OPENING THE ENERGY GATES OF YOUR BODY

Qigong for Lifelong Health

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Fundamental Standing Techniques: Sinking, Scanning and Dissolving Your Chi

Once you have become comfortable with the Longevity Breathing techniques and can settle into the basic body alignments, you are ready to begin feeling deep inside your body. This chapter teaches the fundamental standing techniques that will help you awaken and feel your chi. There are three lessons: sinking your chi; scanning your energy body; and dissolving chi blockages.

Feeling and working with chi is an art. Remember, the depth, ease and speed your mind can connect to and feel rarified sensations in your body grows over time. The ability to feel your chi will come with that increased awareness.

What Is Sinking Chi?

The first step is to feel any physical sensations of discomfort and tension in your body. These sensations come from places where your chi is blocked and cannot move. Sinking your chi is about feeling these sensations and letting them go. This grounds your body and mind and calms your nervous system. When your chi is no longer blocked, it can make you feel relaxed and full of joy and vitality.

The opposite of sinking the chi is chi rising, the physical signs of which you may experience when feeling anxious. The feeling wells up from your stomach or shoulders and moves towards your head. Your muscles tense. Your breathing may become tense and short or you might hold your breath.
In China, qigong and tai chi masters use the word sung when they want their students to feel the physical sensations of tension and discomfort in their bodies and release them by sinking their chi. Sung means a complete release, a complete letting go of any sense of control, contraction, strength or binding inside your tissues and nerves, until holding of any kind is replaced by a complete sense of openness, space and comfort.

How the Author Learned to Sung

When I first started trying to grasp the term sung, I did not have an easy time. In my early days of training in Taiwan, a very friendly Chinese man who was not my main teacher helped me gain the sense of what sung meant. I knew minimal Chinese, he was the same with English, and our communications resorted to quite a bit of mime.

My body was tense. He looked up the word sung in his dictionary and saw that it was translated as relax. He said in broken English, “You relax no good enough,” while mimicking how tensely I was trying to relax my body. I could not let go. Frustrated, he said, “Need sung. Have not enough sung.” He proceeded to demonstrate it to me. Using vastly exaggerated motions, he let his joints go completely loose and stood before me with an obvious lack of any kind of physical tension.

I did not get it. He then demonstrated what he meant with two piles of coins. He put the first pile in a paper bag and laid a knife next to it. He said, “You want sung be like money. Make body be like money.” Then he took the knife and cut the bag. The coins poured out (letting go of physical tension), fell (releasing the chi downward), separated (loosening the insides of the body), scattered over the floor and soon stopped moving (the body fully sung).

I tried again. He saw that I was just half getting it. So he made fists and raised his hands above his navel and suddenly, with his entire body loosening, opened his hands and let them fall to his sides. He grabbed the second pile of coins and brought them up to the same place above his navel and suddenly let go of them. They fell, separated and scattered on the floor. Then just as suddenly, he again let his body relax as his hands and arms visibly loosened and dropped to his sides just as the coins had to the floor.

I put the two images together in my head and got it.

Next, my new friend asked me to touch his arm and belly. He stood with his hands at his side. After checking that I was focusing, he relaxed and without moving an inch, released his body and went sung. I could feel his muscles turning to butter and a distinct wave moving down inside his body.
Two-Person Exercise for Letting Go
Many people cannot let go. They are afraid of losing control. This exercise gives you feedback about your willingness to let go.

**Person One:** Stand with your feet parallel and your hands at your sides. Close your eyes.

**Person Two:** Lift one of the person’s hands to about shoulder height and then lightly and quickly take your hand away so that the hand can fall. The goal is for person one to simply let their hand fall without controlling it. Do this until person one can just let go. Switch roles.

**Lesson 1  Sink Your Chi**

To feel chi directly you must become open and sensitive to subtlety. Practice each of these lessons in order and only progress to the next one when you are sure that you have absorbed the preceding one.

**1. Feel Physical Sensations Inside Your Body**

Sinking your chi is a concrete and unambiguously felt internal release. It begins from wherever your mind focuses inside your body, travels downward and finishes either in your lower tantien, the bottom of your feet or in the earth. The feeling of letting go physically should be eventually accompanied by a definite physical feeling of a downward wave inside your body.

