

# Taoist Internal Breathing

# Foreword by Steve Olszewski

The breathing practices given below are as described by Bruce Kumar Frantzis, a lineage disciple under Taoist internal arts immortal Liu Hung Chieh. The teachings are said to be directly descendant from Lao Tse, author of *Tao Te Ching*, a preeminent book on Taoist thought and practice, which is the second most translated book in the world.

Every human being breathes and consciously employing breathing as a part of becoming aware of and enhancing the flow of energy in the body, and beyond, is an excellent practice for those that wish to pursue the deeper internal aspects of Taoist martial arts and meditation. Or, to simply improve one's health and wellbeing.

Taoist internal breathing has been a pillar of the 16 part Taoist nei gong (internal energy) process for thousands of years. It is designed to lead one into deeper levels of human integration with the Tao, sometimes referred to as Universal Consciousness, or just the "Way". At their penultimate, such practices can lead one to what has been called "Enlightenment".

On a more practical level for martial artists, Taoist internal breathing can enhance ones development in recognizing the internal aspects of training in T'ai Chi, Ba Gua and Hsin Yi, the only three truly internal martial arts systems.

Breathing practices are a common part of the tool kits that many disciplines use to improve the wellbeing of people. In the Taoist nei gong system, beginning breathing exercises join with Qi Gong, internal martial arts (such as T'ai Chi), lower tantien work, meditation, dissolving of energy blockages, and allied work on the human physical and Qi bodies.

Note that any counting mentioned is about the number of *continuous* breaths achieved as one advances. The prescribed counting is intended to help keep track of where one is at in a practice session, to enhance mind continuity, concentration and focus, or in Fantzis's words to help avoid "spacing out". The breathing should be natural, soft, easy and flowing, ultimately light and slender, based on ones bodies need and pace. There is no instruction to use the mind to control breathing, other than to try and make the breath longer as you progress. Avoid going beyond about 70% of your capacity at any time in any physical effort (the 70% rule).

It is suggested that one take their time in learning and advancing any breathing, meditation or energy work. Spend as much time on each of the 12 lessons as needed to fully accomplish one lesson before moving on to the next lesson. This may mean weeks or months spent on a single practice.

It is important to naturally and patiently develop a sustained feeling of the breath over many cycles and sessions, which can aid in becoming more aware of deeper physical and energetic feelings in the body, an important step toward becoming aware of and ultimately moving Qi within, and at deeper levels, outside of the body (e.g. to the etheric body or aura).

A word of caution: although the breathing practices given here are generally safe and effective for most people, deeper levels of nei gong work can be potentially harmful if not managed properly. In this regard one should seek out an experienced instructor before moving into deeper internal energy work.

## FOCUS ON PRACTICE

### *Taoist Internal Breathing, Lesson 1: Feeling the Breath*



Stand or sit comfortably with eyes and mouth closed. Place the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth and gently rest it there. Relax all the muscles of your face. Let your mind become aware of your breath entering your nostrils as you inhale and exhale. Feel all the sensations (physical and nonphysical) to the end of the inside of your nostrils, including the movement of your nose hairs.

After you can feel the movement of breath inside your nose, continue following the sensation of your breath in stages. As you become aware of the breath itself, let your breath penetrate progressively down the center line of your body and feel everything along the way. First, to the bottom of your throat. Next, to your lungs, your solar plexus, your navel, and then your lower tantien, which is approximately one-third of the distance between your navel and genitals. Practice five to ten minutes or more, keeping in mind the 70 percent rule, so you progressively relax, avoiding strain to either your body, breath, or mind.

This is a general breathing process. In the lessons that follow, the breathing process will be described in greater detail.

## FOCUS ON PRACTICE

### *Taoist Internal Breathing, Lesson 2*



- Place the tip of your tongue on the roof (hard palate) of your mouth.
- Take a complete breath. A complete breath consists of a smooth inhale and exhale with no holding of the breath whatsoever after the end of either the inhale or the exhale.
- Gradually make your breath longer and longer. To the best of your ability, each breath should be quiet, soft, and relaxed. Practice for five or ten minutes.

