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Module 17 **Chinese Medical Breathing Exercises**

Chinese medical breathing exercises and the basic principles of Qigong (Chi Kung). There are actually 5 schools of chi kung; Buddhist, Daoist, Confucius, Martial Arts and Medical. And medical was the one that I was drawn to, the one that I learned. They all have the same underlying principles; regulate mind, regulate body, regulate breath, or energy.

Regulating body in chi kung actually, maybe we should turn these around. Regulate body [first] would probably be better. Let's turn those around; regulate body first.

There's a clock pose in chi kung. I guess the ancient clock was a post and the sun and the shadow on the ground that you follow. So clock pose is basically standing straight. Not complicated stuff, no weird positions right. There's a relaxed pose. There's a three-circle pose. There's a circle between my hands, circle between my arms and a circle between my legs and relaxing into that three-circle pose. Sitting pose, could be in the cross-legged position or normal position sitting in a chair. Laying on your back, flat. Laying on your side. And half sitting, half laying. Simple, simple postures in chi kung, not complicated stuff. It's like a chinese menu, you pick one from column A, put yourself into a certain posture. You pick one from column B, you have different ways of basically regulating the mind, is quieting the mind. You can meditate on a candle. You could repeat a mantra. You could do counting, counting breaths. If you're interested in this, I have a chi kung manual I'll be happy to email you if you send me an email, I can give you the chi kung manual.

So you pick a posture, you pick a way to quiet your mind and then you pick a breathing exercise. And there are different chi kung breathing exercises. Normal respiration, which is what we would call breath awareness, it's just allowing the breath to come and go by itself. Favourable respiration, which is now you're breathing diaphragmatically and making the breath more full. Reverse respiration, so you take normal or favourable respiration and turn it around so when you breath in, instead of normal or favourable respiration where the belly pops out on the inhale [exhales], belly button comes back on the exhale. You turn that around, you suck the bellybutton towards the spine on the inhale and push the bellybutton out on the exhale. Reverse respiration or paradoxical breathing. And then there's several others. Lesser respiratory cycle which Mychchia called micro cosmic orbit, who then called it the lesser respiratory cycle. The two main acupuncture meridians like the super highway, the Du and the Ren channel and circulating breath and energy through those two main channels. The greater respiratory cycle is where the energy goes off and down the legs to the feet and back up the legs and up the back so now you're doing what's called the greater respiratory cycle. And then there's foetal breathing, very subtle energy breathing and so there are different breathing exercises you do. So you pick a breathing exercise, you pick a posture, you pick a way to quiet your mind and you put together your own personal little practice. And you mix it up. It has structure, I love the chinese because they have a beginning, a middle and an end to everything they do, that's really beautiful. And not only do they  have a beginning, a middle and an end, they have a before and an after. Bookends around the practice. And they are always interested in balance so if I do an active breathing exercise, before I do that active breathing exercise, they do a very quiet exercise and after they do a quite exercise. If I do a quiet exercise, before I'm going to do some active thing before, and some active thing afterwards. I love how they are always concerned about this balance, really beautiful. And it gives this really clear structure. Some people really like structure. They know; this is the beginning, this is the middle, this is the end. This is what I do to prepare, this is what I do when I'm done, I love it. It's so satisfying to some people. So Chinese medical breathing offers us that.

You know there's a lot more that we could do and we could go. For example, there are several types of chi kung, maybe one for energising, one for calming. Those are going to be very different practices, if you want to energise yourself versus calm yourself. And the third purpose, would be for training purposes. So three ways or three kinds of chi kung practices. Chi kung practices for energising, chi kung practices for relaxing and chi kung practices for training. And that's where my three questions originated when I was in China. What is your degree of health? What is your degree of skill? and what is your purpose in training? That is going to determine, which of the exercises, which of the postures, that we choose. So you can really make it custom for yourself. It's like in a chinese menu; you pick one from column a, one from column b and one from column c and you get a really delicious meal. You know, you're creative.

Chi kung for me is like internal tai chi. Tai chi is the external form of Qigong. I was with him for a week before it occurred to me to ask him.

Every day I would go to his house, he would teach, we would talk, he would give me something to practice for the day, his grandson gave me his bicycle, I was out like in a school of fish with a million other bicycle riders in Beijing. The only one standing out in all these chinese people and this crazy american. I even wore this bright yellow parker and everyone's in these grey marle, dark blue clothing, so I'm like this little flower or something bright, weird thing standing out. But I love that bicycle riding, I like being in the flow of all these other people. I like getting out to the edge and skirting around and getting ahead and getting in the middle and just that weaving in and out of all these people. And I loved how the chinese had this ability to give each other space, even though they're touching each other, sitting very close together on the side of a bus and I watched this really beautiful event; a woman and another event, some sad event and you wonder if somebody died, some sad event, and I couldn't help but observe them and thinking about what might be, but every other chinese person on the bus was like giving them space. It was really felt, that letting those people be what they were in and not even invading it by looking, they deliberately, there was this energetic space that they gave each other and I guess when you live close, you just learn that. Very beautiful feeling and when I arrived in China, finally after getting there, and I met with him for the first time, it was just the biggest moment of my life at the time, and I just broke down, I just started weeping with no explanation, nothing. And he and the translator just sat there so gentle, so quiet, just giving me that space, not to, beautiful.