First stand with your feet parallel, shoulder-width apart, hands by your sides, palms facing backwards and armpits open. Take the time to settle your mind and body. The first step is to take a trip through your body from the top of your head to the bottom of your feet, feeling any physical sensations of strength, tension or contraction inside your body. Start by noticing sensations at the top of your head. Then, let your mind slowly travel downward inside your body. Notice where you have any physical feelings of strength or tension. You might feel that the front of your head is tight or that you are tensing your jaw. Your neck and shoulder muscles might feel tense. Do not dwell too long on any one block. Remember the 70 percent rule and do not strain. Feel free to make more than one pass from top to bottom in any practice session—sometimes two shorter passes are better than one that is too slow. Wear down your blocks like water wears rock—a little at a time.
In terms of working with chi, feelings of strength indicate blockages, places in your body where chi is not circulating in a healthy, steady flow. The paradox is this: the more you feel strength, the weaker your chi.

You might also feel sensations of general uneasiness or a sense of contraction inside a body part. For example, when your mind has traveled down to your stomach, you might have angry thoughts come up and you might simultaneously feel your belly contracting.

Uncomfortable physical sensations are reliable indicators of where energy blockages hide in your body. Do your best to feel these sensations, even if they make you uncomfortable. This is common when people first start noticing how the insides of their bodies feel. You may also feel that the sensations intensify when you focus on those feelings.

Travel downwards with your mind, cataloguing these sensations until you reach the bottom of your feet. Start with a minimum of five minutes to go from top to bottom and gradually increase to fifteen minutes or more.

If you cannot stand for this amount of time, you can alternate between standing and sitting. If you do so, place a chair directly behind you to make it easy for you to sit when you need to. Try to transition between your sitting and standing positions very smoothly.

If you are ill or injured, you can do this step seated, until it becomes possible to alternate between sitting and standing and eventually stand for the entire process.

It may take you weeks or months simply to get the experience of recognizing blocked sensations of strength, tension and contraction and to steady your mind enough so it can travel from the top of your head to your feet without becoming distracted. When you can, you are ready to learn to make your chi go sung.

2. Sink Blockages Downward and Make Your Chi Go Sung

Beginning from the top of your head and moving downwards, settle on whatever physical sensation of blockage your awareness finds first. Then, use your intention in any creative way that works for you to release and let the blockage sink downward or go sung.

You will know you have done it when you feel some tangible sensation of letting go and dropping down happening in your body. You might also feel your chi directly, as it moves in a downward wave.
A common error when working with energy is to think you are feeling when in fact you are only visualizing. The feeling of sung must translate to tangible and clearly felt physical sensations.

Physical Signs of Sinking Your Chi
Here are some physical signs that will help you confirm if you are actually sinking your chi (sung):

**Breathing Relaxes**
Although they are not the same, chi and breath are closely related. As your awareness moves down your body or settles on a specific spot of discomfort, your breathing may mirror it. It can suddenly become louder; you may involuntarily hold your breath and it may begin to spasm or flutter rapidly. When you release that blockage, your breathing will become softer, deeper and smoother.

When you find a spot you want to release, you can use your breathing to help. Focusing on quieting your breathing can help release your blockages and deepen your level of sung. Letting go of tension in your breathing enables you to release layers of physical tension and helps your chi to sink.

Connect your mind to your breathing while you sink your chi to help prepare you for feeling your chi directly. It will lead you to deeper physical and mental relaxation, soften your body and enable you to increase your awareness of what you feel inside.

Eventually your breathing will become completely silent and you will become able to recognize and consciously work with chi itself.

**Alignments Adjust More Easily**
The process of realigning your body into the correct standing posture happens slowly. Any body alignment that feels stiff, physically uncomfortable and hard to maintain indicates a place where your chi is blocked.

Sinking your chi through a physical alignment enables you to more easily adjust the alignment and clear the blocked chi. The feeling of blocked chi can intensify when you focus on it. When you relax and let that place go (sung), the alignment will be easier to adjust and maintain.