## FOCUS ON PRACTICE

### *Taoist Internal Breathing, Lesson 3*



- Consciously count each of your breaths, first for 2 breaths, then 3, then 4, then 5, then 6, then 7, then 8, then 9, and finally 10 breaths, without losing count or spacing out.
- Begin with one set of 10 breaths. Progressively build to 2 sets of 10 breaths, then 3, then 4, then 5 sets of 10 breaths until, without getting distracted, you feel each inhale and exhale. Be sharply aware of your count.
- In the beginning, you can use your fingers or beads to keep count, but eventually you will want to keep track without any external support, thereby strengthening your mind's awareness and continuity.
- Do your best to breathe and count in a relaxed manner, without tensing up. While counting, do not project into the future. Concentrate on the breath going through your body at the instant it is doing so.

## FOCUS ON PRACTICE

### *Taoist Internal Breathing, Lesson 4*



- Be very aware of—that is, *feel*—every sensation of each inhale and exhale.
- Feel the movement of the breath as it moves your nose hairs. How does each bit of breath make the inside of your nostrils feel?
- Follow and feel the connection of each micromovement of breath to your conscious awareness.
- Gradually build to 1 set of 10 breaths, staying acutely aware of how your mind follows each breath.
- Increase to 2 sets of 10 breaths, then 3, then 4, then 5 sets of 10 breaths, all the while concentrating on your conscious awareness.

## FOCUS ON PRACTICE

### *Taoist Internal Breathing, Lesson 5: Breathing Techniques to Increase Conscious Awareness*



- Extend your conscious awareness of each micro-inch of breath from your nostrils down to the base of your throat.
- Feel the front, sides, and back of your throat.
- Begin with 2 breaths, rest, then take 2 breaths again, and repeat until you can do 2 breaths successfully, *without breaking your awareness*. Now do 4 breaths, etc., until you can do 1 set of 10 breaths completely, with continuous awareness and no gross tension.
- Now work on 1 set of 10, having each breath relax every muscle and nerve in your body.
- Next work on relaxing the mental tension of your mind's conscious awareness on each breath. Keep at it until your attention can remain focused in a relaxed, comfortable manner.
- Gradually increase your breath work from 1 set of 10 breaths to 2, 3, 4, then 5 sets of 10.



## FOCUS ON PRACTICE

### *Taoist Internal Breathing, Lesson 6*



- We are now going, in stages, to continue the awareness of breath down to just below the navel.
- Begin with 2 breaths. With each, on the inhale, continue the awareness of your breath from your nose through the center of your body down to the bottom of your chest. Without breaking your conscious awareness of your breath, on the exhale follow your breath back up your chest, to your throat, and through and out your nose. Keep trying until you can do this without a break in your awareness.
- Next, with continuous awareness and body feeling, follow the inhaled breath from your nose to your throat through the center of your body to the bottom of your chest, down to the middle of your stomach, and on the exhale, back up to your chest, throat, and out your nose.
- Inhale downward through your nose, throat, and chest, ending at your navel. Retrace the same path on the exhale. Practice 2 breaths, rest, and continue over and over again until you can do so with a relaxed body and mind in a comfortable way with continuous awareness.
- Continue your inhalation (from nose to navel), breathing downward to the middle of your belly, about half the distance between your navel and pubic hair. The Chinese call this location the lower tantien. Practice until you can breath down to the lower tantien with uninterrupted concentration, feeling, and awareness in a continuous, comfortable, and relaxed fashion both mentally and physically for 2 complete breaths.
- Expand to 3 breaths, then 4, then to 1 complete set of 10 breaths.
- Increase to 2 sets of 10, then 3, then 4, then 5 complete sets of 10 breaths.
- This exercise will significantly increase both your ability to feel the inside of your body and the strength of your conscious awareness.

## FOCUS ON PRACTICE

### *Taoist Internal Breathing, Lesson 7*



You should now be able to maintain a line of awareness from your nose through the center of your body to your lower tantien. From here on, do your best to completely relax your chest and not use any strength in your chest or puff it out when you breathe.

