

## **Right Way to Breathe: Don't Use Your Chest, Use Your Abdomen!**

If you wish to return to childhood yet also wish to have a lot of energy to carry on with those adult activities you like, practice Abdominal Breathing. For those who have been used to chest breathing, changing to abdominal breathing is a difficult task if they do not know the training procedure. Many years ago, when I practiced Shaolin Kungfu with a well-known master, I found that my senior classmates were full of internal power.

My seniors told me that I must use abdominal breathing before I could train internal power. However, neither they nor my instructor taught me how to go about it systematically, though my instructor often reminded me to use abdominal breathing. "How?" I asked. "Don't use your chest to breathe; use your abdomen," my instructor explained. I tried, and tried, but still could not succeed. I asked my seniors, and they replied, "Don't use your chest to breathe, use your abdomen." But after trying for more than a year I still could not breathe with my abdomen.

In this respect, you are luckier, for you will be able to perform abdominal breathing within two months if you follow the systematic steps below.

### *Stage 1*

Stand with your feet fairly close together. Relax and empty your mind of all thoughts. Feel cheerful; smile from your heart. Place one palm (either one, though some masters recommend left for men and right for women, page 44 of *The Art of Chi Kung*) gently on top of your 'qihai' vital point, which is about three inches below your navel. Place the other palm on top of this palm. You may perform the whole exercise with your eyes closed or open, or sometimes closed and sometimes open. Open your mouth slightly; your lips should be wide, not rounded.

Gently press on your abdomen with both palms for six counts. Your abdomen will fall. The pressing movement must be smooth and continuous, not staccato. Hold on for two counts. Then gently release your palms for six counts. The releasing movement must be smooth and continuous, not staccato. Your abdomen will rise. Hold on for about two counts.

The whole process - pressing, holding, releasing, holding - constitutes one breathing unit, or one breath, although there should be no conscious attempt at breathing at this stage. Forget about your breathing - it will take care of itself. But it is important, very important, *not* to breathe in as you press on your abdomen. This breathing in as the chest rises is a very common mistake; and if you make this mistake, it is difficult to achieve abdominal breathing. One good way to avoid or overcome this mistake is to make an effort to forget your breathing. Gently focus your mind on the mechanical pressing and releasing of your palms, or on the mechanical falling and rising of your abdomen.

Repeat the process about ten times, that is, ten breathing units. Then drop your arms to your sides, with your palms facing the back, for Standing Meditation. Close your eyes (if they are not already closed) and forget about everything. If you have gently focused on your earlier palm movements or your rising and falling abdomen, you will by now have attained a pleasant chi kung state of mind.

Enjoy this state of nothingness for about five minutes, or what you think is five minutes. Then, still with your eyes closed, rub your palms together, place the centres of your warm palms on your eyes and dab your eyes as you open them. This constitutes the first stage of the Abdominal Breathing exercise.

Practice this stage twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening or at night, for at least two weeks. Gradually increase the number of breathing units as you progress, but remember there should be no

conscious attempt at breathing at this stage. The six counts for pressing and for releasing, and the two counts for holding, are guidelines; you may gradually lengthen them if you feel competent and comfortable. Only when you can perform the falling and rising of your abdomen mechanically, should you proceed to stage 2.

### *Stage 2*

The next stage is similar to stage 1, except that as you press on your abdomen, visualize or think of negative energy flowing out from your abdomen up the front part of your body and out through your mouth. Negative energy may be translated as toxic waste, negative emotions, illness or whatever you do not want. In other words, you press out all the rubbish from your abdomen and other parts of your body. Then, as your abdomen rises, visualize good cosmic energy flowing through your nose, down the front part of your body into your abdomen. This visualization must be gentle, and must never be overdone. If you find it too daunting, you need not visualize every time you press or release; a few times may be sufficient to set the outflow of rubbish and the inflow of cosmic energy in operation. There should still be no conscious attempt at breathing at this stage. Practice daily for at least two weeks before proceeding to the next stage.

### *Stage 3*

Conscious breath control is introduced at stage 3. Perform the same procedure as at stage 2, except that as you press on the abdomen and visualize rubbish flowing out, gently breathe out through your mouth. As you release and visualize cosmic energy flowing in, gently breathe in through your nose. Your breathing must be gentle and graceful. Past masters have provided an interesting and useful imagery for the breath: both the in and the out breath should be long, thin and continuous, like a piece of never-ending thread. Another good piece of advice is not to use your nose like a suction pump; it is actually a smooth passageway for the flow of chi.

By following the above steps, all my chi kung students can perform Abdominal Breathing within two months. A useful guideline is to practice the breathing 36 times, followed by about 10 to 15 minutes of Standing Meditation. The whole training session takes about 20 to 30 minutes.

As with all other chi kung exercises, the most important point is consistent, regular practice. It is useful to start your training with two or three dynamic chi kung patterns for five to ten minutes, follow this with Abdominal Breathing, and conclude with Standing Meditation. After six months of daily practice, you must be ready to hear your friends say that you have changed into a different (meaning healthier and livelier) person.