**Muscles Soften; Joints Expand**
Hard, stiff, tight muscles will become softer but with significantly more tone. They will move
more easily as you sink your chi and release your blockages. The space inside your joints may open, sometimes accompanied by cracking sounds. These can be quite loud, especially in your hip sockets or vertebrae. Normally, this should not be a cause for alarm.

**Feet Open**

As your chi sinks sufficiently to reach your feet, they can become hot and feel as though they are burning. This is because:

- Small blood vessels within them are open to a greater degree.
- Your metatarsals are getting more space between them.
- Blocked energy in your feet is being cleared.

**The Inside of Your Body Increasingly Becomes Wet**

The clearest sign that sinking is happening is feeling that either a part or the entire inside of your body is getting wet as your internal fluids circulate more efficiently. The Chinese term for this is *yun chi*.

Chi moves all the fluids of your body. Qigong causes those fluids to circulate more strongly, even through your tiniest blood vessels.

An abundance of chi will make your body feel wet inside, whereas a shortage will make it feel dry. When your body goes *sung* and releases internal tension, you might get a furry or soft feeling inside you, comparable to what you feel after you have taken a hot bath.

According to the *Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Medicine*, the fundamental text of Chinese internal medicine, the bodies of young, healthy and vibrant plants, animals and humans are moist and springy. When they move closer to death, their bodies become dry and brittle. People also feel more dried out when they have been ill, tense or after not getting enough sleep. The feeling of dryness occurs when blood and other fluids are not circulating strongly.

When your blood is circulating strongly, the inside of your body feels wetter. As your ability to sink chi gets stronger, it is common for saliva to increase in your mouth. If this occurs, swallow it to reabsorb your chi.

Feeling the inside of your body get wet as you *sung* will give you concrete feedback. This will tell you that you are on the right track. Having a concrete physical sensation, even if it is only fleeting, will help you avoid frustration and not being sure if you are doing *sung* correctly.

When you first start to sink your chi, you are likely to feel the wetness more strongly in particular parts of your body. Eventually, this feeling will spread evenly throughout your
entire body. The sensation of your body becoming wet usually begins in your surface
muscles and then progresses deeper, until you can feel it all the way to your bones.

As you assimilate the technique of sinking chi, when one specific location in the body
gets wet it can increase the sense of wetness throughout your entire body, or one area of
your body may cause only another specific one to get wet.

Usually, your body will feel hot just before the sense of wetness becomes obvious. This
is a sign of increased blood circulation. It indicates that chi is entering an area and moving
through what has been blocked.

As each new release happens, it exponentially increases your ability to release more.

Dropping Your Body and Sinking Your Chi Can Be Confused
When first learning, many feel they must physically move parts of their bodies to act out
the internal feeling of sinking, such as bending their knees or lowering their hips. You
should strive for an internal feeling of sinking and learn to sink your chi without moving
your body.

After sinking has become easier for you, you can combine it with the other core
exercises that require moving your body downwards to simultaneously use physical
leverage and the power of your chi sinking.

Important Points to Remember

1. As a safety precaution, it is important to first learn to sink your energy flow before
   engaging in dissolving your chi because that prepares you to handle upward and
   other energetic flows without injuring your central nervous system.

2. If you are trying to release a particular blockage and you become aware of
   another one higher up, do not switch your focus to it. Instead, use the following
   option. Continue sinking from the lower blockage down to your feet and try to
   ignore the higher blockage. One or both blockages may or may not release of
   their own accord. If they do not, the blockages may release when you do another
   downward pass.

3. Adhere to the 70 percent rule.

4. Maintain correct alignments and do not slouch. You should not feel pain inside
   your joints. If you do, recheck your alignments and if it persists, back off.
Next Level of Sinking

It takes most people months before they can sink their chi to their feet. Begin at the top of your head and systematically try to resolve each individual blockage on the way down. Once you can do this regularly, you are ready to go to the next level and try other specific ways of applying sung.

• You can localize sung to a specific area without having to first release what is above it. For example, you may notice some tension in your shoulders without needing to begin at the top of your head, and release it by focusing on it and making it go sung.