- Let the feeling of the center line inside your body (where your central channel is located), from the middle of your throat to lower tantien, expand forward and backward until you can feel the whole inside of your belly, micro-inch by micro-inch. Now think of your belly as a cylinder and use your breath to expand it equally in all directions from its center line—forward, backward, and equidistant out to the sides.
- In the beginning, focus on the easiest movement, which is that of the lower belly. When this is comfortable, turn your attention to add the more difficult movement of the middle belly. Finally, concentrate on and add the most difficult part of the body to gain control of—the solar plexus and diaphragm.
- Now as you follow the awareness of your breath from your nose to tantien,
  1. On your inbreath, feel your belly expanding from your center line *forward* to the skin on the front of your body. On the outbreath, return your belly to its original position.
  2. Now on the inbreath, expand the inside of your body *backward* from your center line to your spine. On the exhale, relax your body to its original position.
  3. On the inhale, from the center line of the body expand *backward* and *forward* at the same time, both toward the skin on the front of your belly and your spine. On the exhale, return to your original position.
- The simultaneous backward and forward motion is what you want to achieve. Begin with 2 breaths and rest. After your awareness

## **FOCUS ON PRACTICE**

### *Taoist Internal Breathing, Lesson 7 (continued)*

is continuous, both in and out and to front and back, increase 1 breath at a time with completely relaxed continuity, to 10 and then 15 and then 20 breaths.

- If you lose awareness or space out, start over from the beginning. Day by day you will find the strength of your awareness increasing.

## **FOCUS ON PRACTICE**

### *Taoist Internal Breathing, Lesson 8*



The focus is now on breathing beneath the lower ribs.

- On the inhale, physically move and expand the insides of your belly toward the front and sides. Feel the breath move beneath the lower ribs to stimulate your liver on the right side and your spleen on the left.
- On the exhale let your belly return to its original relaxed position.
- Gradually build your breath up with continuous awareness from 2 to 20 breaths.
- Initially put your hands on your sides to physically test if your sides are moving, until without physical touch your awareness alone can tell if your sides are moving or not.

## **FOCUS ON PRACTICE**

### *Taoist Internal Breathing, Lesson 9*



When you begin, it is natural to first fill up the front of the body and next progress to the sides. After a while, however, it is best if you can expand and relax the front and sides of your belly and return to your originating center line *simultaneously and not sequentially.*

## FOCUS ON PRACTICE

### *Taoist Internal Breathing, Lesson 10: Lower Back Breathing*



- Concentrate on the inhale, expanding from your center line to your spine and backward to your skin, lower back muscles, and all the way up and into your kidneys. Return to your original position on the exhale.
- Breathing from your kidneys will be harder than breathing from your front and sides. Initially, it helps to lie down on the floor, knees up in the air, soles of the feet on the floor, with the lower part of your back firmly pressing the floor. The pressure of your body pressing into the floor on the inhale, and the release of the pressure on the exhale, will make it easier to feel the inside of your body.

Breathing with the kidneys is considered very important in Taoist practices. In traditional Chinese medicine, the kidneys are held to be the source of a human's overall vitality and sexual/procreative capacity. Energizing the kidneys is of particularly significant importance in terms of developing a healthy body and clear mind. Chronic exhaustion often reflects weakness in the kidneys.

- Progress from two breaths to twenty, with continuous awareness.
- Now build from twenty to thirty breaths, using all parts of your abdominal cavity simultaneously (rather than sequentially). On the inhale, expand from the center line of your belly to the front, side, and back (kidneys). Return to your original position on the exhale.
- On the inhale, expand your belly like a tube, from its center line, between the solar plexus and the lower tantien, simultaneously forward, backward, and sideways. Return your belly to its original position on the exhale.
- On the inhale, your belly should simultaneously expand as you follow your breath from your nose to lower tantien. On your exhale, you should follow your breath back from your tantien, up the center line of your body, and out your nose, as you let your belly return to its original position.

