

Standing Meditation

(From my lecture on Standing Meditation December 3, 2011)



Most of us recognize that meditation has value. The process can increase awareness, calm the mind, balance our perspective and make us more patient.

Physically, standing meditation in particular can calm the heart and strengthen the whole body. From the standpoint of the mind/body arts, it balances and strengthens the Qi, while freeing us from stagnant or trapped Qi from physical damage and incomplete emotional experiences.

An especially beneficial point is that when does Qigong, or standing in particular, the body is exercised to a level one might not be able to reach otherwise, because the lungs and heart would become too stressed before the muscles.

Technique



There are a wide range of meditation techniques and usually the more difficult the method, the greater the payoff. Using some sort of mental focus is often used as a means of disciplining and directing the mind. One may direct their attention to a sound, an object, a color or even a idea. The most widely used method, and the one we use for standing, is to focus attention on the breathing.

Now, regarding posture, most teachers, including me, can go on endlessly about correct standing posture.

Although all this concern about posture is very important, be assured that no one, even masters, ever get the standing posture perfect. My point is that you should not let the worry of making a mistake prevent you from doing the meditation. In many ways the process is much more important than the goal. Just remember, you can't do it wrong, as long as you do three things: Relax completely,

breath slowly and deeply from the belly, and pay close attention to the feeling of your energy rising, spreading and falling off as you inhale and exhale.

Just remember, you can't do it wrong, as long as you do three things: Relax completely, breath slowly and deeply from the belly, and pay close attention to the feeling of your energy rising, spreading and falling off as you inhale and exhale.

Standing Meditation

Now that I have said that, let's take a look at posture.

As master Robert Chuckrow once said, "If you can relax and center your body, you can relax and center the mind."



In Qigong and Tai Chi we recognize three major energy points we call "Dan Tien", a Chinese word meaning "field of Elixir". There are other key energy wells, but these three are very important in standing. As Jan Diepersloot points out in his book, "Warriors Of Stillness", aligning the lower, middle and upper energy wells with one another is essential to correct standing. This centers the body's energy and enables one to feel connected, like a conduit, between Earth and the

Universe.

One concentrates on, but also must try to really feel, the first of these energy wells, the lower "Dan Tien". This point is a couple of inches below the navel, and is considered to source of our life essence. This essence is called "Jing" in Chinese.

While keeping the attention at this point, one tries to really relax and "open up" the "Gate of life", called "Mingmen" in Chinese. The Mingmen is the small of the back and is the backside of the lower Dan Tien.

Once this alignment is achieved, one must try to fully relax into posture as follows:

1. Relax and very slightly elevate the head
2. Touch the tip of the tongue to the roof of the mouth
3. Relax all the muscles and let the chest "sink in" slightly
4. Round the back by separating the shoulder blades
5. Relax the small of the back and bring the hips slightly forward
6. Relax and open the hip joints
7. Bend the knees slightly
8. Center the weight between the feet on the soles, just behind the ball of each foot
9. Breathe slowly and deeply, but never force this breath-just get the feeling of "watching" the breath

As you stand, with each breath, try to relax even more, all the while scanning mentally for any subconscious tension.

You are just standing, hands at the sides, in the relaxed posture, the most important of the postures, called 'Wuji Zhang'. The weight is centered at a point called the "Vertical Axis" between the feet and a few inches forward about even with the balls of the feet.

This point will move inward slightly as one becomes more advanced. When very deep tendon strength and leg strength has developed, the "Vertical Axis" will naturally move

Standing Meditation

in closer to the heels and the posture will elevate slightly. One is now able to assume a strong and deeply rooted posture with the legs only slightly curved.

“Empty standing” is the translation, and it means one is very awake and aware, deeply relaxed, clear of any preconceptions, not resisting thought but not seeking it.

The Standing Tree



After one has become centered and relaxed in the starting posture, the next step is to raise the arms into the “Standing Tree” posture one must try to relax completely, breath slowly and deeply while quieting the mind.

Raise the hands and turn them so they face inward, even with the shoulders. The elbows droop down and the back is rounded and relaxed. The hands are about two feet away as if one is has his arms out embracing a tree. The hands are open, fingers spread apart slightly and the thumbs point toward your eyes.

As we stand, we try to “just stand”. That is, as we try to relax, we breathe slowly and quiet the mind.

And as we breath, mentally following the rising and falling of our Chi or energy, we must try to relax and “fill the Mingmen”. This means that we must keep the center of our awareness in the lower abdomen and try to open up, relax even more in this area of the body. One must not simply be aware of the Mingmen, one must embrace it like a beloved child.

As Master Diepersloot wrote, if we look distantly but softly at a distant object, it wakens our peripheral vision-the ability to see all around our field of vision. If we simultaneously direct our attention inward our “little developed sense of kinesthetic awareness in awakened. Our awareness and sense of the body, motion, and muscle memory.

The Postural Muscles

The muscles we use to move around are “fast twitch” or mobilizing muscles. The other type of muscles are what are called “stabilizing” or postural muscles. These are postural muscles are involuntary and react against force without our volition.

Control of these postural muscles respond to intention; as in riding a bicycle. These muscles “acquire” through trial and error. These muscles are most affected when we balancing or, in the case of Tai Chi, we are transitioning between postures. This also enables us to train the postural muscles to “let go” at the proper time.

In order to achieve real endurance and balanced strength, these muscles must be trained equally with the mobilizing or fast twitch muscles.

