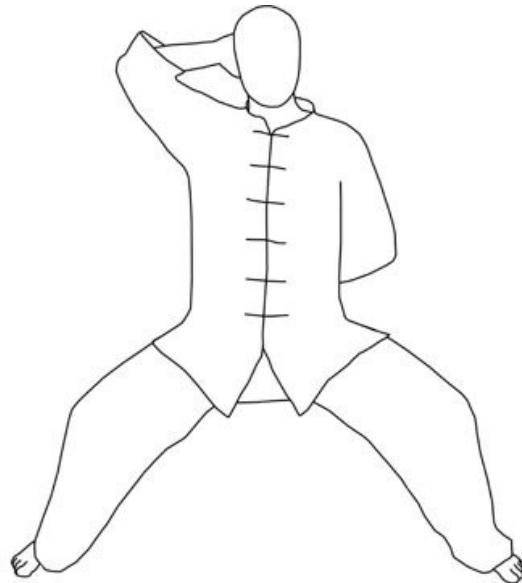
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DRAWING THE BOW TO SHOOT THE HAWK

As you **exhale**, step out with your right foot, to the side and squat down to MaBu, your hands retaining their positions.

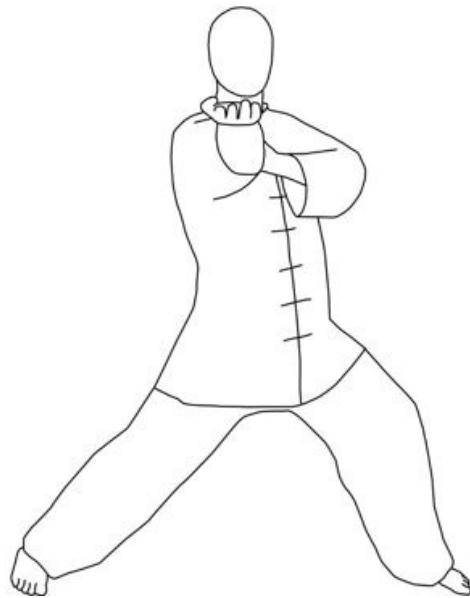
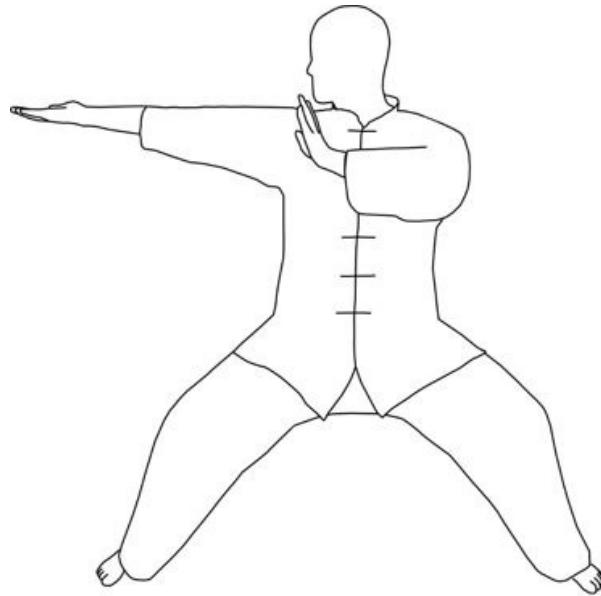


As you start to **inhale**, extend your right arm to the right side, palm facing up, while your left hand comes in front of your right shoulder, palm facing away (towards your right).



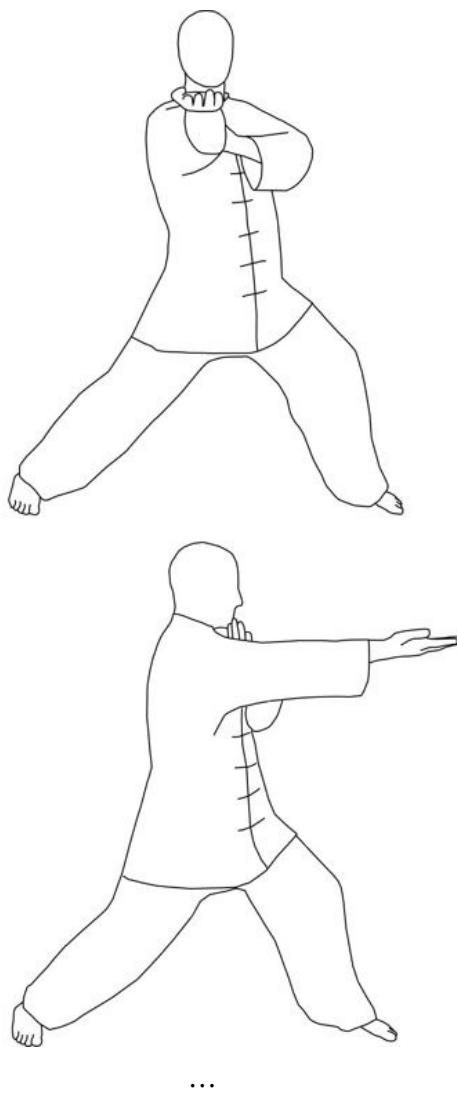
...

Continue **inhaling**, as you start turning your torso to the front, your outstretched arm following the movement and your eyes follow the tips of your fingers.

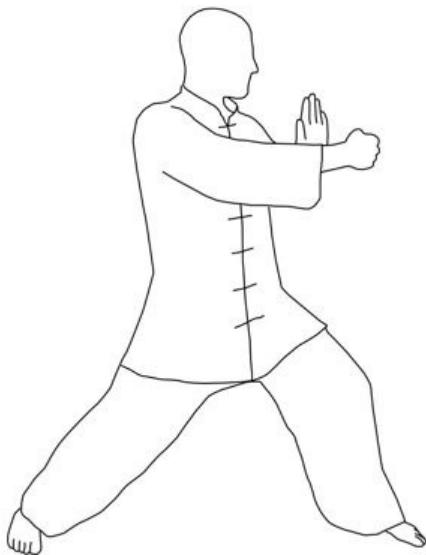
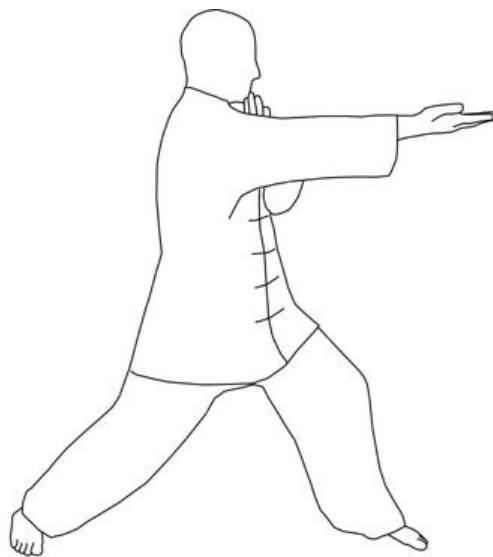


...

Keep turning, until your right arm is now stretched to the left side, across your body. Your left hand is still in front of your right shoulder, now your palm facing the shoulder, but not touching. While you turn, your stance changes from MaBu, or Horse Stance, to GongBu or Bow and Arrow Stance gradually.

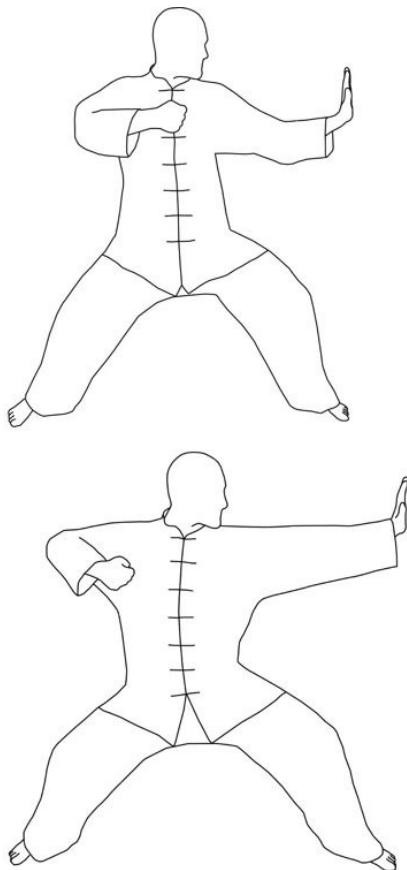


Now **exhale**. Clench your right hand into a fist and start pulling it back, while pushing the outstretched palm of your left hand to the opposite direction, as if you were pushing something away with your left, pulling with the right, or as the name indicates, drawing up a bow and arrow to shoot.

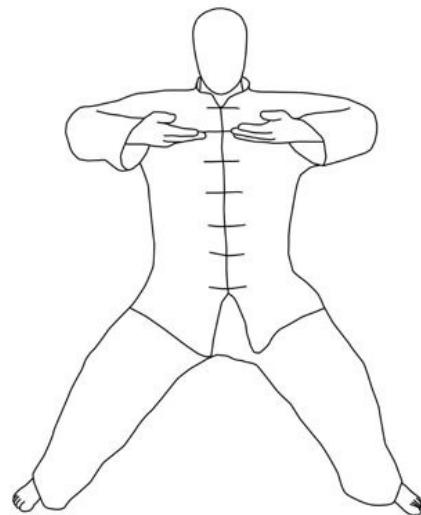
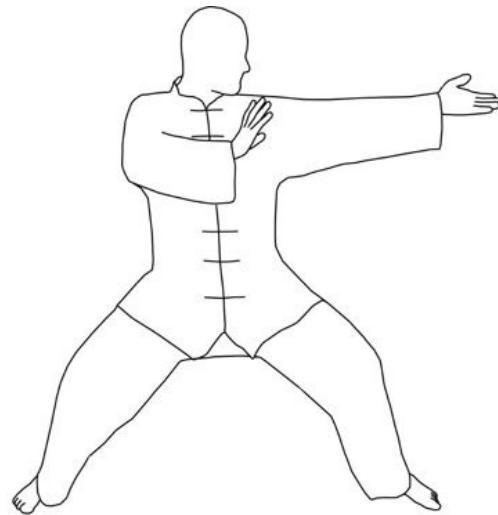


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Continue pushing and pulling simultaneously, until your left arm is fully outstretched and your right fist cannot move any more backwards, with your right elbow held at shoulder height, or just below. While you push and pull away, your hips should follow the movement of your shoulders and your stance should gradually return to MaBu. As you reach the final position, stay in there for three full breaths, inhales and exhales.

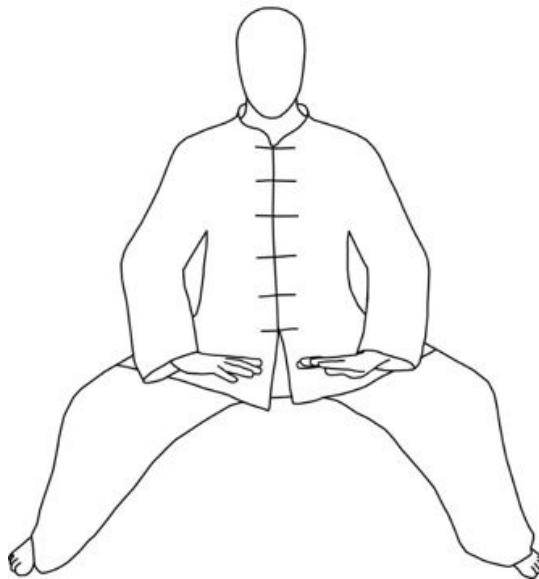
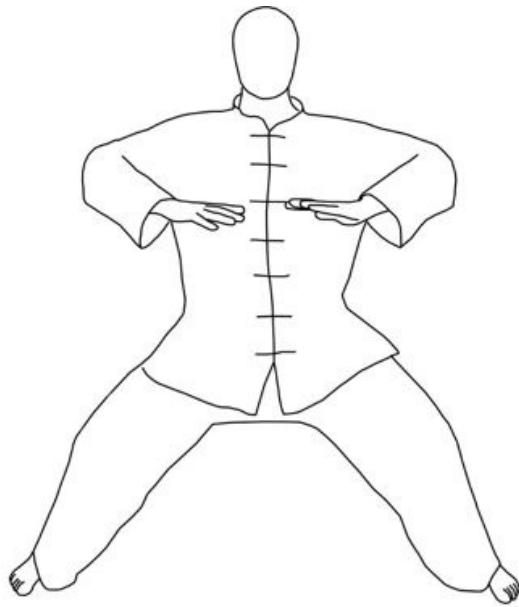


With an **inhale**, turn your left palm up, and relax your right fist. Bring your open palm beside your left shoulder, palm facing toward your left hand. Continuing to inhale, turn your torso to the front, your left arm drawing in, to the front of your chest. Now both hands are facing up, fingers pointed towards each other, elbows out to the side.



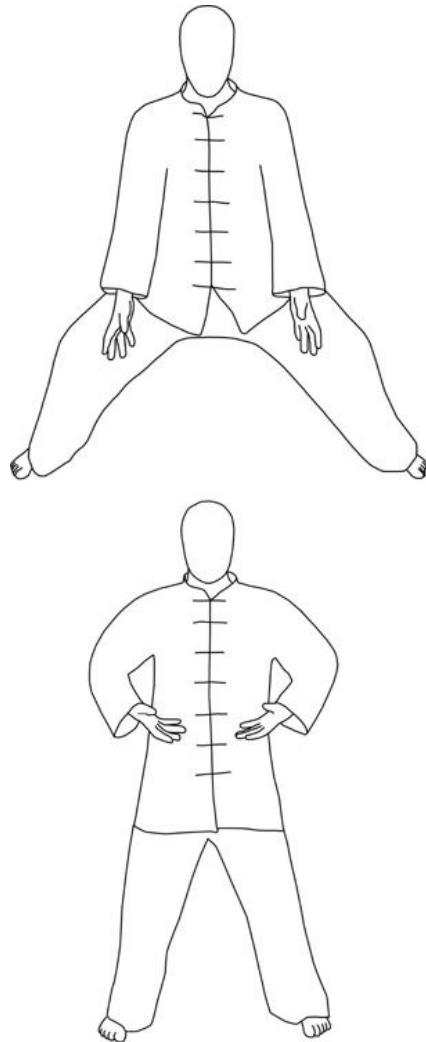
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As you **exhale**, turn your palms down, and push them towards the ground, keeping them parallel.



...

Inhale, and turn your palms in, then slightly up, lifting them up, as if you were to pick up water to wash your face, just like in the opening movement. At the same time, draw your right foot closer to the left and straighten your knees.



If you have only completed the sequence once, now stand up and repeat the sequence to the left side as well. If you have completed the sequence both sides, finish it with the ‘Closing move’. This concludes the sequence of ‘Separate heaven and earth’ and ‘Wise owl gazes backwards’ with ‘Drawing the bow to shoot the hawk’. 

‘TAKING OFF THE SHOES’ AND ‘BIG BEAR TURNS FROM SIDE TO SIDE’

The following sequence is meant to relieve stress, regulate the function of the heart and lungs. Its primary aim is to remove excess heat, or fire (*XinHuo*) from the heart, calming the mind. Switching stances also helps lower limb problems, and helps opening up the hips.

Both the ‘Taking off the shoes’ and the ‘Big bear turns from side to side’ movements are likely to cause tripping or falling if you are unsteady or easily lose balance. If you feel unsafe, or uncertain of any movement, you can just go to an extent, where it still feels safe, even if it involves little to no movement. Please use extra caution, when practicing this sequence.

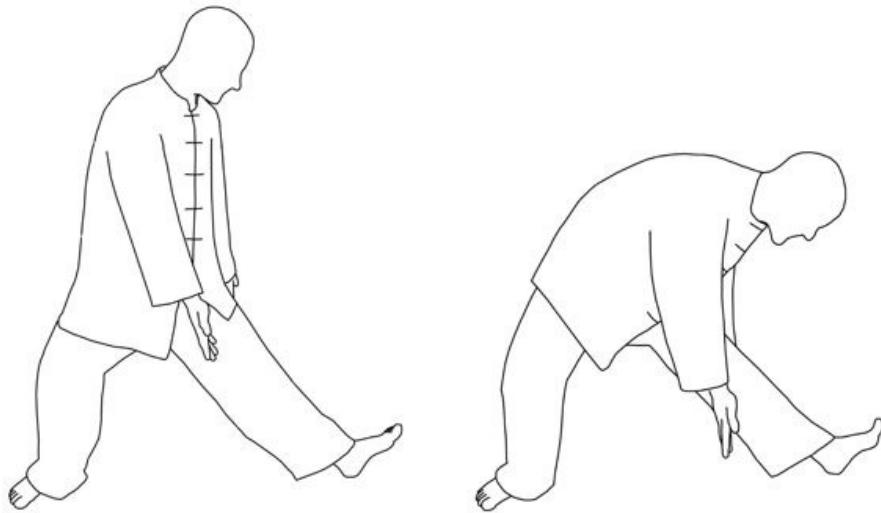
A good, stable MaBu, or Horse Stance, and GongBu or Bow and Arrow Stance are both very important for this sequence. The positions assumed at the first movement, ‘Taking off the shoes’ could prove somewhat difficult for someone less flexible or mobile. In the second part, ‘Big bear turns from side to side’ (often also called ‘Sway the head and shake the tail’), the low position used to turn the upper body could make you feel dizzy or even trip and fall. Please note, the illustrations are only guidelines, you must not go deep or low, unless you comfortably can.

Do not forget the opening and closing moves, right before and after the sequence.