• You can sung your entire body and feel a constantly regenerating downward wave of continuous release. Over time, this wave will get stronger and will release deeper and deeper blockages.

Lesson 2  Scan Your Energy Body

Shifting from the Physical to Chi

By this time you should be experienced in sinking your chi. You should have some intermittent inkling now of the possibility that chi can be as tangible as physical sensation. Now you can focus on feeling the sensations of chi itself.

Slowly Observe Any Energy Imbalances in Your Body

Sinking your chi initially only requires you to engage with purely physical sensations. These help you gain awareness of the indirect signs that chi is moving inside your body. Once you have gained that awareness, it is time to directly scan your energy body. This will train you to become more sensitive to your chi and is the preparatory step to dissolving energy blockages.

Beginning at the top of your head, slowly observe any energy imbalances as you scan down your body. These will manifest as places where you feel tension, strength, contraction or something that does not feel quite right. These are the feelings that reliably allow you to locate blocked chi.
1. Strength

Feeling sensations of physical strength are common. Energetic strength is just as tangible, once you become sensitive to feeling the inside of your body. However, what that strength is specifically attached to may be vague. It might be that you have an excess of chi in an area that may also be related to stubbornness or pride. If it feels like blocked energetic strength to you, it probably is. Do not try to analyze it any further than that. Trust your feeling and intuition.

2. Tension

This relates to any two forces inside you that are in conflict, such as physical spasm or where some emotional or mental conflict subliminally lives inside your body.

3. Contraction

The blockage of chi can cause physical constriction in your muscles, internal organs and blood vessels; or emotional constrictions, such as the suppression of anger or sadness.

4. Anything That Does Not Feel Quite Right

These are energetic blockages, which are difficult to verbalize in the mind but are nevertheless tangible, such as general, nonspecific feelings of unease, discomfort, vague pain or places you cannot feel at all. When something feels right you can definitely feel a sense of aliveness in that spot.

Explore your energy body internally, millimeter by millimeter, from the top of your head to the bottom of your feet. Take notice of what you feel. Notice the areas, no matter how small or subtle, that have any qualities of tension, strength or contraction.

Now, pay special attention to those places where you do not know just what it is that does not feel quite right.

It must be emphasized that you are not to do anything when you notice any of these four qualities of blocked energy; simply become aware of their existence and take inventory of what and where they are.
Helpful Hints for Awakening Your Chi

**Take Your Time**

Usually it will take from fifteen minutes to an hour to accomplish what we call awakening the chi. If you feel you have accomplished this in two or three minutes you have definitely not done the exercise correctly.

**Internal Scanning Is a Feeling, Not a Visualization Exercise**

In doing your internal review, you may not have directly felt your body, but merely visualized or made internal pictures of it, which is an infinitely easier task. You may not like some of the things you did feel, but these places will not go away if they are buried or ignored—they must be worked through. You must allow yourself to feel the actual state of your insides. You will, over time, gain the power to feel and release your internal blockages.

**Let Your Nerves Come Alive**

One of the purposes of energy development practice is to promote an entirely new capacity for feeling. The difference in body awareness between a paralyzed person and an average person is as wide as the gap between your present and future state of nerve awareness once your chi practices become established. Do not be frustrated if you cannot feel much at first. Be confident that in time you will be able to feel.

**Keep Your Mind Stable**

Energy body scanning is not essentially a physical or an intellectual exercise. It is an exercise in specifying, refining and increasing the life-force energies in your body. Small children are known for their short attention spans, but most adults also have what the Chinese call a monkey mind—a mind that cannot be still and jumps from place to place. The mind of those who practice chi develops slowly. Over time, qigong will gradually increase your attention span, concentration and sensitivity to subtle energies.

**The Need for Rapid Perfection Slows Progress**

It must be understood that this is a process of gradual development. Only the rarest of human beings can do these exercises correctly in the beginning. In the practice of chi development, the more gentle and consistent you are, the faster and steadier your progress will be. Berating yourself will only result in discouragement, even when you are
progressing normally. Setting impossible goals and torturing yourself when you do not reach them is a set-up for self-blame and self-sabotage and gets in the way of learning.