## **FOCUS ON PRACTICE**

*Taoist Internal Breathing, Lesson 10:*

*Lower Back Breathing (continued)*

This method of breathing will provide a wonderful massage for your internal organs. You can breath in this manner twenty-four hours a day once this new physical breathing method becomes a comfortable habit. Just as massaging your muscles adds to their tone and overall functioning, so will this breathing method benefit your internal organs. In terms of your health, massaging your internal organs is more important than toning your muscles. Just as muscle massage increases your overall blood circulation, this breathing increases the blood circulation in those deeper blood vessels that nourish the internal organs. This type of breathing may increase the mass of your stomach muscles and definitely will make them stronger.

Build from two to twenty and then to thirty breaths. Make sure you breathe to only 70 percent of your capacity. Do not expand your breath to more than is comfortable. You introduce an effortlessness into your breathing by both taking less air with each breath than you can, and simultaneously relaxing your nerves with each inhale and exhale. Regardless of how much time you take to complete one inhale and exhale (ten seconds to minutes), this effortlessness in the physical act of breathing is of tremendous benefit. It continuously reduces your stress as well as strengthens your internal organs, overall body vitality, and mental clarity.

Effortlessness is also critical in developing continuous awareness of your mindstream, without mental tension. Mental tension saps your mental and physical stamina and ability to concentrate continuously for long periods of time without becoming tired or distracted.

## FOCUS ON PRACTICE

### *Taoist Internal Breathing, Lesson 11: Upper Back Breathing*



You now want to combine both lower back breathing and full belly breathing with upper back breathing.

The lungs are constructed like a bag. If, when you inflate a bag, you hold the back of it still, the bag will inflate forward. This is how most people breathe, causing the chest to puff out, military style. If, however, you hold the front of the bag still, the bag will inflate backward. This is what we do with the chest in Taoist breathing.

The front of the chest (the sternum and chest muscles) completely relaxes and does not move at all, as the lungs expand backward toward the spine. As you do this, allow your shoulder blades to spread away from your spine and let your ribs and shoulders soften and move sideways. This action will release some of the anatomical bindings that prevent the lungs from fully expanding backward to their utmost capacity.

Two forces now simultaneously combine to give your heart a continuous massage with each breath, which is absent or diminished in regular puffed-out chest breathing: (1) the spreading of the ribs, shoulder blades, and shoulders causes greater movement in back of the heart, and (2) upward pressure is applied to the heart by the diaphragm. These two directional forces compress and release the heart muscle and pericardium in a tonifying, rhythmic massage.

This heart massage, combined with the lower belly breathing's massage of your other internal organs, now tonifies and increases blood circulation to all your internal organs.

Begin with two breaths and gradually work up to thirty breaths combining lower back (kidney) breathing, full belly front and sides breathing, and upper back breathing.



## FOCUS ON PRACTICE

### *Taoist Internal Breathing, Lesson 12: Breathing Energy into the Tantien*



Continue to practice everything you have learned from Lessons 1 through 11. Now add breathing into your tantien.

Your lower tantien is located down from your navel about one-third of the distance to your genitals, just slightly above your pubic hair, in the center of your abdomen, midway between the surface of the skin of your belly and your spine, on the central channel. It is the only energetic center in your body that controls and regulates every energy that affects your physical health. You want to find this place in your body by feeling for it rather than visualizing it. This energy center has an initially fuzzy and eventually clear sensation, distinct from everything around it. It cannot be physically seen by your eyes, although it can be energetically felt or even psychically seen by a sufficiently trained or sensitive individual.

The lower tantien may be felt as either a tiny point or a small ball. The tantien is the center of a sea of energy. In the West it is probably best known by its Japanese name, the *hara*.

Imagine energy moving in and out with your breath and feel yourself breathing into your tantien in four progressive steps, achieving effortlessness in one step before moving on to the next.

*Step 1.* In the front of your body, inhale from your skin to your tantien and exhale from your tantien to your skin. Next, breathe in energy from your etheric body—the space three to six inches outside your physical body—backward into your tantien. Exhale from your lower tantien, through your physical body, past your physical body, and back to where you originally inhaled from your etheric body. The continuous conscious awareness of your mindstream should now be moving past a sense of physical matter into your qi body.