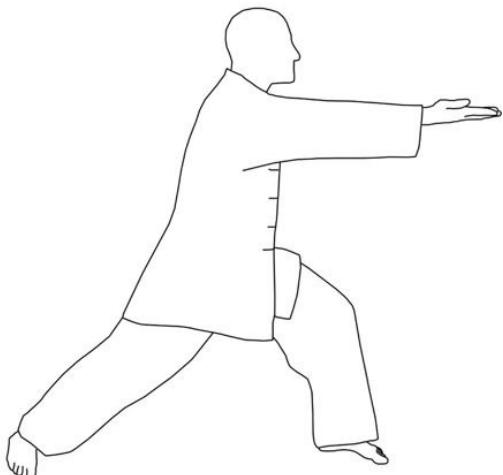
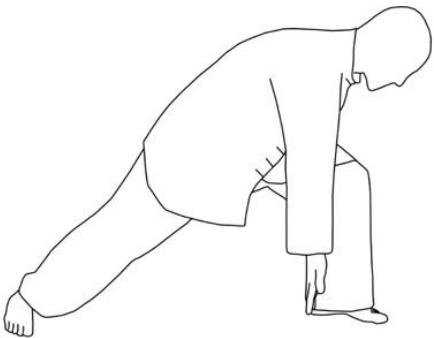
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TAKING OFF THE SHOES

Start with bending your right knee, to the front and slightly to the side. Turn your body towards the left and stretch out your left leg. Only your heel should touch the floor, the toes of your left foot are pointed upwards and forwards. Most of your weight should be on your right leg. Bend your back slightly, without leaning too much forward, look down with your head. Stretch your arms out, on either side of your left thigh, your outstretched palms facing forwards. Start to **inhale**, while dropping your hands down, next to your knees, or lower, on either side, hanging but not loose, bending only your back.

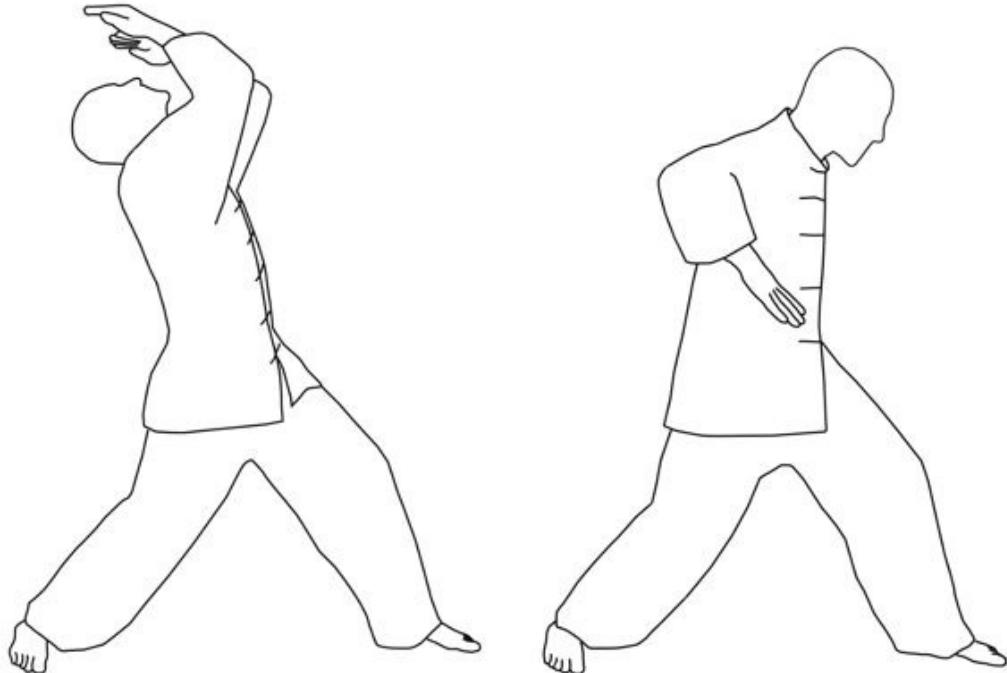


Still inhaling, move your bodyweight over to your left leg, your position slowly changing to the foot-and leg positioning of GongBu, while your upper body stays bent. Continuing to **inhale**, start straightening your back, while you keep both of your arms outstretched, palms never changing position. You would move your hands out to the front, arms stretched out,

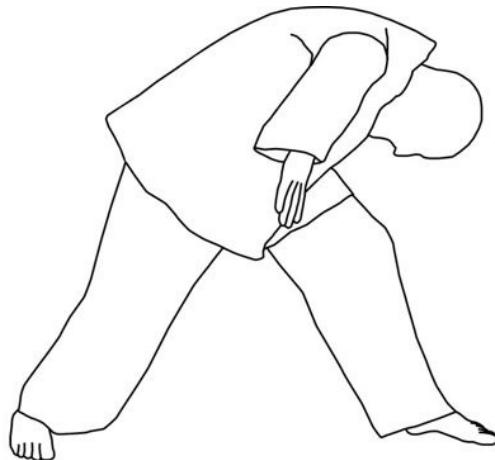


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Still **inhaling**, start leaning backwards with your torso, bend your elbows, and draw in your hands, palms pointed towards your face, just like you were to wash yourself. As your hands pass to both sides of your head, turn your elbows out, and while the palms keep facing down, you should turn them, so that the fingers now point forwards. Continue this, until your both hands are right beside your chest.

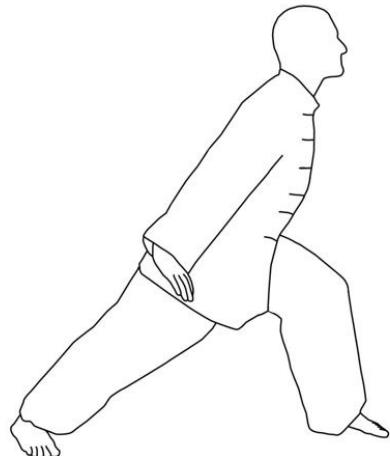


Exhale, as you start bending your back, head looking down. You should move as if you were trying to push your head underneath a low bar, although your preferred height will differ. Your hands on both sides are acting as if they had support of some sort, from which you are pushing yourself away. Your feet never move, but your stance will change back to GongBu.



...

At the end of the move, your feet are in the position same as in GongBu, while your chest is pushed forward, head looking forward. Your back should be straight, slightly arched, with your chest pushed forward, your hands and arms outstretched towards your hind foot. Your palms are facing your hind foot as well, pushing that way. Hold this position for three full breaths, inhales and exhales. Now turn to the other side and repeat the above sequence.



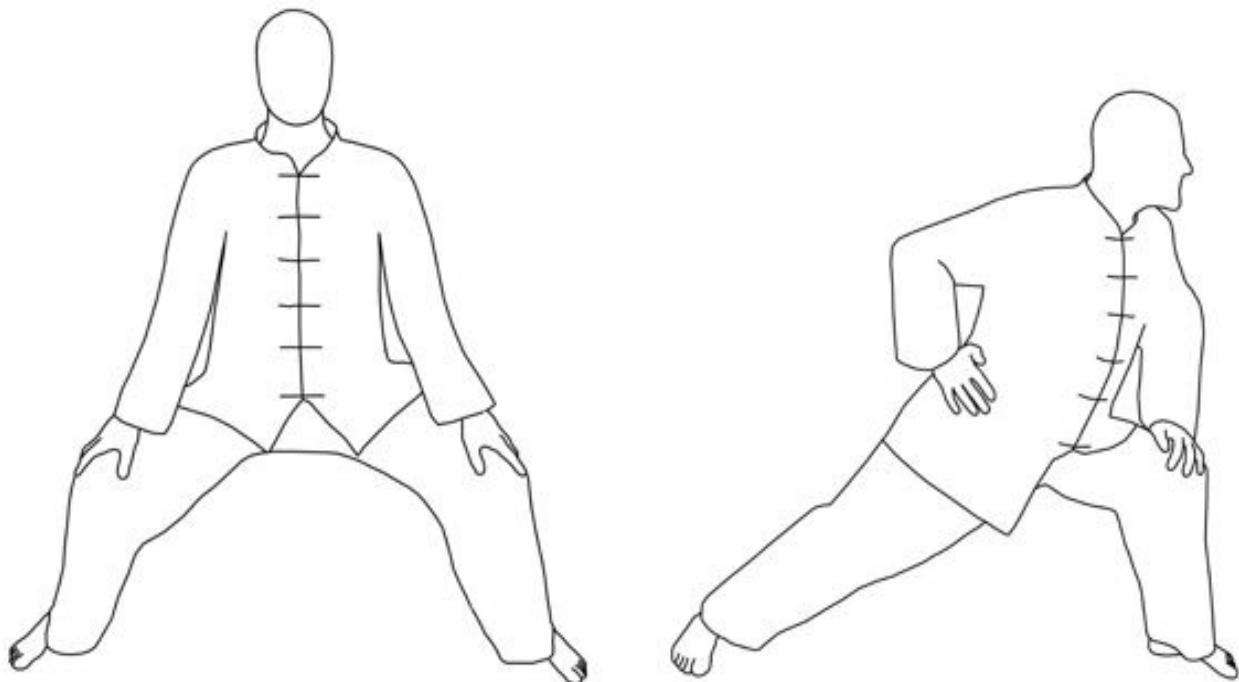
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'BIG BEAR TURNS FROM SIDE TO SIDE'

Be careful. These moves can be challenging. If you are weak or unsure, you can easily fall over. If you feel any difficulty doing this, you do not need to go low or deep. Go as low, or as high as comfortable, lowering your head only as far as you feel safe.

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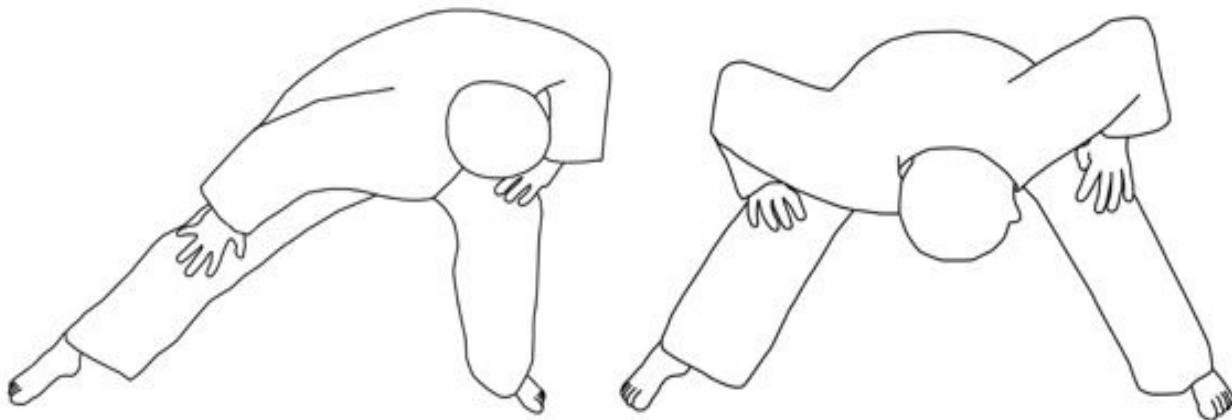
From the last position, simply return to MaBu, with your palms resting on your knees, or your thighs. Now turn to your left, change your stance into GongBu or Bow and Arrow Stance. Your left hand should remain on your left knee or thigh, while your right hand should come up to your waist. Look to the left, turning your head to that direction.



This will be your starting and end position for the following movements.

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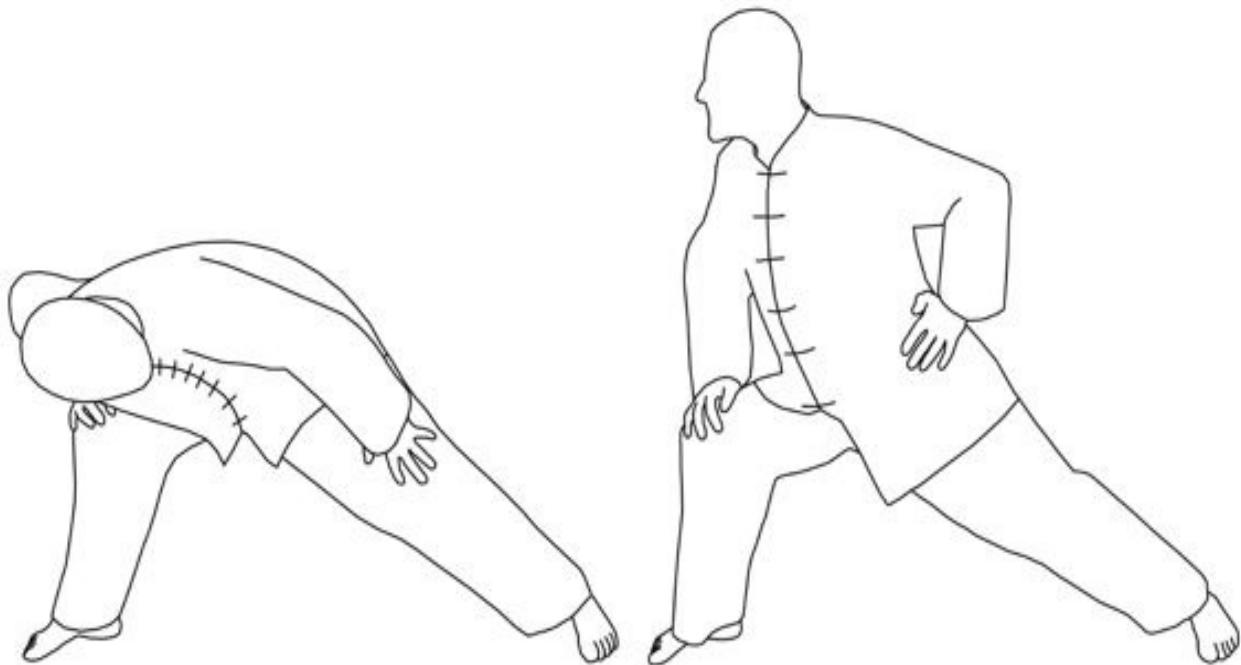
Do not pause here, but begin to **inhale** and start turning your head, trying to look behind you. At the same time lower your torso, bending at the waist, keeping the back straight and turning to the other side. Start changing your stance into MaBu or Horse Stance, letting your right hand slowly slip down to your right knee or thigh. While turning right still **inhaling**, you should continue looking left. At the mid-point, where your head and torso are at the lowest, standing in a perfect MaBu, your elbows should be higher than your head.



Go this low *only* if you feel confident, low body position is *not* essential, safe practice is much more important! You should gradually change your stance into GongBu on the opposite side. The movement should look very much like you were trying to get past a low horizontal bar, in a Horse Stance.

...

To finish the turning movement, turn your head to the right, bring your torso up, and your left hand you your waist, with a sharp short, but deep **exhale**. Your finishing position should be similar to where you started from, only facing the opposite side, now your right.



Now repeat the turning move, going all the way back. Repeat the turning to both sides two more times, having turned from left to right and from right to left three times in total. Only exhale at the very end of each turn, while your head moves upwards. Keep in mind, depth is not important; but continuous, smooth movement, even breathing and safe practice are.

This concludes the sequences ‘Taking off the shoes’ and ‘Big bear turns from side to side’. ॐ

‘TWO HANDS HOLD THE FEET TO STRENGTHEN THE KIDNEYS AND WAIST’

The following movement sequence is meant to strengthen the kidneys and strengthen and protect the waist. Some would claim, these moves are beneficial for the lower body as a whole (in traditional Chinese medicine lower body starts under the diaphragm, as this is how far oxygen enters the body, through what they call external respiration, or pulmonary gas exchange in western medicine).

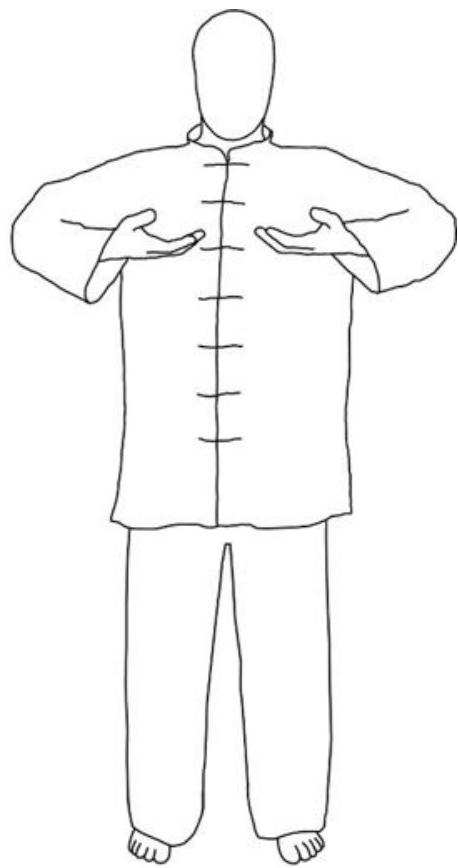
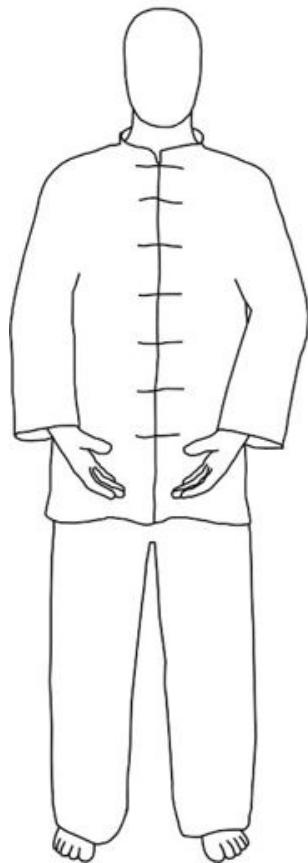
The following sequence includes movements, which can be difficult if you are inflexible or uncertain. You can use props or skip those moves entirely. It is not essential to complete all those movements, although it may be beneficial to try. There will be different ways to proceed with alternate moves proposed for those unprepared or not feeling safe or flexible enough. Such moves will be numbered to be able to easier navigate. This numbering and the proposed sequences might look difficult to understand or follow at first. This will be explained and presented in a much simpler format, right after the description of the movements.

Through stretching the waist area, the hamstrings (the back of the thighs) and the calves, these movements have the additional benefit to compensate for a seated ‘modern’ lifestyle.

