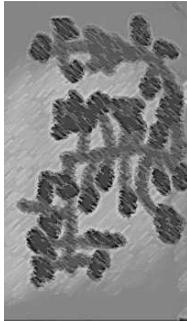


The Taoist Method of Harmonising the Breath

From Dr Li Zhongzi's
Health Without Medicines
(Ming China c. 1640)

Tao Booklet 2007



Translated
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Tao Booklets 2007 : mytaoworld.com

“The theme of the single method of harmonising the breath runs through all three religions, Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism. In its broadest aspect it enables you to enter on into the Way or at the very least to nourish and care for your own life. It is the very highest teaching of jing gong (Stillness Exercise).”

Therefore the Buddhists used ‘gazing at the tip of the nose’ and counting the passage of the breath which was an entry level method of *zhi guan* (stop-gaze) meditation for beginners.

The Taoist *Zhuangzi* in his *Southern Flower Book* (Ch.6.) says: The adept breathes from the heels. The *Yi Jing* (Hexagram ‘Following’) says: At nightfall, the true-hearted fellow enters into the house to rest. Commentator Wang (‘Dragon Creek’) says: In ancient times the adepts rested without sleeping. Thus the text says ‘at nightfall he enters into the house to rest’. This method of resting should be carried out at nightfall...

*The ears not hearing, the eyes not seeing,
The limbs not moving,
The heart without a single thought,
Like a flickering flame,
The originating innermost matter of the heart
Held there in suspended animation,
The true mind hung onto by a single thread.*

Laozi described it: ‘a silken thread, barely sensed’ (*Tao-te Ching* Ch.6). This is it. It is an event which

begins and ends quite naturally, the whole body merging into the Void. Thereby your whole life can also rest in this totality - merged into the Void.

Most people, all day and every day, are endlessly busy, their minds bothered and defeated. If you can rely on this little doze in the evening it means you have enough time in the day to do what you want. But if you cannot regulate your own breath, then that single living flame in your own body is finally extinguished by the mess and grime of the world. This is what meant by 'the Yang sunken within the Yin.'

*The method of harmonising the breath
Does not occupy any time at all!
Settle the body down, sitting upright,
Loosen the clothing and untie the belt,
In a positive and lively manner.*

In the mouth let the tongue stir around several times very gently, enabling the stale air to exit out. You should not make any sound, while you breathe in very gently through the nose. Do this perhaps 15 or 20 times, swallowing down any saliva produced. Knock the teeth together several times, the tongue placed on the roof of the mouth.

*Lips and teeth should be touching,
Both eyes dropping,
To shade out any light.*

*Gradually you arrive at a regular breath,
Passing without effort and quite smooth.
Either count the breaths out,
Or else count the breaths in.*

*Count from one to ten,
Then from ten to one-hundred,
Focus the mind on the number,
Do not let it go off course.*

*If the mind and the breath follow each other,
Random thoughts will not occur.*

*So then you just stop counting,
Leaving it to nature.
Sitting there a long time,
Wrapped in the mystery.*

*If you want to move and get up,
Then very slowly uncurl and relax the body,
The hands and feet should not suddenly move.*

*If you can diligently practice just so
From within the stillness, a light is born
Of a kind both strange and wonderful.
Truly it can illuminate the heart
And see into of our innermost nature
Not simply promote health.*

Coming out and entering in like ‘a silken thread’,
barely held, the mind and the breath fuse together.
Which is indeed the True Breath. Each breath, one

by one, returns to the root and you steal a march on
Nature - creation lies in the palm of your hand.
This is the secret way to eternal life.

.....

The *Ode on Nourishing Life* says:

*When you are hungry, then eat.
Before you are full, then stop.
Walk a few steps at random,
With the aim of making the stomach no longer
full.*

*When the stomach is fairly empty,
Proceed into your house,
No matter whether it is night or day,
And sit or lie down as you please.*

*Carefully settle the body down,
Until you take the form of a wooden puppet.*

*Constantly turning over a word or phrase,
You taking command of this present body.*

*But if I make the slightest movement
If I allow a hair's breadth interruption,
Then straightway into hell I steam!*

This is just like the rule of the Shang lords and Grandson Wu, founder of the Zhou: when a job has to be done, even death cannot be allowed to stand in your way!

*Again make use of Buddha's words,
Along with Laozi's saying:
Gaze at the tip of the nose,
Counting the passage of the breath,*

*A silken thread, barely sensed,
Keep it well unbroken.*

*Count up to one hundred,
The whole body quite still,
The whole body immovable,
On par with the Void,
Not anxiously restrained,
Just simply unmoving.*

*Count up to one thousand,
Or else leave off the counting,
Until there exists just one single rule,
Summed up in a single word - 'follow'.*

*With the breath merged totally,
Coming out and entering in,
Follow it unbroken,
Until one morning it stops,
Neither coming out nor in.*

*At this instant you have a breath
Which opens a hair's breadth crack -
A scene appears, eighty-four thousand miles
Of clouds and tumbling rain.*

*Without a beginning, without a cause,
And all disease is eradicated,
Every barrier surmounted.
Stillness, ability, life and compassion,
Naturalness, light and emotion.*

*It is like a blind man
Suddenly able to see.
What else can you do at this moment?
But simply find someone to point out the way.*

*Now this old fellow is rambling on...
My words must cease at this point...*