The acupuncture point called the *ming men*, or "door of life," is located on the spine directly behind the tantien. It is often called the back tantien. Besides being a primary control point for the elimination of lower back pain and for enabling movement of energy along the spine, it is also the energetic control point for the kidneys, which are the source of vitality and thereby life of the human body. The *ming men* opens up the life force in a person, and hence its name.

## FOCUS ON PRACTICE

### *Taoist Internal Breathing, Lesson 12:*

#### *Breathing Energy into the Tantien (continued)*

*Step 2.* Inhale from the ming men point to your lower tantien. Now exhale from the tantien to ming men. Build progressively to thirty complete breaths.

*Step 3.* Fuse steps 1 and 2 together. Inhale simultaneously from both the front and back. In front, inhale from the boundary of your etheric body at the point just beyond your tantien; in back, inhale from the etheric boundary just beyond the ming men. With this inhale, bring breath energy from both directions simultaneously through your etheric body, skin, and flesh into your lower tantien. Upon exhaling, allow the breath energy to exit simultaneously in a straight line from your tantien, through to your etheric body both in the front and in the back. This will activate the *dai mai*.

The *dai mai* is an extraordinary acupuncture meridian that encircles the body from the tantien to the door of life—ming men—and back to the tantien. It holds a special place in the body's energy system. The *dai mai* belt meridian intersects with, connects, and integrates all the body's twelve main vertical acupuncture meridians. At first, by breathing through from the tantien to the ming men, you activate the *dai mai*, energizing all your other acupuncture meridians simultaneously.\* The energy lines inside your body, as well as your external aura to the edge of your etheric body, are directly connected to each other in a circular relationship, one activating the other. When your tantien breathing continues past your skin to the edge of your etheric body or aura, it connects the two primary (front and back) points on your external aura and thus activates, integrates, and strengthens your whole aura. When your auric energy is activated, it reinforces the strengths of your acupuncture meridian lines. This strengthening forms the door through which you can progressively become aware of the energy in your whole aura.

This Taoist breathing method was also historically used in Chinese Chan Buddhism but was not passed down to Zen Buddhism in Japan or, for that matter, to the Japanese martial arts community, including aikido. It performs two functions simultaneously: (a) it makes the body sensitive, healthy, and strong, and (b) it extends your conscious awareness from your

\*This includes the governor and conception vessels, which are also called the microcosmic orbit.

## FOCUS ON PRACTICE

### *Taoist Internal Breathing, Lesson 12:*

#### *Breathing Energy into the Tantien (continued)*

physical body to your qi. Consequently, your ability to be consciously aware of what is happening in your mindstream for long periods of time is expanded.

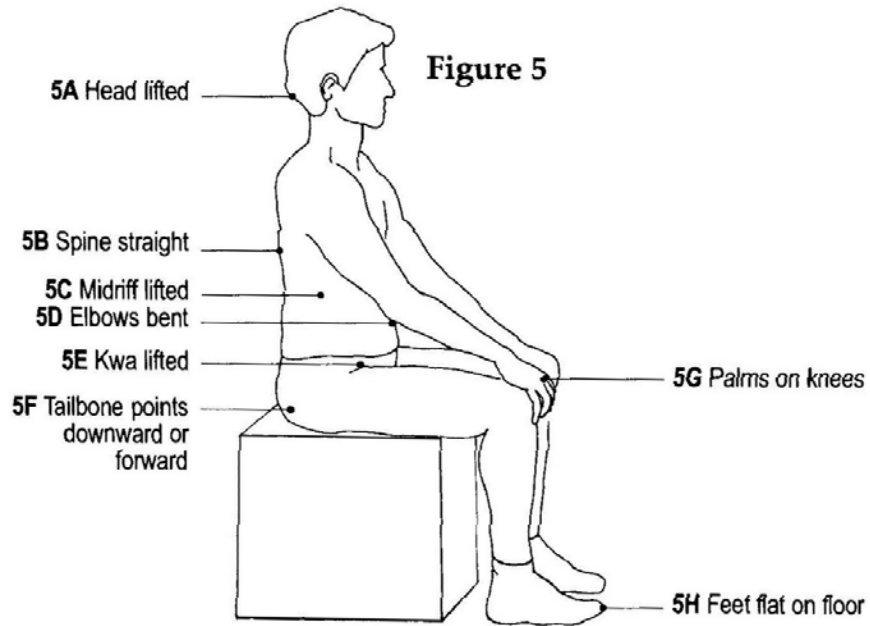
Gradually build tantien to ming men breathing from two to thirty breaths.