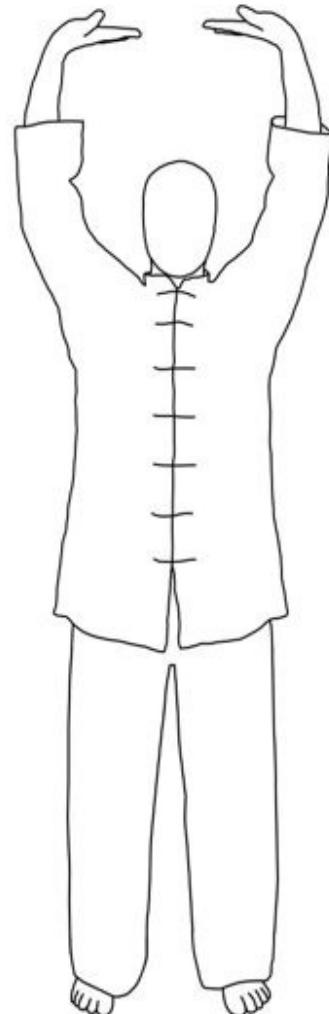
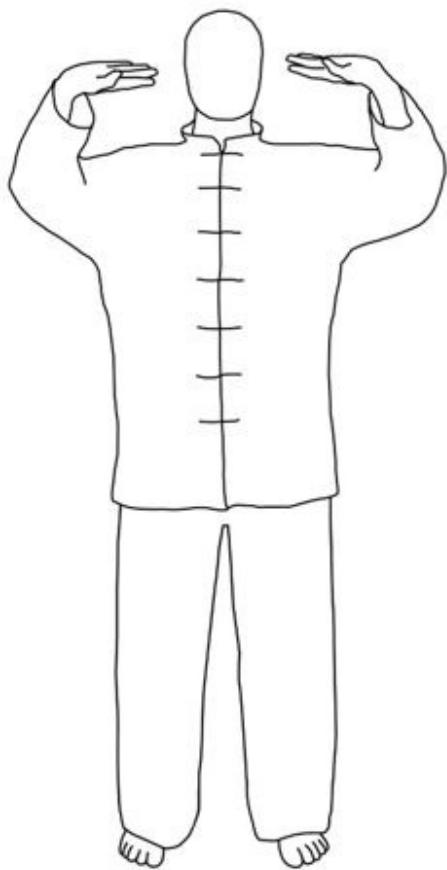
Do not forget the opening and closing moves, right before and after the sequence.

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Inhale and start slowly lifting your hands, palms facing upwards, fingers pointing at each other, as if you were about to wash your face and were just lifting some water up.

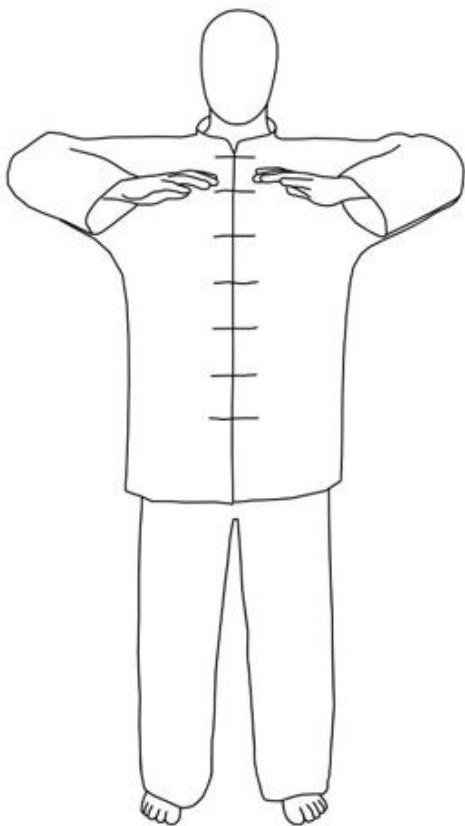
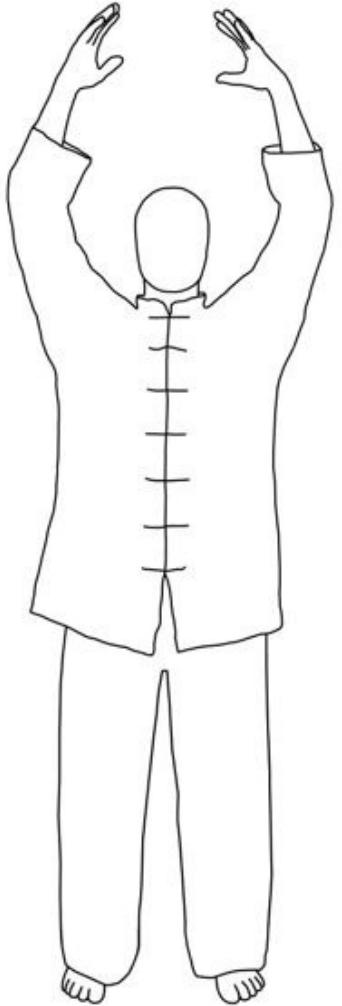


When your hands reach chest height, start to **exhale**, while turning your palms up, over your shoulders, then pushing your open and flat palms towards the sky. You can pause there for one inhale and exhale. Although not important, it might be beneficial to do so.



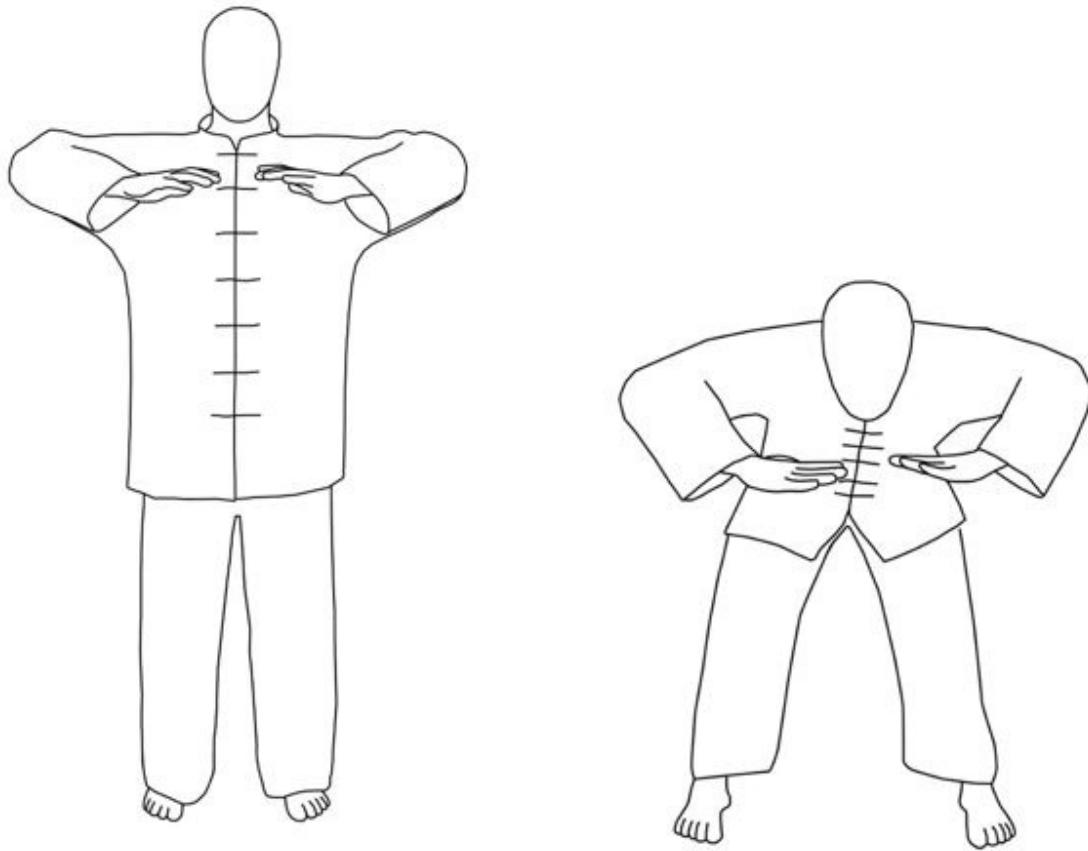
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Start to **inhale**, while turning your hands to face each other, fingers pointing up and towards each other, like you were holding a ball between your open palms, and finally lowering them to chest height again.



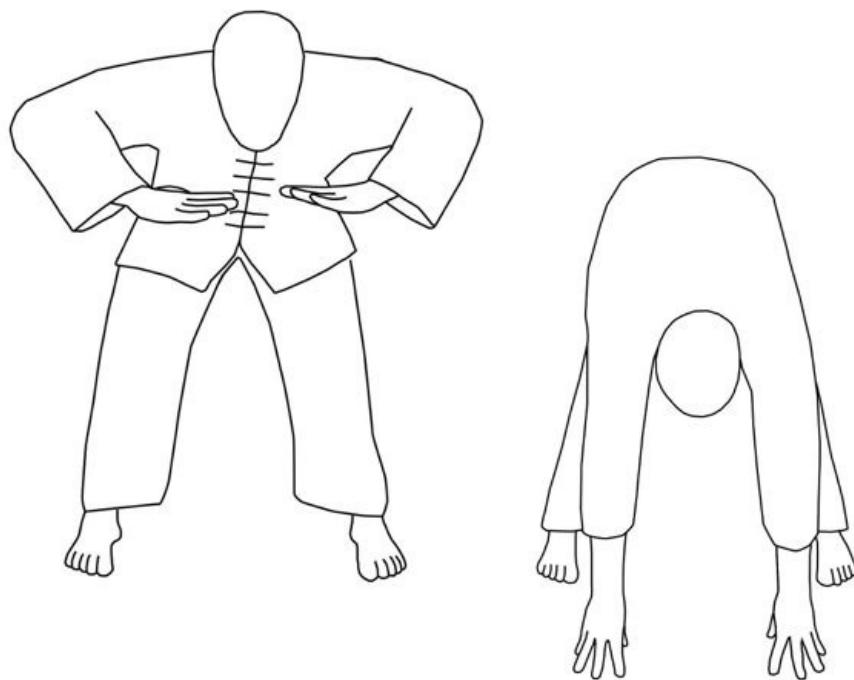
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At this point, begin to **exhale**, and start bending your torso, keeping your hands in the same position. Bend at the waist, with a straight back and straight legs, until your torso is approximately parallel with the ground, or a little bit higher.



1. If you are unsure, of the following movements, or feel inflexible to do it or unsafe in a low position, skip this part and proceed with #2, grabbing your feet.

Without pausing there, continue to **exhale** and extend your arms in front of you, trying to reach the floor. Do bend forward as far as your fingertips touch the ground and hold yourself on your fingertips, with arms and fingers stretched out and legs as straight as possible. If you are inflexible or find it otherwise difficult to reach this position, you can bend your knees slightly, to ease the stretch at your lower back. If you feel like you need to bend your knees more than a little, or if you cannot touch the floor even with bent knees, you can use a prop, like a box, or a low coffee table.



If you are unsure in the low position, or easily get dizzy, have a high blood pressure, or just do not want to risk falling over, use a high prop, such as a strong sturdy chair or table, maybe even a counter-top. Going low or deep is not important, as long as you can maintain a minimal feel of stretch in the back of your thighs, which is possible with a minimal bend at the waist. As always, safe practice is more important than low positions or movements. It is best to go only as low as you can maintain with straight legs, knees locked out, and keeping your back relatively flat. This will help to avoid going too deep and having

accidents or over-stretching your lumbar area. You can also skip this part entirely and proceed to grab your feet with both hands.

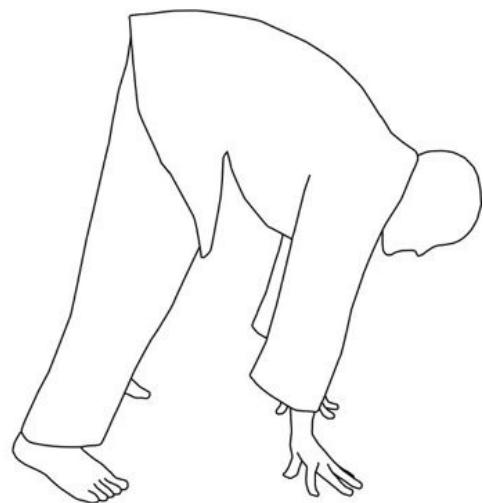
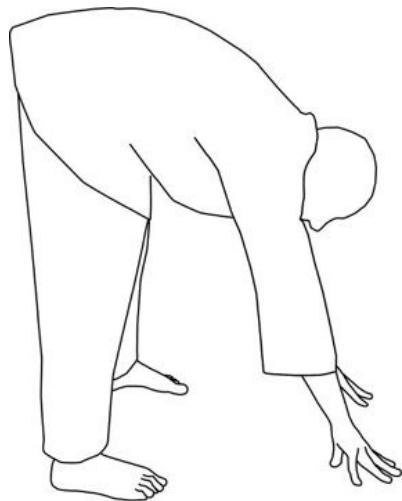
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Pause here for one **inhale**, or even longer if you need to make sure you can maintain your balance. You can also ‘pull’ your torso backwards, stretching out your arms and back, if you flexible enough to do so, while inhaling. From here, proceed with caution and move slowly, as it is very easy to trip or fall over in this position.



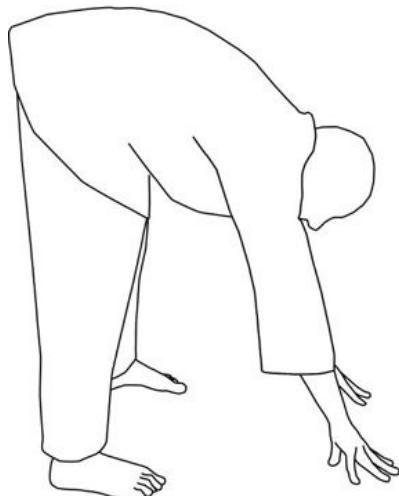
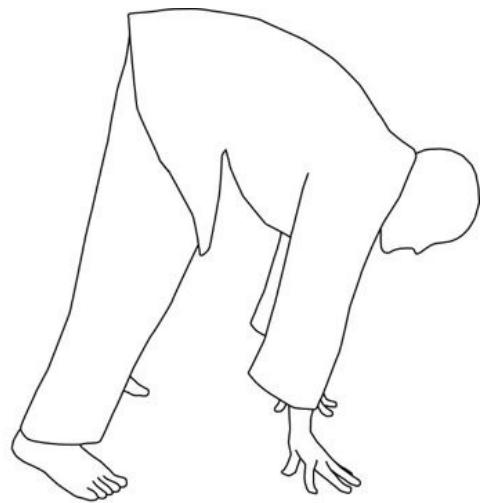
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Exhale and push your bodyweight over your hands and arms, raising your lower half slightly, as you lift yourself on tip-toe. You do not need to go deep, or far out, only as far as it feels safe.



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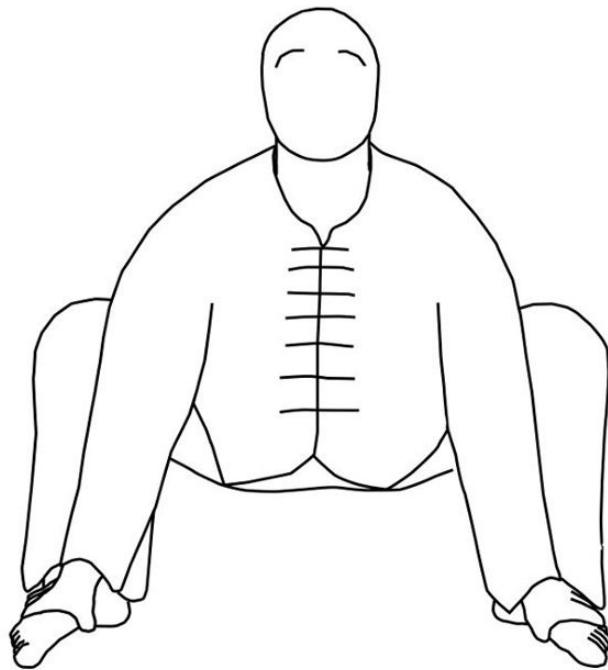
Inhale and return to the original position with your feet flat on the ground. Repeat this back and forth movement two more times, for a total of three inhales and exhales. For the fourth time you **inhale**, continue with squatting down (see #2).



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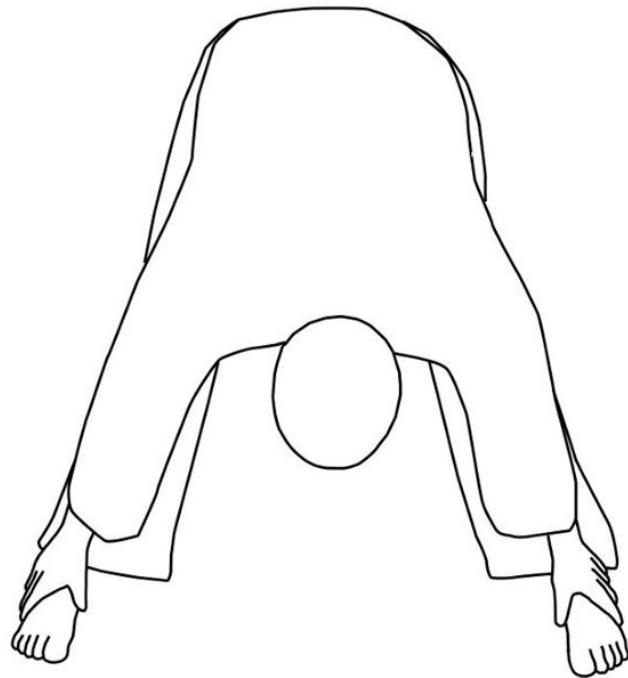
2. Continue here, regardless if you have skipped or completed #1. If these moves are still too difficult, you can skip this step and go with the alternative move, #3.

Inhale, as you bend your knees and squat *all the way down* between your legs. Both hands should grab a hold of one foot, your elbows touching your knees from the inside. Both feet should rest flat on the floor, toes turned slightly out. Look up to the sky, raising your head slightly, but looking all the way up with your eyes, as if you were trying to look at the top of your skull from the inside.