Beware of Feelings of Strength

To most people, a sense of strength is a positive and useful thing, something to be valued and sought after. In chi work, however, the feelings of strength are blockages, which prevent the normal, healthy, steady, flow of energy from circulating in a relaxed, powerful fashion.

What Relaxed Chi Feels Like

The ideal is for the energy in any given place in your body to feel relaxed and comfortable, with an easy sense of flow that is full and balanced. You should have a total sense of emptiness connected with your energy. It is only when your energy is blocked that it generates specific feelings.

Lesson 3 The Chi Outer Dissolving Process

Dissolving is the process of fully releasing blocked energy. A classic Taoist metaphor describes the outer dissolving process: ice to water, water to gas. Ice to water more accurately describes the act of sinking your chi; while water to gas is the act of dissolving your chi. Dissolving requires that you work directly with your chi.

Relationship Between Sinking and Dissolving Chi

You can sink your chi without dissolving it. However, you cannot dissolve your chi without also sinking it to some degree. Dissolving is subtler since it works with chi directly; sinking initially works with physical sensations. Each has its strengths, challenges and considerations:

1. Sinking your chi is more accessible and easily learned.

2. Sinking is commonly taught in internal martial arts such as tai chi where acquiring physical power is a main point of competitive success.

3. Sinking builds awareness of the physical sensations in your body that leads to awareness of your chi. Eventually, sinking leads to direct awareness of the chi
that influences your body to become internally wet. This leads to recognizing and
directly dissolving blockages in chi during the dissolving process.

4. Learning to sink chi helps to ground you and keep you in the present. It is a
safety precaution against disassociating from the emotions that arise when you
dissolve and release blocked energy. This is especially important for people who
are exceptionally sensitive to chi but rather unconnected to their bodies.

5. Dissolving is more effective and reliable for mitigating and healing disease.
Initially, sinking more easily develops chi-generated physical power for martial
arts and athletics.

6. At the moment you successfully dissolve your chi, many of the physical sensations
that you experienced while sinking your chi will become more pronounced.

7. Eventually, sinking and dissolving will become one seamless process.

8. When either sinking or dissolving you can use your breath to help make you
conscious about the subtle layers within a blockage, amplify your awareness
or increase your focus. However, do not become too reliant on your breath to
accomplish these tasks. You want to be able to sink and dissolve your chi with
and without using your breath.

The Etheric Body and Dissolving

There is an energy field that surrounds you called your etheric body or aura. It fluctuates in
size based on how strong or weak your chi is from moment to moment, anywhere from six
inches to several feet. Dissolving requires you to release energetic blockages within your
etheric body to its natural boundary.

All the physical and energetic areas of your physical body are directly connected to
corresponding areas within your etheric body. Likewise, blocked areas in your etheric body
can directly activate energetic blockages in your physical body and prevent your sinking
chi from translating into full resolutions of those blockages.

In dissolving you learn how to release your energy not only downwards but also
outwards away from your physical body through your etheric body to its boundary. As you
do so, the energy that is released assumes a neutral state and recycles back to you as
energy that your physical body can adapt for its ongoing needs.
1. **Dissolve Blocked Energy: Ice to Water, Water to Gas**

   Begin at the crown of your head and notice where you have any feelings of strength, tension, something not being quite right, any general uneasiness or any sense of contraction. These feelings may be physical, energetic, emotional or mental. The blockages that cause these sensations must be dissolved. The dissolving process involves feeling as though these places first change from ice to water and then from water to gas.

2. **Dissolve: Shifting from Ice to Water**

   Once you have identified a place where your energy is blocked or frozen, your awareness should feel the outer contours of this frozen energy. Your awareness will surround and penetrate this solid mass and cause the blockage to soften and allow you to reach its center. This is comparable to what happens when you melt an ice cube: the melting slowly moves from the outside towards the center. You then release the blockage by letting it go sung. This is the transformation of ice to water.