So I was there a week before it occurred to me, hey, you're thinking me, thank you for all this stuff, but what are you doing? What is your personal practice? He said, oh well, come with me in the morning, I come to the park every day, I run, I practice. Well fantastic, ok, why didn't I think of that sooner? He got up at 4 o'clock in the morning. I'm a crack of noon guy.

I'll show you what a chi kung master practices every day. Let's stand up.

He started with body slapping. Starting from the shoulder and working down the arm. And if you were to look up an acupuncture chart, cupped fist, loose flopping, and if you know about acupuncture, you know where there are lines and you could be tapping points. But just doing it starting from the shoulder, working out. So you would do this and then the other arm. Chinese are so self-sufficient, we don't need a masseuse, we massage ourselves in China. And of course, depending on your level of health and your skill and your training, that can get really, you can take it to some cool places. So the next thing was this [swings arms across body to shoulder]. So I'm swinging from the hips and my arms and the fist land right on these muscles where you take tension. And then he took it down to the chest, I don't want to hit my microphone. But you're not using your arms, they're just out there swinging and they're landing in that place. So you're just aiming it at the last minute sort of, but you're not doing it with your arms. The next one was the kidneys, thumping of the back. And the next was this [aims towards lower back]. And then he did the legs, just like with the arms [knocks fists down legs]. Sometimes he would put his foot up on the fence and do it, sometimes he would bend over and do it, both legs we're going through it a little quicker than when he used to do it. And by now you should be feeling some chi in your body. So then he would do this circling, rotating of the pelvis. So you woke up all this energy and now you're bringing order to it. He would circulate little circles with the pelvis clockwise, 200 times. And then counter-clockwise 200 times. And then he ran three miles. And there you have it. And that was it.

Audience member: Was he changing the size of the circles?

Speaker:

Yeah. Really cool experience with that, we went to the park, we were in the park, and he was very well known, so when he was in public, people knew him and he tended to attract people. They gave him space but they couldn’t help but want to be around him and watch him, he's really quite a miraculous guy. And he know a lot of practitioners with abilities and skills. One guy breaking bricks on his head and for a dollar, he would let you break a brick on his head. And so he's really try to pull me in to break a brick. But here's just something about hitting a guy on the head with a brick that's really hard to do.

The first time I did it, I kind of held back at the last minute. I didn't want to [bang] with a brick on his head. And he got so pissed off at me. So the second time, I broke the brick on his head. That was cool, hurt my hand, was sore for a week, but he was fine.

Introduced me to this old man who had these twin grand-daughters Herbert Benson and somebody else wrote a book called 'Encounters with Chi'. And they found these two little famous girls in China, twins. You could put them in separate rooms and one would draw a picture and the other girl would draw the same picture. They had this amazing connection.

And they had much more abilities than that. Their grandfather would pick them up with a pitchfork and throw them up in the air with a pitchfork and they would do a somersault in the air, turn over and land on the pitchfork. Very cool.

He also had this amazing ability to stay in this energy.  And my lesson was how I was always pulling myself out of my energy, trying to hard, pushing myself. So we would run, for example, the three miles, and when it was over I was like [heave breathing]. And he was just like {calm sighing]. He's 85 freakin' years old and I'm 35 at the time or whatever, it was embarrassing.

So that was one thing I really learned. He had a sense of his energy and he never got pulled out or pushed himself through, it was a very beautiful, always centred. Really really beautiful.

Audience member: Can you summarise what he taught you to help you, or is that a long story?

Speaker:

This circulating, there's an axis, there's a central axis around which the circulating is happening [rotating pelvis in circular motion]. And you can begin to find it and feel it. And then you're in it, you're grounded in it, you're centred in it. And as soon as you start going, doing things mindlessly, or push or force or tense or strain, you can feel that uh-oh, you've lost that axis. That's the best way I've got to think about it. And it doesn't take much to pull us out of that, I mean I was practicing being in a crowd, watching how somebody bumps you and disturbs your meditation and things like that.

There was nothing like embarrassing your teacher and creating a scandal in communist China in 1985. I went there on a one-way ticket, I didn't have enough money for a return ticket. [Dan continues to tell his story].

But that moment through me off my centre, that's how long it took for me to leave my centre of peace and of calm and in the flow. And instead, this reaction took over. And it's a fear reaction, its a fear reaction. So we usually feel it when you get out of it, and then you know that when you're in it, there's nothing you can really, you know put on and identify, but when you come out of it, it's like uh-oh. So the recognition of it, I think, is more when you're not in it.

Audience member: What's interesting about that field idea, is I've practiced the micro cosmic orbit meditation myself with [heart math] institute, there's a few other guys, there's a guy called [Hasiin] and they talk about this field that we have which is like this donut shape [motions in circular motion around his body].

Speaker:

Yes, and you see where these original tai chi moves. I mean we know it's there, we're sensing it and we don't realise that we're responding to the way energy wants to move. And you know the traditional thing is some master is sitting in meditation, and the energy starts to move him and its beautiful to see. And everyone else wants what the master's got, so we copy the movements, hoping from the outside in, by doing what the master does, and thinking the way they think, and practicing what they practice, that we can somehow awaken this mastery in us, which kind of works I guess. But really, it has to come from within.

So the best thing, the most we can do with chi kung, and I got this from another chi kung, Russion chi kung guy, China fanatic, really beautiful guy, said all we can do is tell stories, give people things to practice and leave the rest up to God. That's the best we can do.

So moving on from Chinese, so this is just another way to frame breathwork practice.

[End of video 17].