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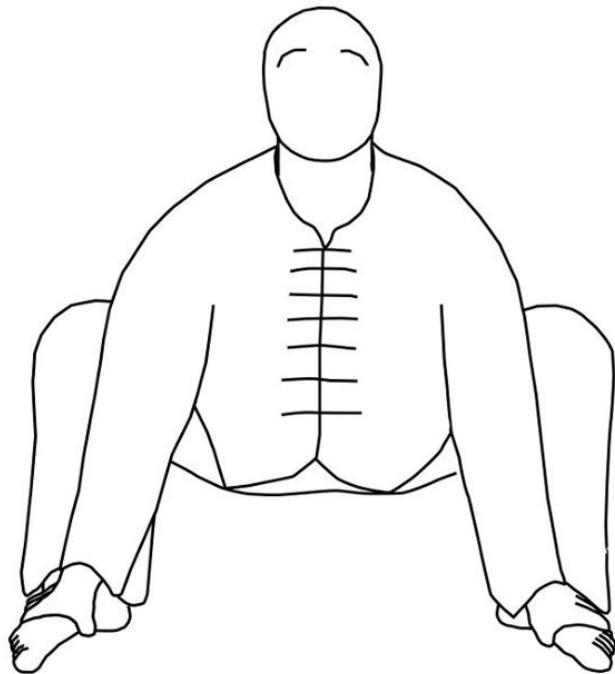
As you **exhale**, straighten your knees as much as you can, while still holding your feet. Your eyes should continue to look towards the top of your skull. Try to straighten your legs as much as possible. Although it is not essential to lock your knees, you should strive to do so. As you **inhale**, squat back down to the starting position. Repeat this squatting and straightening your legs while holding your feet, for a total of three inhales and exhales.



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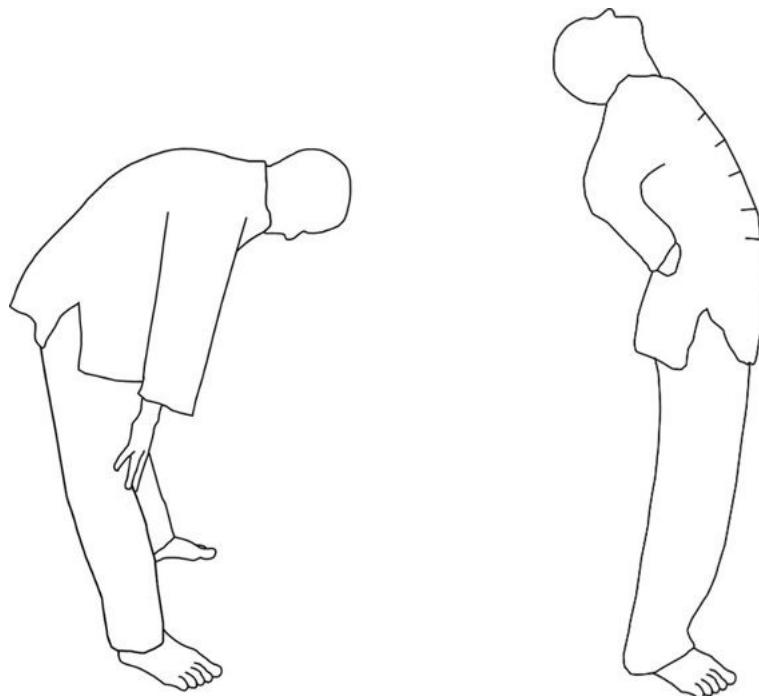
3. Alternative move – *Continue here if you have skipped either/both of #1 or #2. If you have completed #2, you do not have to do this move, although it could be beneficial to perform this move as well. If you choose to skip this move, continue with #4.*

Start in the same squatting position as on the previous move as you **inhale**, or, if you are bending forward from the standing position, continue with squatting down and grabbing your feet and **inhale**. Stay in the squatting position and **exhale**.



...

Now start straightening your legs and slide your hands up to your knees, while you inhale, keeping your back bent. Then start to exhale as you slide your hands up on your thigh, way up to your lower back, and give your kidneys a gentle massage, while bending your torso and your back and your head slightly backwards, eyes continuing to look up. **Inhale** bending forward, sliding your hands to your knees then squat down again as you exhale, your hands returning to hold the feet. Repeat for a total of three inhales and exhales.

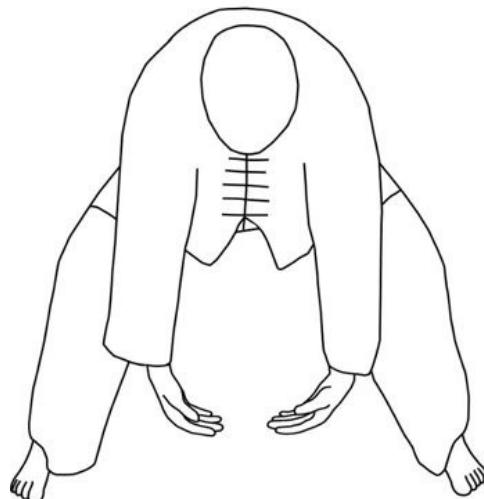
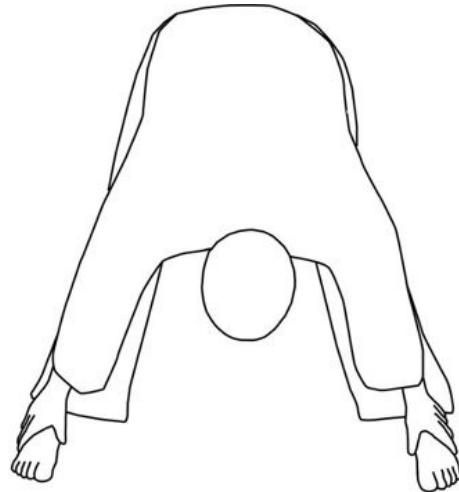


If you have completed this move, skip #4 and continue with # 5.

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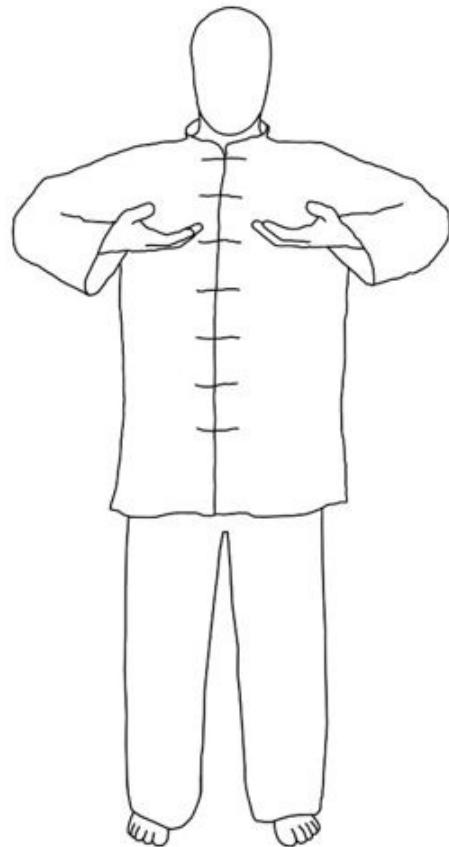
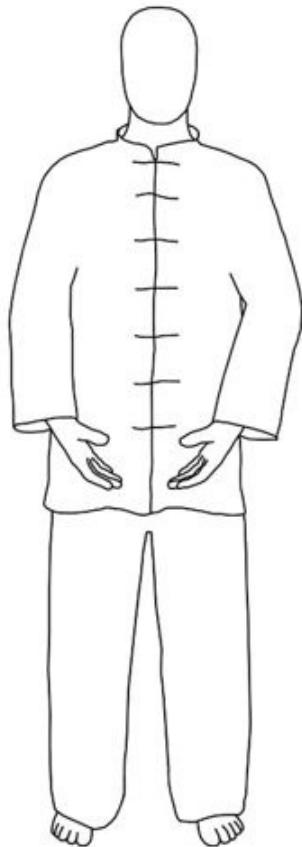
4. If you have not followed #3, the alternative move, continue here straight from #2.

As you **inhale**, start straightening up your body, while your hands hold and imaginary ball from the bottom.



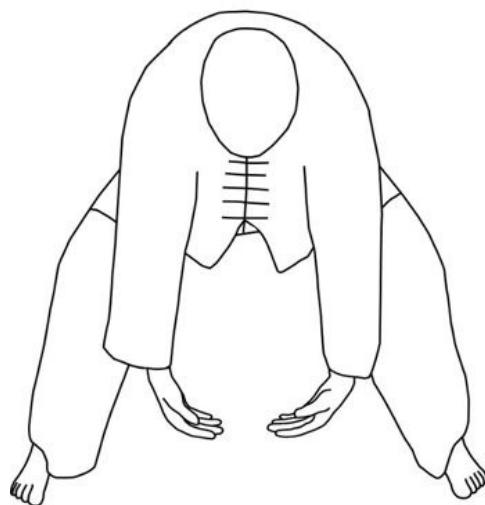
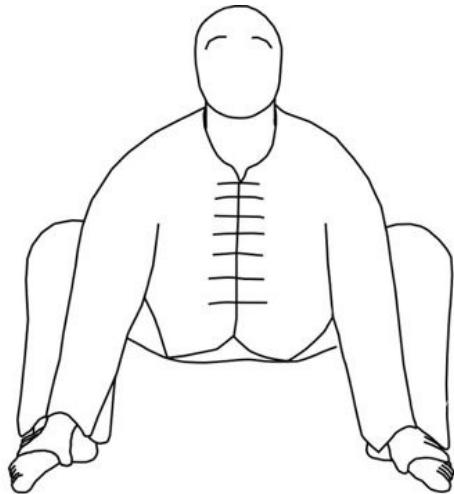
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Continue this movement and inhaling, until your body becomes upright, drawing in your left foot, to gain a narrower stance. You upright palms should stop in front of your chest.



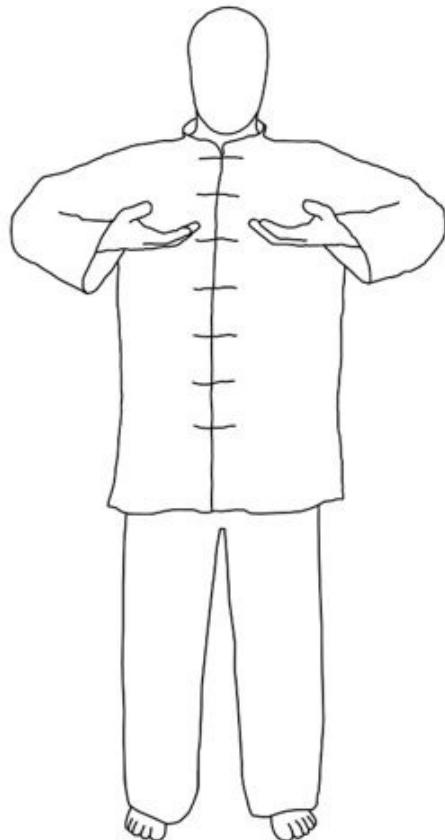
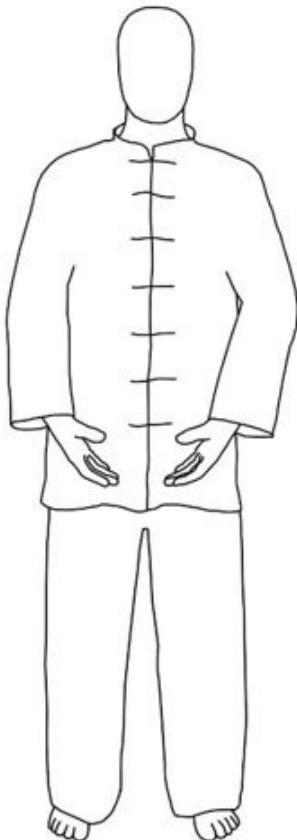
5. If you have followed #3, continue here right after the alternative move.

As you **inhale**, start straightening your knees and lift your torso, while your hands hold and imaginary ball from the bottom.



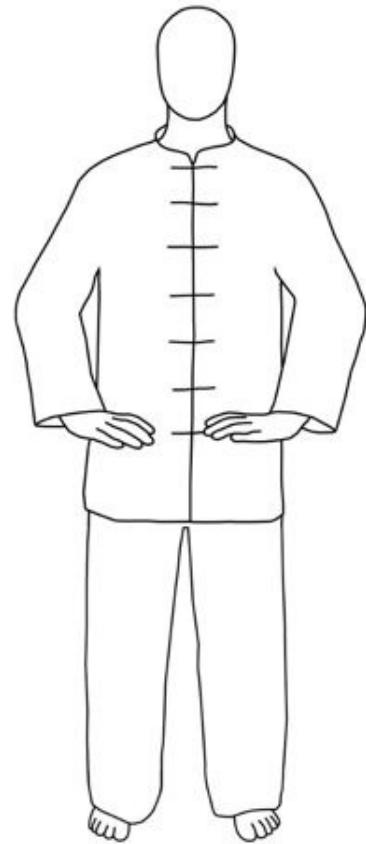
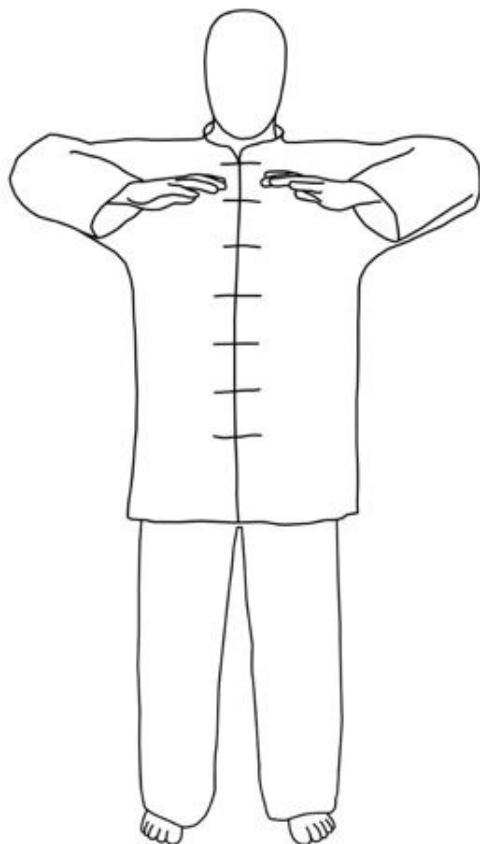
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Continue this movement and inhaling, until your body becomes upright, drawing in your left foot, to gain a narrower stance. You upright palms should stop in front of your chest.



6. This will be the last movement of any sequence path.

Exhale as you finish the movement sequence, turning your palms down and pushing your hands gently downwards.



...

The above numbering and the alternative ways this could be followed, might become quite confusing. Listed below are the possible sequences, you may go through. After the opening move and first few, unnumbered movements, continue with one of the following:

The traditional sequence: **#1 – #2 – #4 – #6**

Alternative sequences: **#1 – #3 – #5 – #6** or
#2 – #3 – #5 – #6

The fullest sequence: **#1 – #2 – #3 – #5 – #6**

Short alternative sequence: **#2 – #4 – #6**

The easiest sequence suitable for those limited in movement or flexibility: **#3 – #5 – #6.**

This concludes ‘Two hands hold the feet to strengthen the kidneys and waist’.



‘CLENCH THE FISTS AND GLARE FIERCELY’

The following movement is meant to activate the liver, through which one may gain strength and health. The liver, among its various physiological roles, also functions as a storage of blood and glycogen. When activated, it would release these substances, greatly enhancing power and Qi.

Also known as ‘power punches’, these are the only moves resembling fighting movements. You should still continue moving slowly and gently. You can clench your fists tight and even do the movements using physical strength, but these are not actual punches, your movement should be always *slow* and *controlled*.

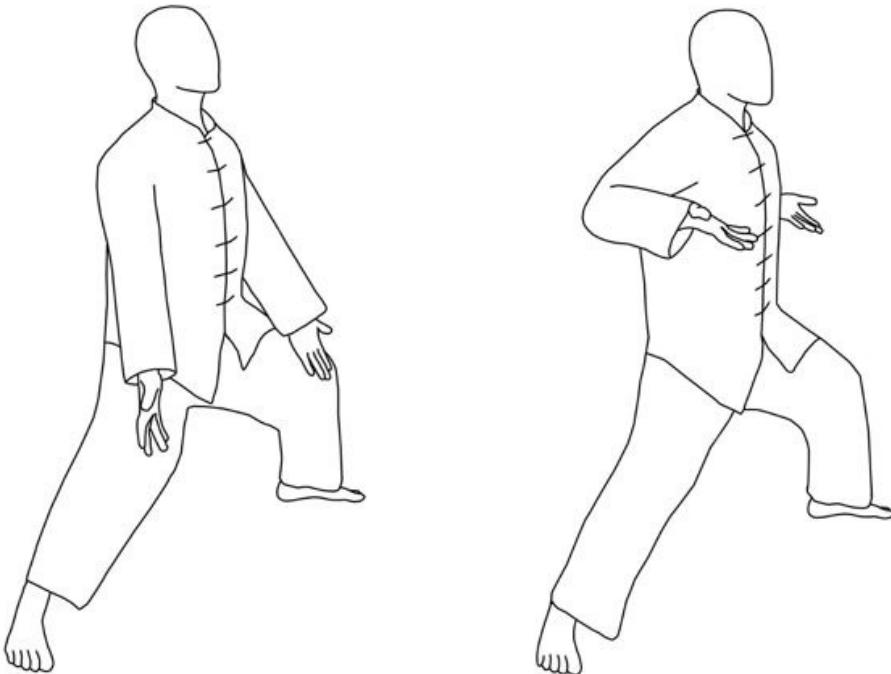
As you will stand relatively long in Horse Stance, practicing this sequence regularly will have some longer term strength benefits as well. If you find it too difficult, you should try a higher stance, possibly lowering your body over time as you get more accustomed to the position and your legs become stronger with practice.

It is quite important, as the title implies, to ‘glare fiercely’, having a stern, strong look at a fixed point in front of you.

Do not forget the opening and closing moves, right before and after the sequence.