*Step 4.* This is truly an optional step that should be done only after step 3 completely stabilizes. If you do not have extensive experience with energy work, it is best to stick to practicing step 3 for a minimum of three months before progressing to step 4.

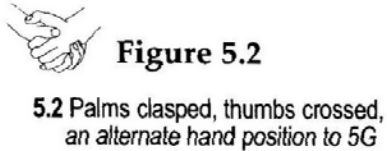
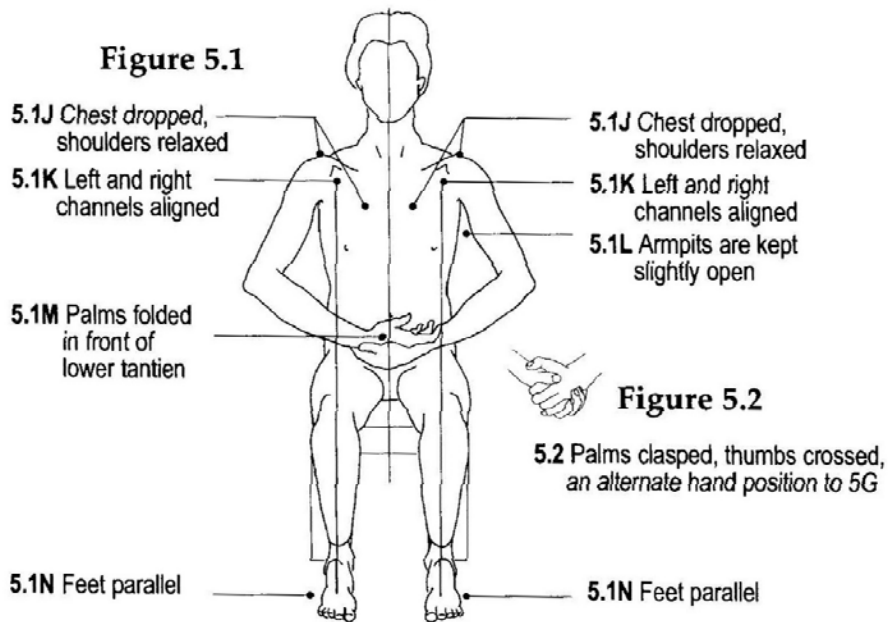
As this stabilization occurs, the subtle sensation of the breath moving back and forth along the line between your etheric body and tantien should have the clearly felt sensation of being connected and unbroken. After this occurs the dai mai will automatically activate. As your awareness grows through practice, the felt sensation of the encircling dai mai should progressively become more clear, both on your skin and in your etheric body. Being able to feel the dai mai will make it significantly easier for you to both increase its strength and consciously join its energy to your tantien.

- (a) Inhale and breathe energy from the entire circumference of the dai mai on your skin, through your body, and into your tantien. Exhale and return the breath energy from your tantien, through your body, and to the entire circumference of the dai mai on your skin.
- (b) Inhale, and from the dai mai's entire circumference in your etheric body, breathe energy through the air, to your skin, and through your body into your tantien. Exhale, and reversing the same pathway, breathe energy from your tantien, through your body, to the entire dai mai's circumference on your skin, and through the air to the dai mai's entire circumference in your etheric body.

**Correct Alignments When Sitting In A Chair**



**5.1I Central channel aligned**  
center of head is directly over center of hips



*Incorrect Alignments When Sitting In A Chair*