Standing Meditation



Science has learned that most muscular-skeletal health problems are caused by an imbalance between these two types of muscles.

We also know that what psychologists call “incomplete” emotional experiences or unresolved trauma often result in excessive subconscious tensions that are “held” in the postural muscles. We are “just standing”.

We have learned through the study of body language and somatic science, that the mind and body are constantly expressing outwardly, what it is experiencing and feeling inwardly. But, like most things, this works both ways. One can influence and change inner feelings by changing the posture or attitude of the body in a mindful way.

Dr. Maoshing Ni, author of “Secrets Of Longevity”, has taught us that standing deeply energizes the heavy muscles in the legs and back, and will augment and strengthen natural human growth hormones. This makes us more energetic, more youthful and more resistant to disease.

The Experience of Standing

Standing has some challenges, which Master Cohen described as the three trials:

The Trial of Discomfort: One must develop the ability to disregard the physical discomfort which accompanies standing meditation. If a sharp pain is felt, one must stop and rest. Otherwise, the trial is to direct the mind away from the distraction of physical discomfort and instead, direct the mind to give its full attention to what is “going on”.

You will feel your nervous energy rise up, along with the almost irresistible urge to move. Relax into this energy and, instead of letting it rise, use you adult mind, you’re “I’m the master here” mind, to send that nervous energy down into the lower abdomen.

The next trial is the Trial of Fire. In this phase, we often experience a great deal of body heat. This arises because we have not yet acquired the ability to simply “let go”. As we grow stronger, and begin to relax even more deeply INTO the discomfort and the body heat, the discomfort will pass.

As this is happening, we are also freeing ourselves of internal blockages where the Chi is too weak or too abundant.

Finally, there is the Trial of Patient Growth

All the way through this experience, we find that random thoughts enter our minds. Concerns about day-to-day life and our problems, but also the echoes of other people’s voices; parents, friends, relatives, managers and teachers. Our mind is tempted to “flit around”. This is what the Chinese call the Monkey Mind, the undisciplined, unfocused mind which is trying to be everywhere at once.

Standing Meditation



One of my best sources is the work of Karel Koskuba, a master of Zhan Zhuang who wrote in his article; The Foundation of Internal Martial Arts, that we humans are “addicted to distraction”. Mostly this is based upon two things: fear of boredom and fear of stillness. Fear of that quiet, still, empty place our mind goes to when we are completely still. But, be assured, there is absolutely nothing to fear. In this state, you are simply the “observer”, watching, listening, but not seeking or resisting.

We have reached a level where we are “cut loose” and free to practice what Master Cohen calls, “restorative awareness”. Like food to a hungry body, a sense of being restored to full energy, full awareness and the sense of interconnection to everything will become abundant.

Advanced Standing Meditation

Dr. Lam Kam Cheuen, in his book: The Way Of Energy, describes several techniques for “going beyond” the basics. These are well worth looking in to.

Also, have a look at the writings of Yang Jwing-ming in his book “The Roots Of Chinese Qigong”. In his book you will find discussion of something called “Almost Movement” or “Nei Dan Cultivation”. In this practice, one learns to send the mental signal for movement, like lifting the hand upward, but not actually moving, and then “sensing the strength or energy” of that movement.

A study of modern day hypnotism and also the writings of Dr. Joe Dispenza, (“ Evolve Your Brain”), helps us understand that this meditation is a state of very deep relaxation combined with deepened awareness. Hypnotists know that all hypnotism is really self-hypnosis, and that meditation is, in fact, self-induction into a hypnotic state. The indicators of true hypnosis are stillness, relaxation, body warmth and what is called “catalepsy”:

Catalepsy (from gr. κατάληψις "catch") is a nervous condition characterized by muscular rigidity and fixity of posture regardless of external stimuli, as well as decreased sensitivity to pain.[1]

Catalepsy is also a term used by hypnotists to refer to the state of making a hypnotised subject's arm, leg or back rigid. "Arm catalepsy" is often a pre-hypnotic test performed prior to an induction into a full trance.

Conclusion

Master Wang Xiang-zhai, (1885 – 1963), is considered the modern founder of Zhan Zhuang and one who popularized and developed the practice in the 20th century.

Standing Meditation



He and his students were renowned for being unbeatable in martial arts contests because of their dedication to the very simple practice of Zhan Zhuang.

He wrote that Zhan Zhuang could “cure anemia, normalize blood pressure and make the heart beat calm and regular.”

He described Zhan Zhuang as ruled by four important contradictions:

1. Holding the arms up is relaxing
2. Time flies when standing
3. Static postures promote fluid coordinated movement
4. Standing still is good exercise

Bibliography

“The Way Of Energy” by Lam Kam Chuen
“Warriors of Stillness” by Jan Diepersloot
“Chi Kung by Yves Requena
“The Way Of Qigong” by Kenneth Cohen
“The Web Of Life” by Fritzof Kapra
“The Subtle Body” by Cyndi Dale
“Timeless Healing” by Dr. Herbert Bensen
Documentary film: The Quantum Activist by Amit Goswammi
“Heal Yourself With Qigong” by Suzanne Friedman
“Hypnotism: Keys To TheMind” by Nathan Thomas
Foundation Of Internal Martial Arts by Karel Koskuba
“Evolve Your Brain” Dr. Joe Dispenza
“The Roots Of Chinese Qigong” by Yang Jwing-Ming