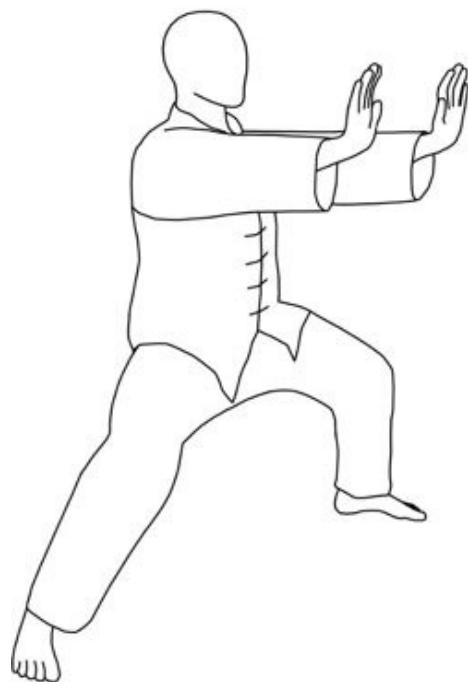
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Start with feet wide apart, or in a high Horse Stance. Your hands should be in front of your thighs, palms open and facing forward. Begin to **inhale** and draw your palms up to your chest, palms continuing to face upwards. Your arms should be tight, touching your torso, as your elbows move backwards.



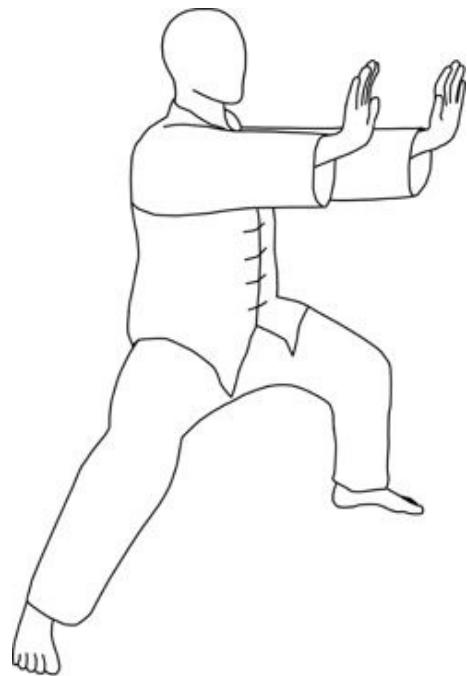
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Exhale and turn your open palms forward, then extend your arms in front of you, pushing away with your open palms.



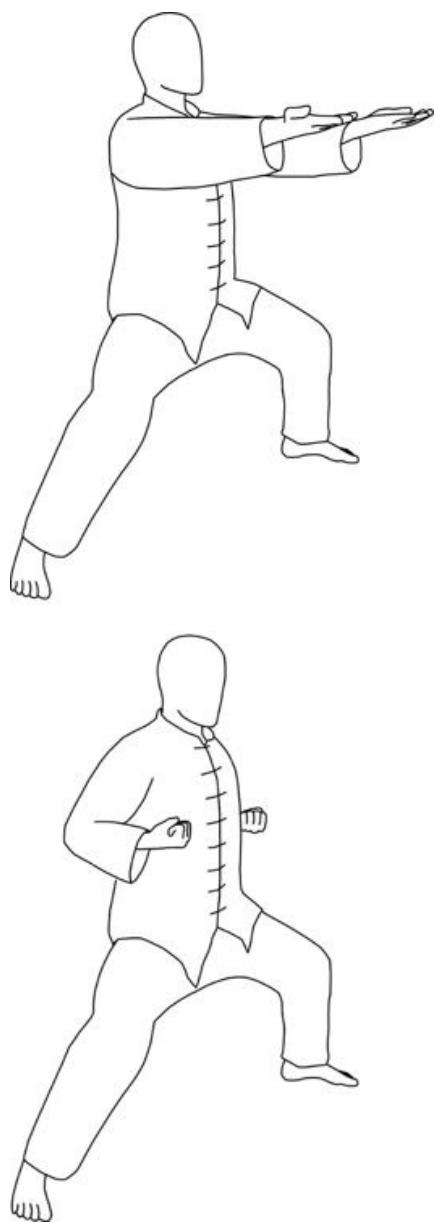
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Inhale and turn your palms upwards. You can slightly exaggerate the movement of the wrist.



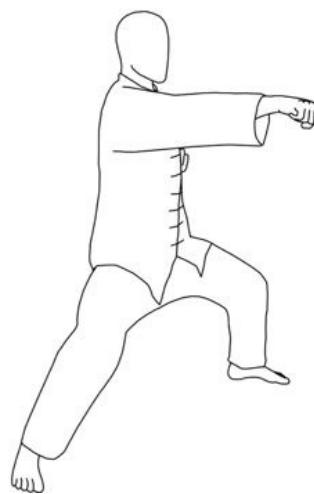
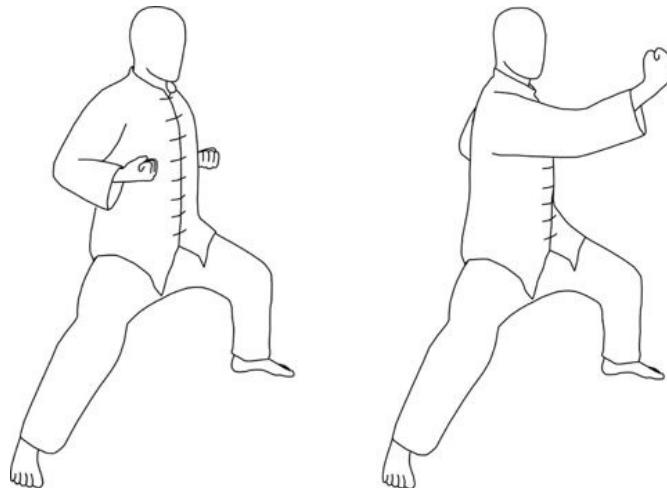
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While continuing to **inhale**, clench your fists, with palms still facing up, and draw your fists in, next to your sides. Your arms should be tight beside to your body, not allowing your elbows to flare out, just like you were pulling something heavy.



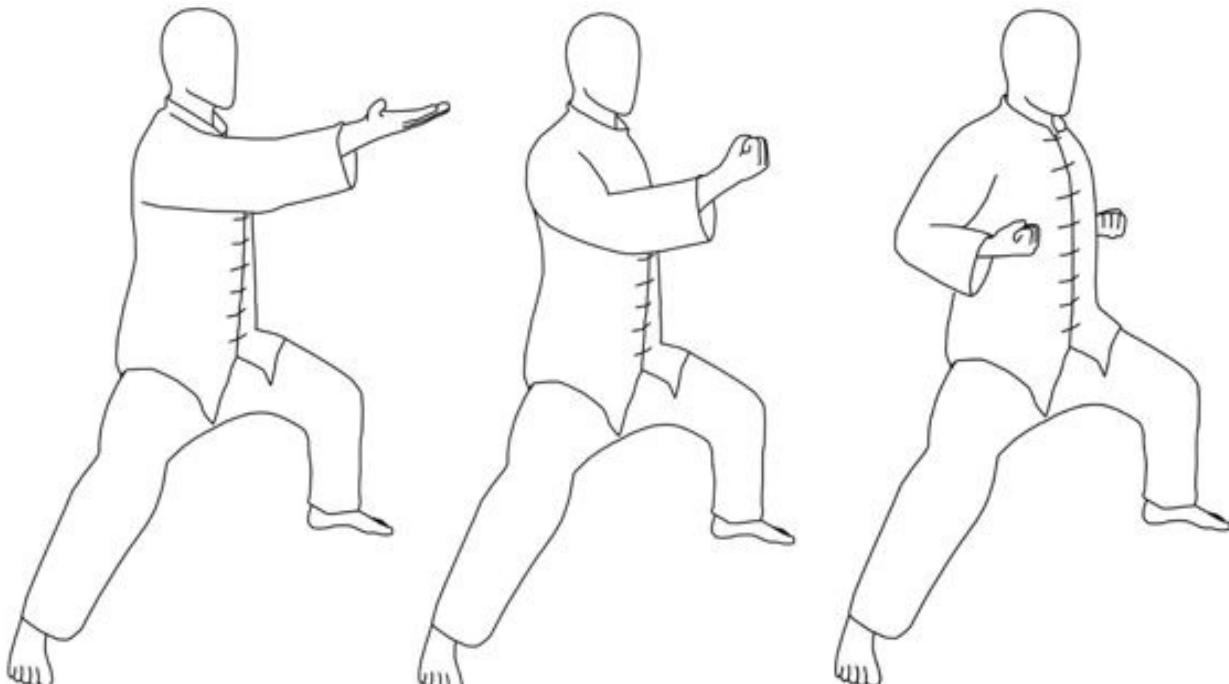
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As you **exhale**, extend your right arm, your fist clenched, palm facing upwards, until your arm is nearly straight. When your arms is almost extended, start turning your hand and palm down, continuing to move forward, creating a screwing sort of movement. All the while your left arm remains motionless, with your fist clenched by your left side.



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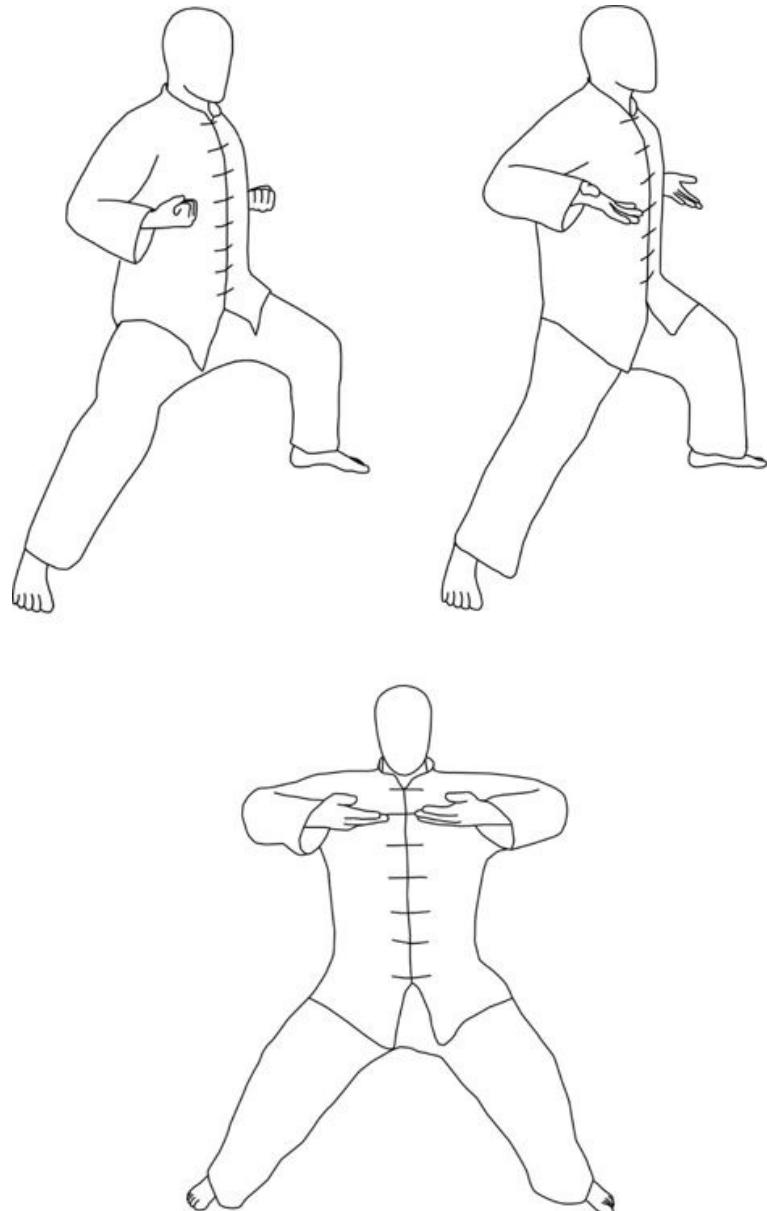
Inhale and turning your palm upwards open up your hand. Then clench your fist again, with your palm facing up and draw it in, your elbow staying right beside your body, returning to the starting position. Your movement should resemble trying to grab onto something from a different angle, as you let it go for a moment, then grab it again with a different hand position and draw it towards your body.



Now repeat the movement with your left arm. Repeat for two more slow punches with both arms, that is three inhales and exhales with your right arm and three inhales and exhales with your left arm in total, alternating arms.

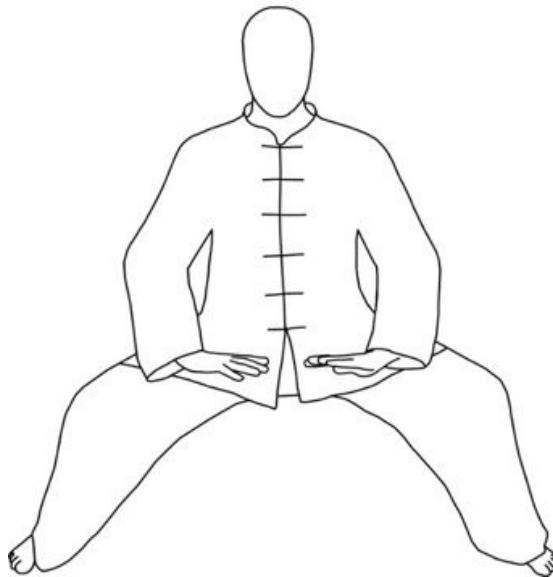
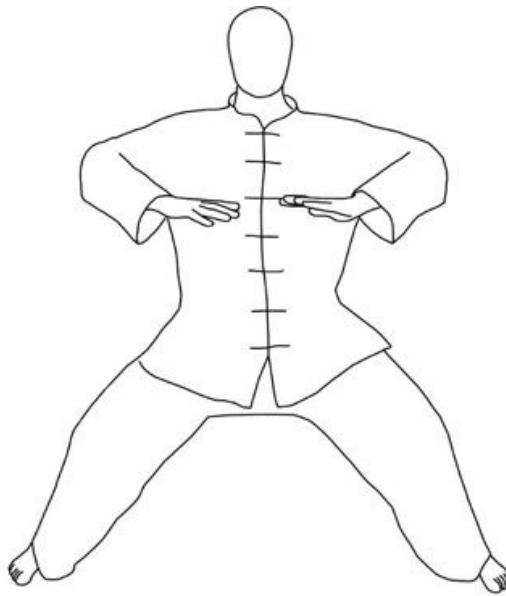
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With your **last inhale** open your clenched fist as you have finished drawing your hands in and draw your open palms downwards in front of your chest, raising your elbows to the sides.



...

Exhale and turn your palms down, then push the downward facing palms towards the ground as if you were trying to push something down under water.



This concludes the sequence ‘Clench the Fists and Glare Fiercely’. ☻

'BOUNCING ON THE TOES SEVEN TIMES TO PREVENT DISEASE'

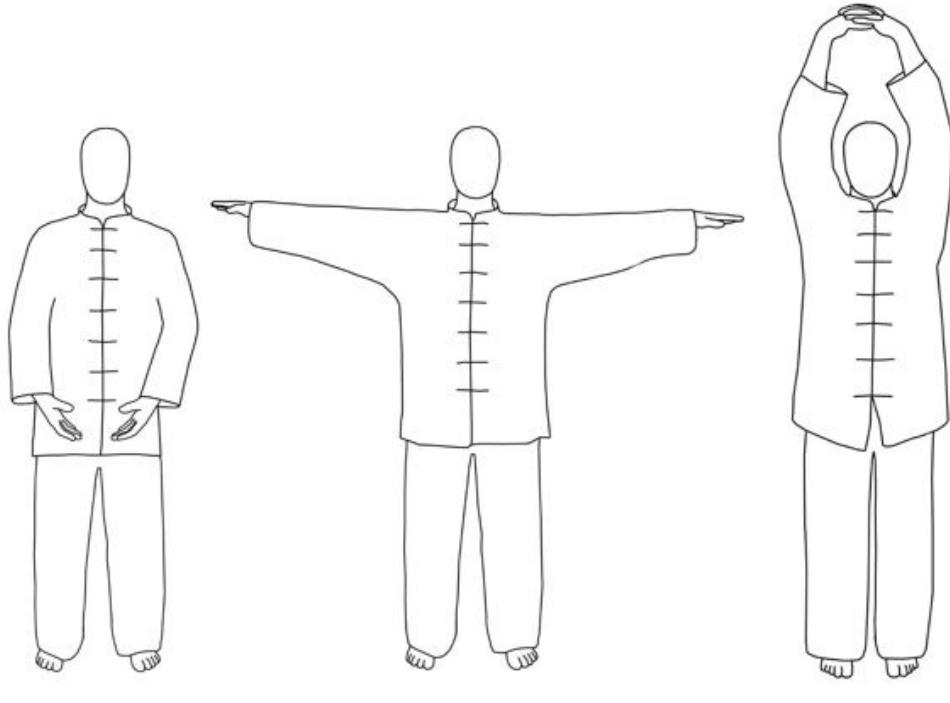
The final sequence is meant to boost your immune system, prevent strains, diseases and injuries. Also known as ‘Seven diseases and hundred disorders disappear’, the massaging of the stomach area (the centre of the immune system) and the seven stamps or bounces do a great deal to strengthen the natural ability of the body to protect itself against illness.

Not only does the gentle massage have a great effect on the internal organs, but bouncing on the toes will provide a further massaging effect as the internal organs gently move around each other. The bounces also help the circulatory system and the often forgotten lymphatic system, which has an important role in the immune system. Bouncing helps the lymph move around the body and detoxify.

Do not forget the opening and closing moves, right before and after the sequence.

