

## Reverse Walking of the Immortals

Travelling in reverse may be a strange and unnatural sight. People do not normally walk backward. The only time they do so is in moments of fright and, even then, they only take a few steps back.

However, reverse walking is occasionally depicted in Chinese tales of Gods and Immortals. Some Immortals simply walk backward. Others ride their animal back to front. An exemplary figure would be Zhang Guo Lao, one of The Eight Immortals, who is often portrayed as an old man sitting on his donkey, facing backward. Reverse travelling has become a kind of trademark for certain Immortals.

Reverse walking and riding is often interpreted as an expression of appreciation toward an underlying concept. Although the walking itself is extremely powerful and potent, it is, nevertheless, still only a manifestation of that ideology.

Reversing directions and allocations offers engineers new possibilities of change. It is a method of bringing new forms of dynamics into motion. This idea is not limited to the physical arts. It is also often used in other Chinese cultural arts such as Feng Shui. Reverse breathing is another manifestation of this concept (see pages 34–41).

Walking forward feels natural, whereas walking backward contradicts your instincts and intuition. It feels as if you are walking against the wind or swimming against the current. Although immense effort is often needed to sustain reverse walking, the rewards are always substantial.

Great masters of the martial, physical, and spiritual arts have studied and practised the unique features of reverse walking. It has become an important method of training whatever your goal may be, whether it is for cultivating health, physical skill, longevity, or enlightenment.



'Immortal'









1



2



3

**1** Stand comfortably straight with your heels touching. Rest both hands on your hips without tensing your shoulders. Even though you are walking backward, look forward purposefully. Do not let your gaze waver or become empty.

**2** Transfer most of your weight onto the right leg without moving your centre. Gently circle your left foot backward in an arc and touch the ground behind you with your toes. Do not step too far back otherwise you will lose your balance. Avoid twisting your waist; everything above the waist should remain still.

**3** Plant your left heel gently but firmly on the ground. Glide your upper body backward so that your weight is now mostly on your left leg. Avoid tilting your upper body back and sticking your bottom out. Keep everything above your waist relatively unchanged – only your centre has moved. Your upper body should remain at the same level.



**4** Circle the right foot back, slowly, and let the toes touch the floor. Your stride should be comfortably gauged to maintain balance. The leg movements should not affect your upper body. Keep your weight mostly on the left leg. Your centre is unmoved.



**5** Plant your right heel firmly on the floor. Shift your weight slowly back over your right leg. Avoid turning or twisting your waist during the movement. Your right leg is now moderately bent and your left leg is almost straight. This is a mirror reflection of step 3. You should be facing the same direction throughout the sequence.

Afterwards, slowly swing your left foot back and proceed to step 2. Continue the sequence from there.