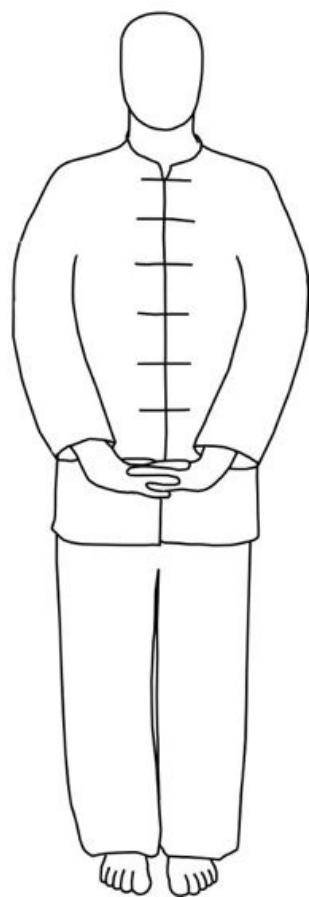
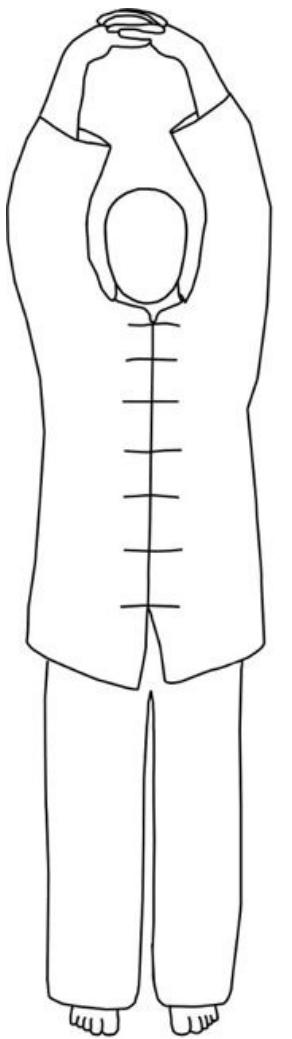
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Inhale and raise your straight arms to your sides, continuing to lift them above your head. When your arms are stretched upwards, interweave your fingers, with palms facing down, continuing to stretch upwards in all your length.



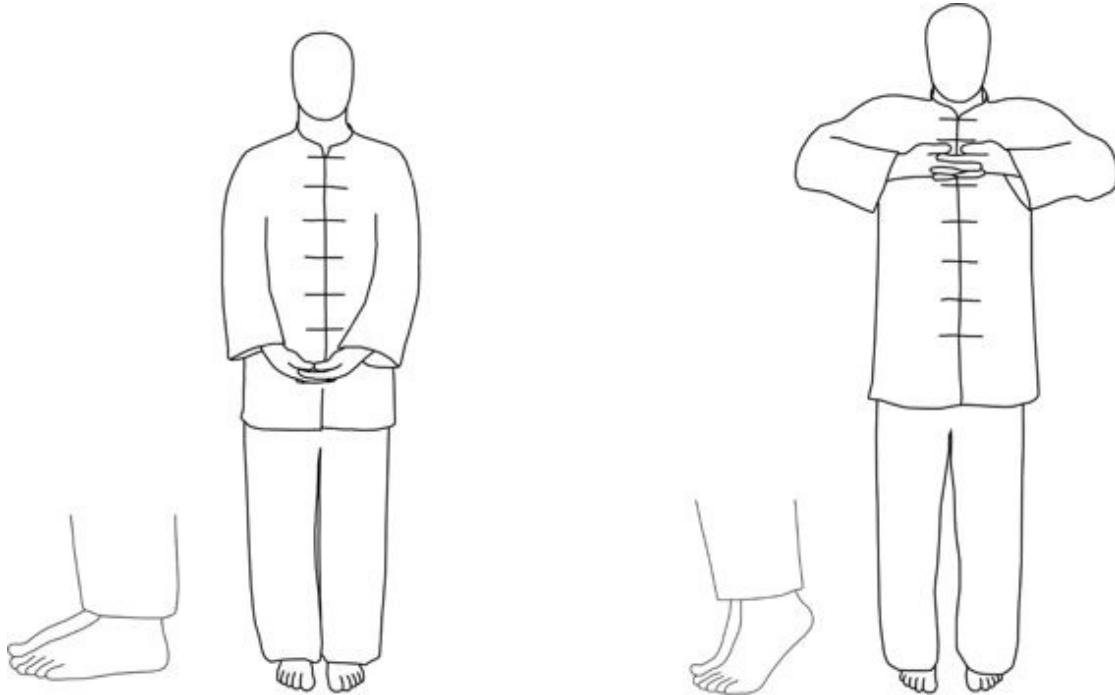
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Exhale and bring your hands down in front of your torso, in a slow, smooth and controlled movement, fingers interwoven, palms facing downwards, all the way to the front of your abdomen, like you were holding a balloon beneath your interwoven fingers and trying to push it as far down as you can.

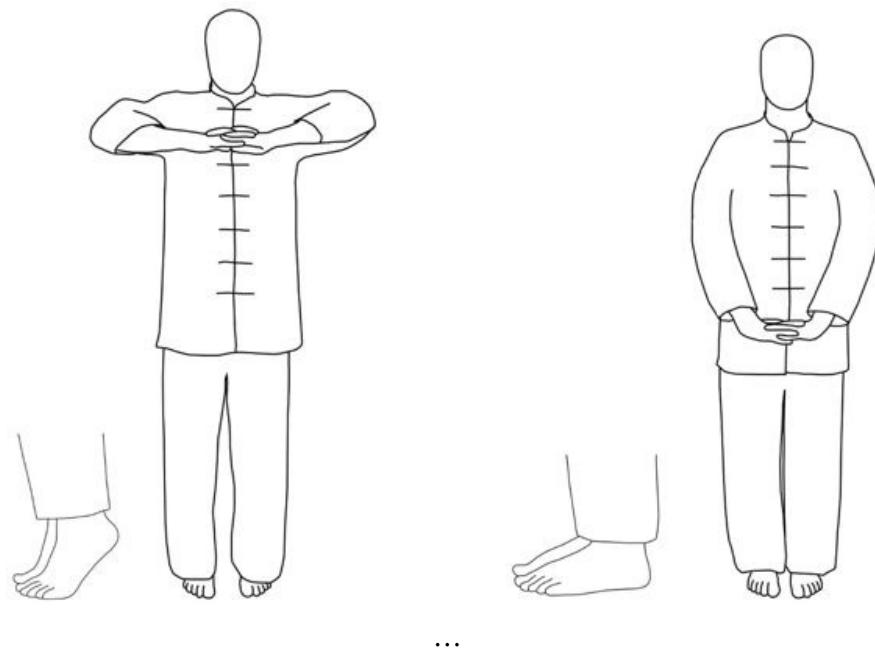


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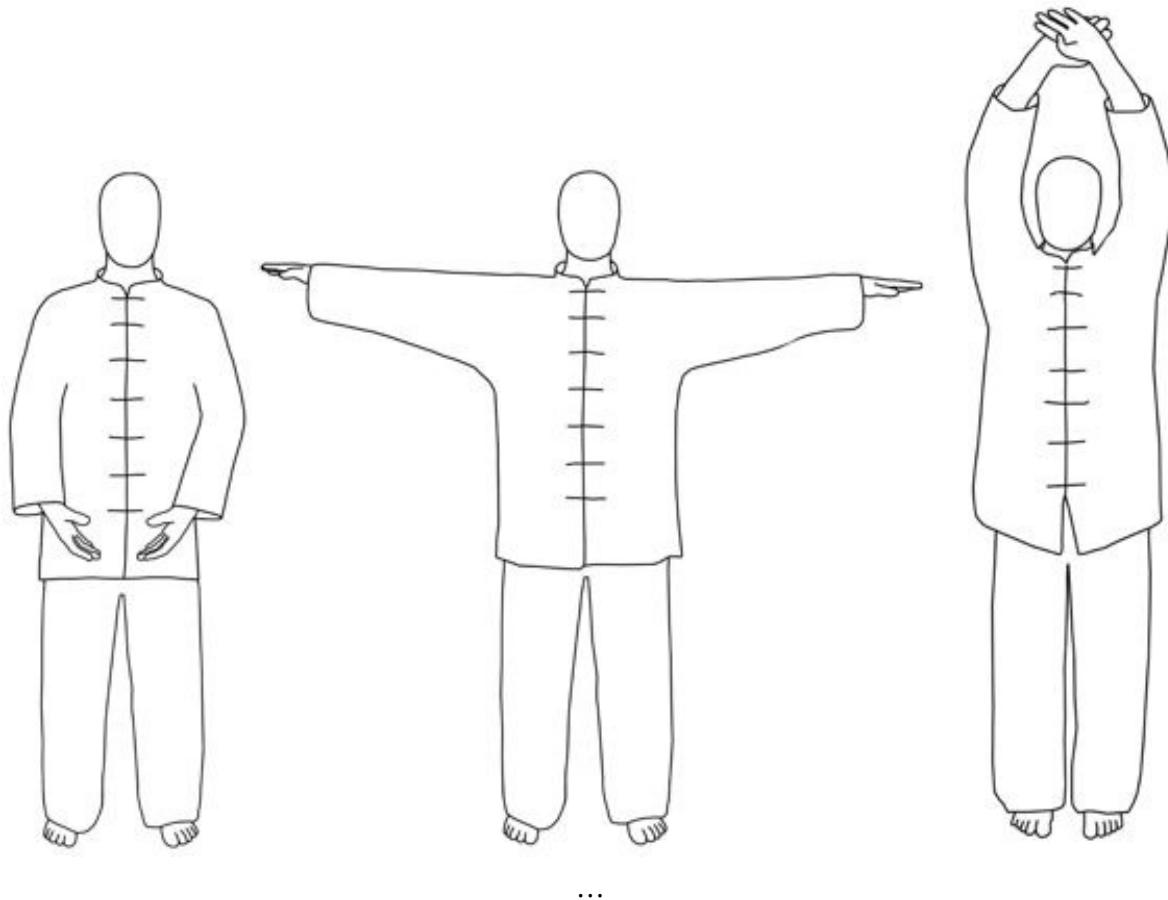
As you begin to **inhale**, turn your palms up, keeping your fingers interwoven and begin to lift your hands upwards, to the front of your chest, while lifting yourself up on your toes.



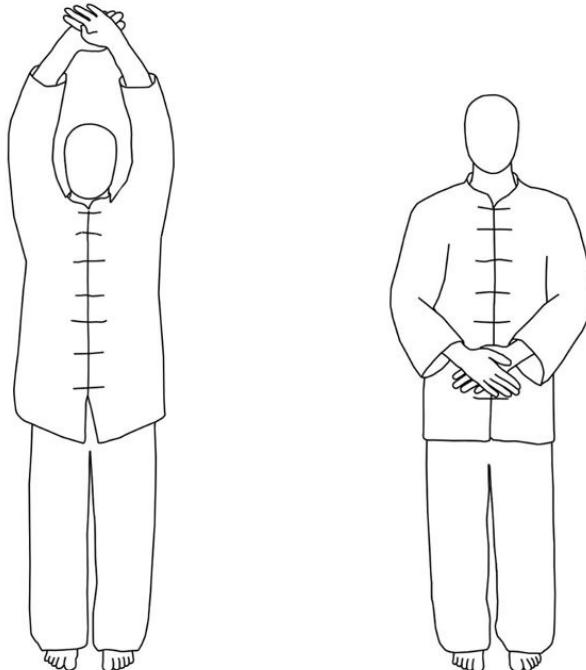
Turn your palms down, fingers remaining interwoven. **Forcefully exhale**, almost like you were sneezing or blowing your nose. Compress your lungs and press out the air as strongly and abruptly as you can. At the same time, bring your hands down *forcefully* to the front of your abdomen, leaving your fingers interwoven and drop your heels to the ground to come to a natural stand from tip-toe in a fast and abrupt manner. The exhalation and dropping your heels should happen synchronously. Repeat this lifting yourself and stamping while forcefully exhaling, seven times in total.



After the seventh stamp, **inhale** and open your hands, releasing your fingers and lift them up to the sides, with arms outstretched, then continue to lift your hands above your head. Once there, turn your palms forward and cover the back of your left hand with your right palm.

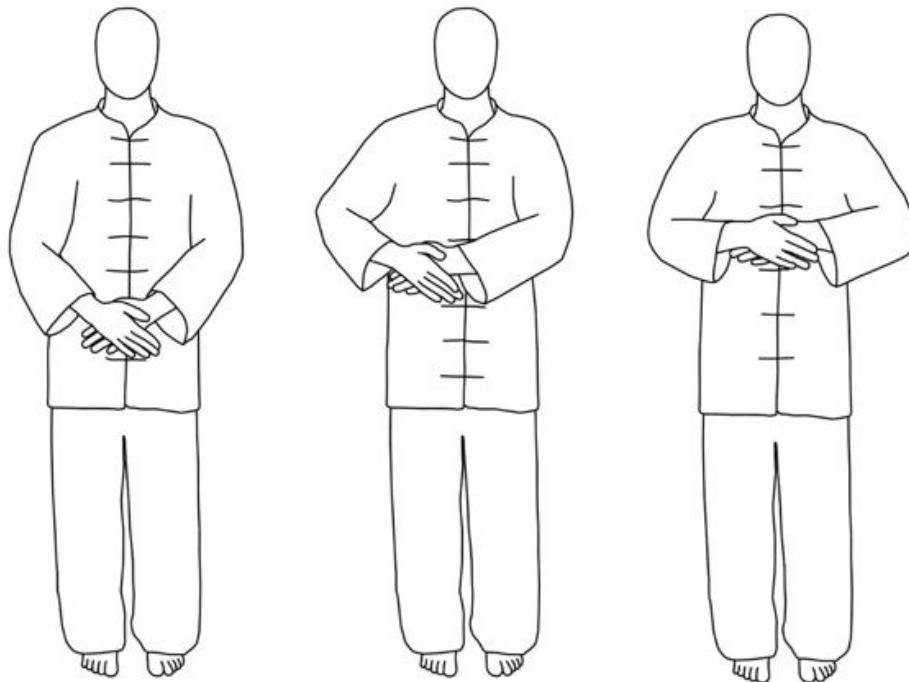


As you **exhale**, bring your hands down to your lower abdomen, making a large arch in front of yourself with your arms, like you were pushing something right into your belly. Your hands should remain attached all the time.



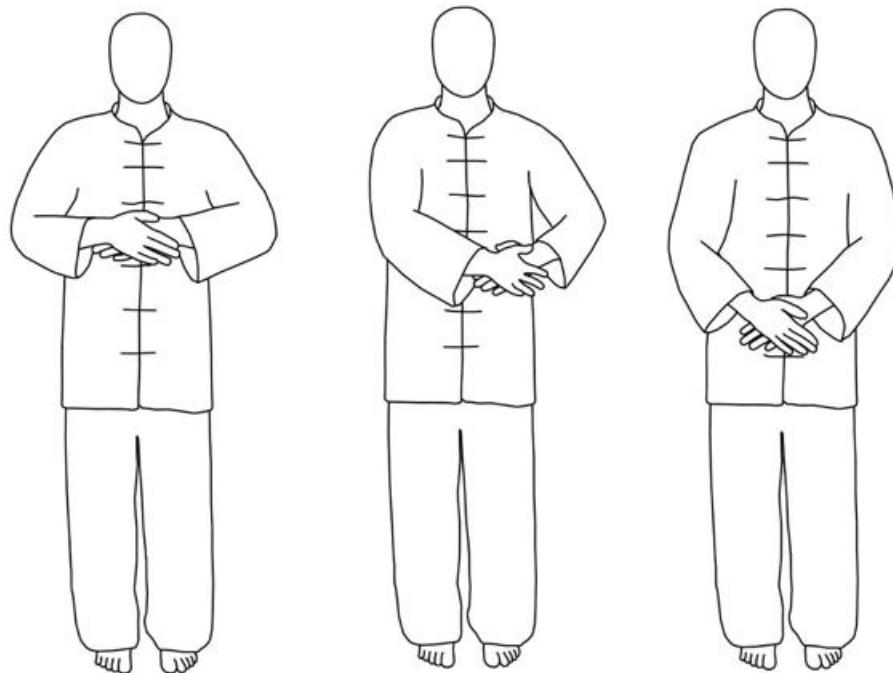
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Inhale and begin to move your hands up and to the right, then to the top of you abdomen, drawing a semi-circle, applying a gentle pressure to your abdominal wall, massaging your internal organs as you do so.



...

As you reach the top of your abdomen with your hands, begin to **exhale** without pausing and continue the circular motion of your hands on the left side, moving downwards in a semi-circle, until you reach the original starting position. Repeat for a total of three or seven *full* circles, with inhales and exhales.



When ready, repeat the same circular movements with inhales and exhales to the opposite direction too, moving left and up, then right and down, for the same number of repetitions you did before. If you have done the full circle three times, repeat now three times in the opposite direction. If you have done seven circles, do it seven times again.

This concludes the sequence ‘Bouncing on the toes seven times to prevent disease’.

Note: The book’s formatting will now return to normal, with no further forced pagebreaks. 

FINISHING BADUANJIN

To conclude BaDuanJin, repeat the closing move, which you did at the end of each sequence, three times. You can do some stretches now, if you feel necessary, but it is not at all important, as the movements themselves provided a great way of stretching.

If you are patient and keen, you can repeat the whole sequence now, never holding a particular position for more than a single breath and never pausing between sequences. This way, wherever you read ‘hold this position for a total of three inhales and exhales’ you should hold that position for only one inhale and exhale, while making the whole BaDuanJin one long and continuous movement sequence without a break. It would definitely be beneficial to do this at least once a week.

If you like any particular movement more than others, or feel you need to concentrate more on, or have problems with a particular area, which you would like to address or correct, you can pick any of the sequences and repeat it three, seven, nine or twenty-four times. Likewise, if a particular sequence calls for three repetitions, you can do seven, nine or twenty-four repetitions as well, if you like. For example in the sequence ‘The wise owl gazes backwards’ you turn your body three times. If you prefer, you could turn seven, nine or twenty-four times as well. This would apply to any and every movement in BaDuanJin, but be consistent in your practise.

It is important to keep your practice consistent, always practicing the same way. Also, only regular practice will be beneficial. Ideally you should practice three times a day, once in a morning, to re-energize your body, once midday, at the peak of your power, and once in the evening to rid yourself the stress of the day. Of course if you only have time or energy to do this once a day, you will have the full benefits of practice. The minimum you should do, if you mean to

practice regularly, is the full BaDuanJin three times a week, with the first sequence repeated every day. ■

YOGA

Although western yoga often concentrates only on the asanas (body positions, or poses), yoga thus being treated much like a physical exercise, the original yoga tradition of India is much deeper than it would seem from the west. Known and used for many millennia, yoga is an excellent way to maintain the health of both body and mind. As in the yoga tradition the health of the mind is closely related to the health of the body (much the same way as in what is today called a holistic approach to health), the asanas of course play a crucial role in everyday practice. On a probably less often considered note, yoga has a great focus on meditation practices, possibly even greater than on physical conditioning and stretching.

An original yoga practice would involve numerous breathing techniques (some similar to those discussed in this book and some that are much more advanced), the well-known asanas or body positions and many advanced techniques of meditation practice and even nutritional and lifestyle advices. At the beginning, asanas and meditation are probably practised separately, yet the experienced yogi would compound these seemingly separate methods and practise meditation, even through performing asanas.

Of course in this book there is no opportunity to go deeper into the yogic traditions and practices. You are however is strongly encouraged to seek out yoga schools or courses, if for no other reason, but for the enormous health benefits yoga has to offer even on the most basic level. If you are lucky enough, you may find a genuine yogi to teach holistic yoga and not only exercise.

If only the ‘modern’, or ‘western’ approach of yoga is available, fret not, *any*

meditation practice learned from this book may be incorporated into yoga practice. While you perform your asanas, as soon as you become confident in a certain position, you may practise a meditation or breathing technique of your choice. Both your yoga and your meditation practice will benefit from this enormously.

If it seems or feels too much to concentrate both on your asanas *and* a different meditation method, you may make your yoga practice itself your meditation. Remember, meditation is all about focus. The deeper and stronger you focus and concentrate on your practise, the more it will resemble meditation and will eventually become it. If you *treat* yoga as meditation, you are already doing meditation through yoga.

There are also several meditation methods in yoga, that do not include movement. Many are mantra meditations, where the meanings of the mantras are of great importance, making it more akin to a contemplation practice, while in other mantra meditations, such as the previously discussed OM mantra, the focus is on the sounds.

Some yogic meditations are more concerned with spiritual ascension and connectedness, the ‘Opening of the Crown Chakra’ practice from a previous chapter is in fact a common yogic practice. ☸

CORPSE POSE (SHAVASANA)

A great example of yogic meditation is Corpse Pose. It is in fact a yoga asana, where the body position, however relaxed, is as important as the meditation practice itself. As the confines of this book will not allow for the introduction of more basic asanas or body position, yogic breathing and meditation practice, only the Corpse Pose (Shavasana), regarded as the most difficult asana in yoga, will be described.

While seemingly motionless, Shavasana is still connected to moving meditation. Although one is not consciously moving through this pose, and even trying to prevent movement, much focus will be dedicated to the movement or non-movement of the body in general, thence the association with moving practices.

The benefits of Corpse Pose are numerous. This practice offers the greatest relaxation response of all meditation practices discussed so far, being an almost instantaneous stress and anxiety relief. This is mostly due to the fact, that Shavasana requires the total relaxation of all or most bodily tissues, or every skeletal muscle the very least.

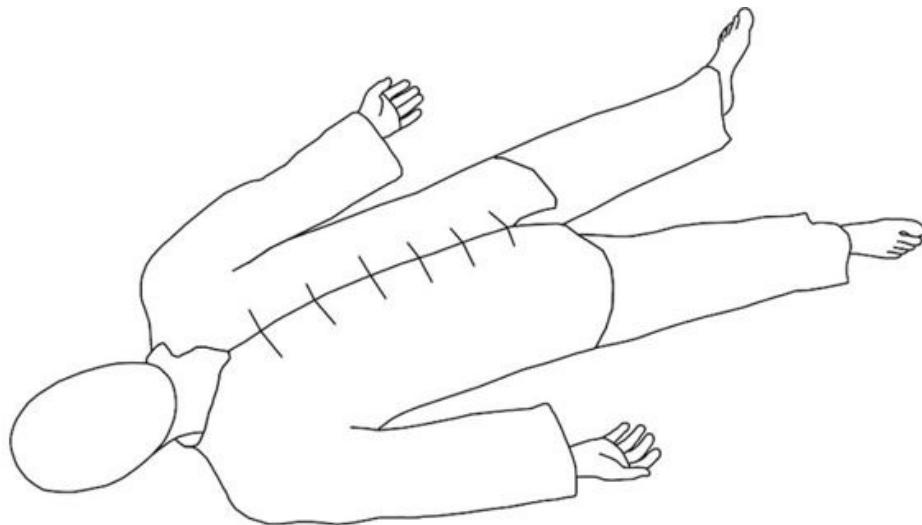
In your everyday life there is barely a moment you are fully relaxed. In any and every position you find yourself during the day, you may experience some sort of tension in certain parts of your body. Just to stand erect, requires the tensing of many skeletal muscles. Even when you sit, some muscles will be hard at work to allow you not to collapse. Shavasana does in fact mean a level of bodily relaxation similar to what one would experience while being absolutely unconscious or under heavy sedation, making it the most difficult positions to master in yogic practice, even though it may seem easy from the outside.

This level of relaxation will have an instantaneous positive effect on the

nervous system allowing it to relax as deeply as in the most comforting sleep. This way, it would seem, Corpse Pose is the closest to what many people think meditation really is, a nearly total relaxation of body and mind. The difficulty is, just to achieve this position requires intense, undivided and very sharp focus, making it an advanced meditation practice, rather than a simple relaxation technique.

GETTING INTO CORPSE POSE: TENSE AND RELEASE

To start, wear loose fitting, comfortable clothes, with absolutely *no* tight parts, no strings or elastics. Everything must be as light and loose as possible. Lay flat on your back, on an even, but comfortable surface. A yoga mat, or similar would suffice. Your palm should be turned upwards, with your arms straight by your side, but not touching your body. Your legs should be straight, with feet a few inches apart. Let your feet drop towards the outside, do not try to hold them up by force.



Now close your eyes and calm your mind and breathing. Practice the meditation technique of your choice to achieve internal calmness. If you have not mastered any meditation techniques yet, it is most possibly too early to start here. Your breathing should follow the technique, you find easiest to maintain, without much attention paid. Simple abdominal breathing would be sufficient.

When your mind and breathing are calm, you are ready to start getting into

Shavasana. Try to breathe evenly, but do not try to regulate your breath anymore, even if you did so far. Just notice its calmness and move on. Your focus will be moving elsewhere. In the following sequence, it is important to incorporate your breath.

Always try and inhale as you squeeze or tense up a body part, and exhale while relaxing.

- First just observe your body as a whole. Feel the floor under your back. Try to sense the all-encompassing tension, you are mostly unaware of, during the day. This will be easier felt, once you have some experience with Corpse Pose. If this is your first time, just try and observe any sensations in your body.
- Direct your attention towards your left foot. Curl up your toes hard as you inhale, then relax and exhale. Repeat it two more times. Feel, how your foot has lost tension already.
- Now move your attention up to your left calf. Tense it inhaling, then release with an exhale three times.
- Tense your left thigh as you inhale and release it as you exhale, three times in total, and observe how it relaxes.
- Repeat with your right leg. Start at the foot, with curling up the toes, then move up to the calf and finally the thighs. Do every part three times, tensing up as you inhale, releasing with an exhale.
- Now, move your attention up to your butt cheeks. Squeeze and release three times. Feel, how you lose stored tension from there as well. Inhale as you squeeze and exhale with the release.
- Move up to your lower back. Tense it, tightening up your lumbar area with an inhalation and release the whole of your lower back as you exhale. Repeat three times.

- Now move up to the upper part of your back. Tense it and inhale and relax and exhale, three times in total.
- Bring your attention to your abdomen. Squeeze your belly as if you were trying to sit up, while inhaling and release without moving as you exhale. Do this three times.
- Next, tense your chest and inhale, relaxing as you exhale, three times.
- Bring your attention to your left shoulder. Try to tense up the muscles in it as you inhale, then relax and exhale, three times. It might be difficult to isolate the muscles around your shoulder. Try to imagine you are trying to lift your outstretched left arm to the side without really moving your arm.
- Move down your left arm, now squeeze your left triceps (the back of your left upper arm), by over extending your arm as you inhale, then relax and exhale. Do this three times.
- Focus now on your left biceps. Squeeze it, like you were about to bend your arm at the elbow, but there was a great weight preventing you from doing so and inhale, then exhale and relax. Repeat for three times in total.
- As the muscles of your lower arm mainly move your hands and fingers, clench your left fist hard as you inhale and relaxing with an exhale, three times.
- Now repeat for your right arm, first the shoulders, then in the order of triceps, biceps and fists, squeezing and relaxing three times each, inhaling with tension and exhaling through the release phase.
- When you are done with your right arm, move your attention to your neck. Try to tense it as you inhale and relax it with an exhale three times.
- Your attention should now be at your face. Squeeze everything in it, like you were trying to make a real ugly face as you inhale, then relax and exhale. Do this three times in total.
- If you can, squeeze your scalp then relax it, three times in total. If you do

not know, how to do this, do not worry, just move on. (If you are able to move your ears, this is what you should try to do, while paying attention to your scalp.) Remember to inhale as you squeeze and exhale as you release

- Repeat the sequence if you like, especially if you feel like a great amount of tension was removed on the first attempt, or if you feel your practice would benefit from it. Do it as many times as necessary to feel relieved of residual muscular tension.

The tension you felt leaving your body after tensing and relaxing the larger skeletal muscles, is often referred to as residual tension. Your muscles need to tense up in order to make you move or keep your structure and body position, after which, relaxation of these muscles is often incomplete due to many physiological factors. While consciously squeezing and releasing them it will be easier for these muscles to relax much deeper. This is a very important part in getting into the pose, you should not skip it, even if you become more experienced.

This tension and relaxation sequence should have already removed most of the tension from your body, while also giving you an idea how your focus will shift during the next phase. As you incorporate your breath, you might have had a feel for how much your breathing can aid relaxation or tension. As discussed under 'Breathing Techniques', you have the ability to calm or excite yourself through breathing and you now experienced how it may aid your practice.

GETTING INTO CORPSE POSE: REMOVING DEEPER TENSION

While the previous sequence was mostly concerned with removing tension from the large superficial skeletal muscles, through the following, deeper body scan, you will have a greater attention to the finer detail and the more subtle, less obvious remaining tension in all parts of your body.

This part could prove really challenging. What you should aim for, is to pay as close attention to the body part you are scanning, as you can. You should bring your sharp and undivided focus to each part in the sequence and analyse it, trying to remove tension, as you try and consciously relax them as much as you can. The feeling should be akin to when you catch yourself holding your breath for a moment, then you release and feel a deep relief inside.

The previous sequence could be a great guide, as you felt tension leaving your body. You should aim for a similar but more subtle sensation. This could be challenging when you have not learned how to relax intentionally. If you are familiar with visualization techniques, those could now be a real great asset.

There are a number of techniques that can aid your relaxation, the most effective might be using your breath and some visualization to try and remove all tension as you scan through your body in sequence.

As you inhale, you should see this breath with your mind's eye, flowing through your body to the part you are focusing on, and as you exhale, your breath should take away the tension with it. If you struggle to keep your focus on a certain body part, say or hear its name in your mind as you inhale. Hear it loud and clear, but never pronounce it loudly. Be specific: *e.g.* for your left ankle, say 'left ankle', not just 'ankle', 'foot' or 'left foot'.

As you inhale, imagine the breath going through your body, straight to the body part you are trying to relax, flowing through you like relaxing warm water. Each inhaled breath will dissolve tension, like a sugar cube dissolving in warm water. As you exhale, this dissolved tension flows away, together with your breath-water, out through your lungs and your nose. Pay close attention to the feeling as your body relaxes deeply. Feel it sinking into the floor. Imagine that the part you are focusing on becomes heavier. Do three or seven breaths for each part.

- Start at the toes of your left foot, one by one, from the smallest to the

biggest, pausing for minimum three breaths at each toe.

- Next, move to your left sole, for at least three breaths, relaxing a bit more with each exhale. Imagine your breath as warm water flowing through you, all the way down, dissolving tension in your left sole as you inhale and moving away, removing tension as you exhale.
- Your focus now shifts to the inside of your left foot. You may feel a slight tingle in your foot, that is good. Imagine your breath-water move between the little bones of your foot, then remove tension from there. Feel your heel pressing deeper into the floor as it gets heavier.
- Your left ankle is next. Each breath makes it more relaxed, the joint less tense. Your ankle sinks down with each breath. Three breaths would be enough, seven should be better, as your ankles are used heavily for walking, storing a lot of tension.
- Now focus on your left calf. This is the first larger muscle group on your way up, it may store a lot of tension still. Do a minimum of three breaths here as well, but seven would be ideal. Feel the tension melt away and your calf flatten out on the floor with each breath.
- Move your mind to the front part of your shin. There is a little, long and thin muscle there, which you use quite intensely as you walk. Feel it tingle as your breath-water dissolves tension in it. Do a minimum of three breaths.
- Now it is your left knee, you should be focusing on. It will be challenging, but just imagine as your breath loosens up the compressed joint. With each breath the back of your knee should feel like sinking into the floor a bit more. Do a minimum of three breaths, although seven would be ideal.
- Moving up, you now focus on the left hamstrings. This is the muscle group at the back of your thigh. As you inhale, imagine as the breath-water comes down, and flushes all this muscle, dissolving any remaining tension in it. This muscle is usually tight in people who sit a lot, so make

sure you do at least seven breaths for the best results, especially if you have a seated job, or just like to sit at home. With each exhale, as the dissolved tension leaves your left hamstring, feel how your left thigh sinks into the floor deeper, as it becomes heavier with each breath.

- Turn your focus to the front of your left thigh. There is a very large muscle group, called quadriceps, covering most of it. These muscles do a lot of work during an average day, they also need deep relaxation. Inhale and imagine your breath, like warm water, flowing down to your left thigh and flush it with warmth, dissolving all the remaining tension from it. As you exhale, this dissolved tension, along with the water-like breath, should leave your thigh and your body through your lungs and your nose, while your whole left leg begins to feel heavier. Do seven breaths here as well, especially if you walk a lot during the day, have a standing job, or do any sports or other physical activity.
- Now, direct your attention to the little muscle at the top of your left thigh, your left hip-flexor. It is a small muscle, you may have been unaware of most of your life, with an important role, and possibly a lot of stored tension. If you do not know where to look, just focus on the top of your left high, at the front, where it joins your torso. Remain here for at least three breaths and imagine the tension dissolve from it.
- When you are done with the left leg, continue with the right. First the toes, one by one, from smallest, to biggest, for three breaths each, next your right sole, for three breaths, then your right foot.
- Move up the right ankle, then the calf, which probably needs more attention. Relax your shin, then your knee, moving up to the hamstrings for seven breaths, then your front tight and lastly the small muscles at the top.
- Moving on, now direct your focus to your butt. There are many muscles there varying in size, which can also store a large amount of tension. Stay for seven breaths at the left side, feel as your breath, like warm water,

dissolves tension as you inhale then this tension gets removed as you exhale. You left butt should feel like sinking into the floor deeper with each breath. When you are ready, repeat on the right side.

Now you are ready to move up to your torso. At first only the musculature of the surface will be scanned. After the whole body is done, you will return here to relax your inside.

- Move up from the butt and focus on your lower back. Feel your breath washing through your lower spine and the tense musculature around it. These muscles need to work constantly to keep you upright and protect your lumbar area. Let them relax for at least seven breaths. With each inhale, let your lower back flatten out on the floor a little bit more.
- Now, move up on your back and imagine as the breath you inhale spreads through it like water, dissolving all tension and slipping right back to your lungs and out through your nose as you exhale. As the back has large muscles in it, do this for seven breaths for the best result. With every exhale, your back should feel like it flattens out more on the floor, with your entire body pushing down.
- Shift your focus to the front of your body, down to your abdomen. Start inhaling and feel as your breath spreads through your abdominal wall, and onto the sides. Let it dissolve tension stored there and remove it with the exhale. Let your belly sink with each exhale. Do a minimum of three breaths.
- Moving up to your chest, the breath should be right there when you inhale, just imagine as it spreads through your ribs and flush all your muscles around the ribcage like nice warm water dissolving any tension stored there. Such tension will be just as easily removed when you exhale. Do this for three breaths. If you exercise a lot, you might need more time here.
- Move on to your left shoulder. As you inhale, the breath-water should be flushing your shoulders from the outside, first the muscles around it, then the joint itself. Feel as the tension dissolves. First the muscles relax, then

the joint itself becomes loose. As the shoulder joint is extensively used, stay here for seven breaths. With each exhale, feel your shoulders sinking into the floor a little bit deeper.

- Now move to your upper arm. You need not make the distinction between triceps and biceps now. Just have your whole upper arm relax, as you inhale the tension dissolving, and exiting your body with every exhale, for at least three breaths, or seven if you engage in heavy physical labour or exercise your arms regularly.
- Moving down to your left elbow, imagine your elbow joint being flushed with warm water at each exhale. The often over-used elbows need deep relaxation. Remain there for seven breaths, with each exhale the elbow becoming heavier and more relaxed.
- Move down to the left forearm now. Feel it relax for three breaths at least. You do not need to clench your fist or even move a finger now. Just let your breath-water flush your forearms with warmth, dissolving tension as you inhale and flush away all of it with the exhale.
- Your left wrist comes next, feel the joint being flushed as you inhale and the tension moving away as you exhale. Do this for seven breaths.
- Direct your focus to the left palm. As your palms get flushed, you will probably feel a slight tingle. Relax your palm for three breaths.
- Next, move onto the fingers of the left hand. Focus on each finger individually for three breaths, or, if you write or type a lot, seven breaths, starting with your little finger and ending with your thumb. If you are very keen and patient, or have a lot of experience in keeping your mind focused, you can try and relax each joint in every finger individually. If you decide to do this, three breaths would be sufficient for every individual joint.

As you relax your palm and fingers, let them curl up naturally, do not try to

keep your hands stretched out.

- Now repeat for the right arm, shoulders, upper arm, elbow joint, forearm, palm and individual fingers, or individual joints in every finger from little finger to thumb.
- When you are done with your right arm, move on to your neck. As you inhale, imagine your neck being washed through with warm water as the breath moves up there, dissolving all the tension and flushing it away as you exhale. You can start with the back of your neck, then continue with the front, or you can choose to relax the whole neck at once if that feels more comfortable. As your neck stores a lot of tension, do this for seven breaths. With each exhale, the back of your neck should flatten out a bit more.

If you decide to relax the back and front of your neck separately, start with the backside. After seven breaths move to the front. Do not only focus on the outside of the neck, but direct your attention to inside of your throat. Your vocal chords, being muscles themselves, are also capable of storing tension. Removing tension from them could also be quite symbolic, as you may picture removing unsaid problems, of which you cannot talk.

Releasing such blockade may grant you a deep sense of relief in general, and an instant solution for much of daily anxiety. Do at least seven breaths in your throat as well. As you inhale, the natural flow of air will move through your throat. Let it enter your lungs first, then imagine it moving back up to your throat and flushing it like warm water, dissolving tension then retreating back to your lungs, carrying tension away as you exhale. After this, the breath would naturally move through your throat again as it exits your body through your nose.

- You should now move your focus up to your face. Flush it with the warm

breath-water as you inhale and imagine it carry away tension as your features smoothen out. Three breaths would usually be enough, unless you frown a lot or are generally unhappy, in which case stay for at least seven breaths.

- Now move up to your scalp. Your inhale flushes the skin around your skull and your ears, dissolves any tension found in the tiny muscles under your skin, then remove it as you exhale.

Having finished with the surface of your body, now you are ready to move your focus to the inside. Depending on your final goal, this can take two directions, from head to abdomen, or from abdomen to head. If you chose to stay in Corpse Pose and do meditation, you should now decide which meditation technique you will follow.

Generally speaking, if the technique of your choice requires you to keep your focus in your head, start from the abdomen and work your way up. If the technique needs you to keep your focus in the abdomen, start from the head and work your way down.

If you choose not to stay in Corpse Pose any longer, but only use it to relax your body, it does not matter, which way you do it, but for continuity, you might want to start from your head down. Because the techniques described later will mostly be involving a focus on your breathing, this description will follow directions from head to abdomen.

Remember, no method or way is superior or inferior to any other. You should do whatever you decided to do and keep on practising.

- Move your focus to the inside of your head now. Chances are, that because of the intense focus the above exercise required, your thoughts would be mostly subsided by now. If there are any more disturbing thoughts left, this is a great opportunity to try and silence them.
- You can do the breathing technique, like before, flushing your head with

breath-water, only now you would imagine it washing away your thoughts. Alternatively, you can use your favourite visualisation or any other technique to silence your mind.

- When your thoughts are fairly quiet, move your focus down your chest. It is there the breath arrives at every inhale and you can use this breath now to remove tension from there, just like with the rest of your body.
- Finally, your focus moves into your abdominal cavity. Flush it to remove tension, imagine the breath water washing out all your internal organs, your guts and the whole digestive tract, removing all toxins, stress and tension for three breaths at least, then remain there. Your focus will not move from here anymore.

If you have managed to remove most of the tension from your body and mind, you are *now* in Corpse Pose or Shavasana. If your purpose was relaxation, you can finish now, or remain a few more minutes and enjoy the silence.

If you stay in the pose and move on to do more meditation, the greatest challenge might be not to fall asleep, yet this relaxation technique may as well be used to induce sleep. If you have difficulty falling asleep at night, getting into Corpse Pose when going to bed, might be the gateway to a good night's restful sleep.

If you have difficulties falling asleep, try to get into Shavasana, or as close to it as you can, when you go to bed. Once there just let your mind wander, until you eventually float away to the land of dreams. 

STAYING IN CORPSE POSE

Once you have reached the level of relaxation true Corpse Pose means, there are several ways you can continue the practice. The exercises you have been doing so far, were only to allow you to get into the pose. Now that you are there, you can proceed in a number of ways, some of which will be described here.

Do not let yourself be restricted by the few simple methods discussed below. Corpse Pose holds an infinite array of possibilities. Letting your intuition guide you on the journey ahead might prove as useful as following a predetermined method.

SQUARE BREATHING

This breathing method has been described earlier in this book in greater detail (see ‘Square or circular breathing’ under ‘Breathing Techniques’). To stay in Corpse Pose without further effort and reap most of its benefits, be it relaxation of the body or the quieting of the mind, square breathing is an ideal companion. This way, your focus will remain in your abdomen as you will focus on your breath.

When you start watching the lengths of the inhales, exhales, holds and pauses, you may wish to listen to your heart beating. If you are really quiet, you would be able to distinguish its sound. If you choose to time your breathing to your heartbeats, chances are that your heart-rate will still go lower, as you continue to focus, this way true square breathing is only achieved once you have reached absolute quietness.

It is not advisable to use a metronome at this stage. If you do not like counting your heartbeats, it could also be possible just to count in yourself, although keep in mind, that your counting will most likely not be even. Practice as long as you like. The longer you maintain the pose, the greater the relaxation response you may get out of it.

DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING

This breathing technique will bring out the true meaning of Corpse Pose. The goal is, to quiet your breathing as much as it becomes nearly invisible. Although the technique might appear intimidating; when you are in Shavasana, it might be easier than it seems to achieve real diaphragmatic breathing. You can first practise square breathing and when your focus is fully on your breath, you may continue with this technique.

- To achieve diaphragmatic breathing, focus strongly on your breath. Practice simple abdominal breathing for a while, with a strong focus on the movement of your abdominal wall. As you are fully relaxed, with each inhale, your belly should feel heavier than usual, as it rises, and each exhale would seem to happen almost automatically, as your descending belly pushes the air out.
- Watch your breathing closely and observe the movement of the abdomen. Stay here long enough, with a strong, undivided focus. Do *not* try to control your breathing in any way, only watch it happen. Observe passively and notice of how it changes. Your breathing will naturally slow down, until it is barely observable, but still present.
- The real challenge starts here. While maintaining the focus on your breath, shift the focal point from your belly to your diaphragm, *inside* your body. Try to sense its movement. Do not worry if you cannot do this at first, just pay very close attention, to where – or where you think – your diaphragm is. Just watch and observe, be passive and feel your breath.

If you do not get a feel of it for the first time you try, you may need more than one practice session. Patience is more important here than with any other technique.

- If you can sense your diaphragm, keep a strong focus on it. Watch it move. Feel as it contracts, pulling on your lungs, making you inhale, and

feel it relax, pushing up the lung, making you exhale.

- You can also picture this movement, if you have good visualisation skills. Watch it move up and down inside your body, feel it doing all the breathing. Let it do the work. Be passive, observant and very patient. This will take a long time...

Eventually you will notice that the movement of the diaphragm has become less pronounced. You will feel it doing less work. It will have quieted down to an almost unnoticeable movement. At this stage, for the outside observer you will look just like you have stopped breathing. Neither your chest, nor your belly would show any sign of breathing, you would appear perfectly still and motionless.

The same will happen to your system. Due to the lower oxygen intake, your bodily functions will slow down considerably. Your digestive system, being one of the main energy consumers inside, will temporarily shut down. Your brain, also needing a large amount of oxygen to function, will turn quieter, your brain function barely noticeable. There will be no thoughts coming to disturb, you will sense true quietness, calmness and peace.

If you have made it this far, you are in *real* Corpse Pose, the ultimate Shavasana. Not many are capable to achieve this state, not because the lack of ability, but because the over-charged nervous system, modern lifestyle impose on people. Regardless of how far down the road you get, you will benefit from such practice enormously, as your nervous and every other bodily system crave silence and quietness.

When you arrive here, the greatest challenge will be to stay awake, as when so far relaxed it is very easy to fall asleep. Falling asleep in Corpse Pose is not necessarily a bad thing, as such sleep could be the most relaxing, refreshing experiences you have ever associated with sleeping, a whole new dimension of resting. You should always allow sufficient time to practice, as there will always be a chance of falling asleep, even if you are more experienced in meditation. If you wish to continue the practice however, you must keep your mind awake,

which will require a trained focus and a considerable amount of practice.

BEYOND CORPSE POSE

There are many opportunities, as to where you can proceed from here. You could direct your focus up to your mind, or even outside the body to try and sense the energy field surrounding you, making it a fluid-body or even bodiless experience. You can try the crown chakra meditation in this state, as it will be probably much easier to achieve. You could do death meditation, that is the contemplation of being dead and leaving behind your body and worldly possessions, becoming all that you truly are, a soul, temporarily occupying a body. You could also just have your intuition guide you to wherever it may take your practice. Your opportunities at this stage are truly limitless. ■

OTHER FORMS OF MOVING MEDITATION

Moving meditation practices are not limited to the aforementioned traditional, or traditionally recognised methods. Since meditation means concentrated and sharp focusing of the mind, any sort of movement, allowing for such focus can and does become a moving meditation practice, when observed with the right frame of mind.

Physical activity can also be a great way to achieve a relaxation response. The naturally stored tension in the muscular system, either as a result of physical tension, or that of mental or psychological strain, can be relieved by tiring out the neuro-muscular system so that it will eventually be forced to release such stored tension.

Using physical activity as moving meditation or even just stress relief, could be particularly effective with chronic stress situations, where the tension stored in the physical body can be so great that it would prove to be difficult to follow even the simplest meditation routines.

If the goal of your moving meditation is mostly releasing stress, the higher intensity of the activity, the better the result. The hormonal response of the body may also help. Following intense physical activities, the body will release endorphins into the blood-stream, hormones that are responsible for feeling happier and more relaxed, a phenomenon generally known as the ‘runner’s high’. Endorphins may help in deepening the relaxation response and to relieve most chronic stress, the body and mind may store.

As the physical body, and much of the nervous system is thus strained and depleted, it may become increasingly difficult to maintain your focus. Learning

to focus in such difficult situations will also have some obvious additional benefits in following other meditation practices, as such learned ability can easily be translated into different methods. Also, while you learn to focus under tension, you prepare yourself to better manage and handle daily stress as your nervous system would not know the difference between mental and physical strain. ॐ

MARTIAL ARTS

One of the most obvious of such activities is practising traditional martial arts. Even though TaijiQuan is the martial art form most commonly regarded as such tradition, there are no limitations, on how one should move, or practise, for a martial arts training to become real meditation. Regardless of the form or style, regardless of the goal or aim of a certain technique, as long as the practitioner can keep their focus sharp and pointed, being in or one with the movement they practice, they are in fact practising meditation.

Of course those practitioners that realise this, will become better and more committed to their art, but those that follow such path instinctively, or rather intuitively, would be fully able to reap all benefits of meditation practise. A famous example of such practitioners are the monks and performers of the Shaolin temple in China, who traditionally regard their martial arts training as part of their daily meditation routine, enabling them to fully conquer their bodies, command their movements and perform seemingly super-human feats.

A usual objection to this observation is that martial arts are often violent, as the movements are meant to harm others, and meditation promotes serenity and peace of mind. Both observations are true on their own, yet they do not necessarily have an exclusive connection. Both meditation and martial arts are essentially only techniques, methods of practice the individual can follow, whatever end they may pursue them for.

Martial arts themselves do not harm people, while meditation itself does not bring peace. It is the practitioners and their intentions, that eventually achieve such effect. If one uses a meditation or contemplation practise to strengthen their feelings of violence and aggression, it could also become a very effective tool to achieve such goal, as seen in various military traditions. Similarly, if a martial artist chooses their path to find inner peace, and uses their fighting practice, as a meditation to aid them on this path, they will

easily be able to reach this goal, finding peace through practising fighting movements, eventually freeing themselves from any need or urge to physically engage in fighting.

The reason why martial arts are mentioned at the first place here, is the regularity and discipline most such arts require from the students, making them great candidates for moving meditation. While some modern arts or martial sports may as well offer the same benefits, traditional martial arts often focus more on forms of repeatable movements, than actual combat, which further strengthens their suitability. ☸

SPORTS AND DANCING MARTIAL ARTS USUALLY REQUIRE SOME SORT OF PHYSICAL EXERTION, OR HEAVY MUSCLE OR CARDIO-RESPIRATORY WORK, MAKING THEM RATHER SIMILAR TO MODERN OR TRADITIONAL SPORTS. INDEED, ANY SPORTING ACTIVITY, REGARDLESS OF THE LEVEL IT IS PRACTISED AT, WOULD BE AN Equally GOOD CANDIDATE FOR MOVING MEDITATION.

There are multiple ways to choose a point of focus, depending on the sport of choice. For long distance, repetitive sports, like running, swimming or cycling, the first such candidate to come to mind may be breathing. You can easily focus on your breath, just like during a meditation practice and may even count it in a similar way, possibly enhancing your performance.

More technical sports may involve a strong focus on proper technique, usually also including a deep focus on the breathing, be it heavy weight lifting, target shooting, archery, or snowboarding. Literally any sport can be turned into meditation with the right focus and mind, and doing so would certainly see an improvement in performance as well.

Similarly to some cardio-intensive sports, dancing can often involve intensive movement, the difference being that during dancing, the focus is more often on the music, or rather the rhythm, making it more akin to a moving music meditation practice. Often without realising, when losing yourself in the rhythm, you are entering a deep state of meditation, also called trance, which can easily become a most transcendental experience, if you care to practice it more mindfully, as seen from the shamanic dances of traditional societies. For more difficult or technical dances, focusing on the precision and grace of every move may be the way to turn dancing into a meditation practice. ☸

EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES

If you are not into any of the above activities you may still find plenty of opportunities for moving meditation throughout the day. There are no limits, you are not bound by tradition, or environment, proper clothing, weather or the type of activity you enjoy. The only thing you will need is the right mind, and something like a hobby, or an activity you engage in quite regularly. Be it gardening, ironing, hovering, general cleaning, cooking, crafting, tinkering or repairing things, or even reading a book, the opportunities are limitless. Turn your everyday practices into meditation, with proper focus and mindfulness, do not let your thoughts and problems distract you at every turn. If you can concentrate on what you are doing, it *is* already a meditation practice you can easily and enjoyably follow. ■

AFTERWORD – MEDITATION IN YOUR DAILY LIFE

You have seen many traditional, some obscure and lesser known, some modern and unusual meditation practices and methods described in this book. Some are suitable for the complete beginner, while others are for the more seasoned practitioner, but neither are better or more than the other. Practising is great and absolutely necessary to maintain your health and balance, yet meditation does not have to end with your daily sessions. As you reach the state of meditation, you quiet your mind, and sharpen your focus, you seem to have reached a goal, that is only the first step in any method mentioned above. Do not forget, these techniques are only different applications of this very state of mind, this mindfulness and quietness, where the chatter of your mind is subdued and you can finally hear the voice of your intuition.

When you are experienced and practice regularly, you may eventually reach the very highest state or goal, any method you have chosen to follow could offer. What happens then? Should you go along and stay at the state you have reached? Should you start anew with something completely different and master that technique as well? While it is most advised and commendable to follow any or both of the above ideas, what really should happen now is a shift in focus. At a certain point, meditation should become omnipresent. It would not start when you sit or lay down to practice, or start going through the movements, and would not end with the final self-massage, or stretching afterwards. You would enter your daily practice in a state of meditation, and leave practising with a mind still focused. Your meditation would carry over into anything, and everything you do. At this point you would be able to live your life completely mindfully, with great focus and attention. That would lead to greater compassion and a better

world for yourself and everyone around you.

You do not have to wait for that to happen, however. You do not have to be a master of meditation, or any method, to try and translate your meditation into your everyday life and practices. Be mindful of your actions, surroundings, words, companions and fellow inhabitants of the planet so that meditation could become your life, letting your life become meditation. ■

RECOMMENDED READING THE FOLLOWING
NON-COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF RECOMMENDED
BOOKS COULD BE USEFUL FOR ANYONE,
WISHING TO GAIN A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING
OF THE SUBJECTS DISCUSSED IN THIS BOOK
AND ALSO SERVE AS A GREAT ADDITION OF
MANY SUBJECTS THAT WERE OMITTED FROM
THIS VOLUME.

As meditation becomes increasingly popular (and quite fortunately so), it is also becoming increasingly difficult to find good, authoritative and thorough treatises on the subject, or related subjects, among the host of authors publishing today. The following short list of books, although not meant to indicate endorsement, association or affiliation with the authors, or publishers, are among those of the most recommended works on the given subjects, with the most authentic authorities, researchers or practitioners that have ever published. The list is not, by any means, exclusive and is only meant to serve as a starting point for further reading.

The below list will be categorised by subject and presented in chronological order, by the date of publication, or first publication, where applicable. (*Editor's note: Not all of the below titles have e-book editions*)

MEDITATION

- His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama: *Path to Bliss: A Practical Guide to Stages of Meditation*, Snow Lion (1991)
- Gehse Namgyal Wangchen: *Awakening the Mind: Basic Buddhist Meditations*, Wisdom Publications (1995)
- Lama Zopa Rinpoche: *A Daily Meditation Practice: How to Meditate on the Gradual Path to Enlightenment*, Wisdom Publications (1997)
- Swami Vishnu Devananda: *Meditation and Mantras*, Motilal Banarsi Dass (1999)

ANATOMY

- Anne M Gilroy, Brian R MacPherson, Lawrence M Ross, Michael Schuenke, Erik Schulte, Udo Schumacher: *Atlas of Anatomy*, Thieme; 2nd edition (2012)
- Leslie Kaminoff: *Yoga Anatomy-2nd Edition*, Human Kinetics (211)

YOGA AND BREATHING

- Yogi Ramacharaka: *Science of Breath* (1906), reprinted by Forgotten Books (2012)
- B. K. S. Iyengar: *Light on Pranayama: The Yogic Art of Breathing*, The Crossroad Publishing Company (1985)
- Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati: *Prana And Pranayama*, Bihar School Of Yoga/Yoga Publications Trust/Munger (2010)

MANDALAS

- Carl Gustav Jung: *Mandala Symbolism (Bollingen Series)*, Princeton University Press (1972)
- Giuseppe Tucci: *The Theory and Practice of the Mandala*, Dover Publications (2001)

QIGONG

- Dr. Yang Jwing-Ming: *Qigong for Health & Martial Arts: Exercises and Meditation*, Ymaa Publication Center (1998)
- Dr. Yang Jwing-Ming: *Qigong Meditation: Embryonic Breathing*, Ymaa Publication Center (2003)
- Shifu Yan Lei: *Instant Health: The Shaolin Qigong Workout For Longevity*, Yan Lei Press (2009)



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HYPNOSIS

- Kurt Tepperwein: *Master Secrets of Hypnosis and Self Hypnosis*, Instant Improvement (1991)
- Michael D. Preston: *Hypnosis: Medicine of the Mind, A Complete Manual on Hypnosis for the Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced Practitioner*, Pine Orchard Press (2001) ■