3. **Dissolve: Transformation of Water to Gas**

   Once the entire blockage becomes soft and flowing (like an ice cube that has melted and become water), keep your attention on it and have your awareness gently cause the blockage to expand until there is a sense of the trapped energy expanding beyond your body, to where it feels as though it has come to a natural stop or boundary, perhaps as much as a foot or two outside of you. This is the transformation of water to gas.

   The dissolving of an energy block moves in stages. At the stage of ice to water, your body will become relaxed, soft and warm as increased chi flow causes your blood circulation to increase. (Remember, your mind moves your chi and your chi moves blood and other fluids.) At the stage of water to gas, pain and the deepest stresses in your body will disappear and, in more advanced qigong, your negative emotions will vanish. You will feel good but the root levels of your energy blockages will not completely disappear.

   This dissolving technique must be accomplished by feeling it, not by merely picturing it in your mind’s eye. It is a kinesthetic experience.

   Relaxation alone may not necessarily result in more energy that can heal
your body. You can relax your muscles and still leave emotional blockages untouched. Energetic release affects you on all levels of your being.

At the energetic level although physical relaxation (water) alone makes things temporarily feel better, it alone may only partially release an energy blockage (ice). If because underlying causes of the blockage (ice) have not been dissolved to the boundary of your etheric body, resolved and eliminated (turned to gas), the water can later reconfigure and again return to ice, ultimately resulting in pain or disease.

To get a sense of the dissolving process—ice to water to gas—clench your fist as tight as you can, until your knuckles turn white, which naturally causes your energy to contract. Then put your awareness in your hand and expand your contracted energy until you completely relax your hand (ice to water) without physically opening your fist. Then, continue to focus your awareness on your closed hand until your energy expands out of it into the air and your hand feels that it lacks solidity and is completely amorphous and noncorporeal (water to gas).

4. Standing: Dissolve Downward Through Your Entire Body

A) As you scan inwardly through your body, dissolve an area of blocked energy as completely as possible, until you have an internal sense that it is not possible to dissolve it any further at this time. That is, you reach a point of diminishing returns, where if you were to continue trying to dissolve that point for the next five minutes, five hours, or five years, you would go no further. During the next practice session, you may find that this area feels a little less blocked and is more easily dissolved—whether partially or fully.

B) Next, sink whatever energy remains undissolved down to the second place where energy is bound. Dissolve this combined energy of the first and second places as much as possible. Continuously repeat this procedure as you encounter each new blocked placed further down. You should remember the 70 percent rule. Do not strain by working too hard or dwelling too long on one spot.

C) Sink what remains undissolved down to the third place. Then dissolve the combined energies of the first, second and third places as far as possible. Then continue down in this manner, blockage by blockage, to below your feet.

D) Finally, make a quick pass down your body and release all internal sensations through your feet into the ground, as far down as your awareness continues.

E) Always finish at or below your feet. In order for the energetic clearing you have done during standing to stabilize and not unravel afterwards, you must end each
practice at your feet when sinking the chi and below them when scanning and dissolving. If you find that you may run out of time in your practice before you reach the bottom of your feet, be sure to leave a few minutes at the end to lightly continue down to finish at your feet. This is very important. The longer your practice has been during that session, the more time you should leave at the end to finish well.

The Human Energy Body Expands and Contracts
Your energy body extends below your feet and above your head. Your energy body (etheric body or aura) can grow or shrink many feet, depending upon the vitality or weakness of your internal energy. Some days you may only be able to get your energy an inch into the ground, and other days you may project it many feet. These fluctuations are absolutely normal until your energy body has been developed and stabilized.

Principles Behind the Dissolving Process
The universe is composed of energies that vibrate at different rates. Taoist qigong follows the basic alchemical methodology of raising slow, condensed energetic vibrations, like the physical matter of your body, to more subtle, faster and expansive vibrations, such as emotions and psychic qualities.

The experience of the ancient world, including China, has shown that by focusing concentrated attention, intention and awareness on the energetic aspects of one’s being, one is able to raise the potential and actual strength of the body, mind and spirit. This develops physical health, emotional well-being, mental clarity and psychic abilities, ultimately leading to the development of one’s spiritual nature and towards becoming one with the nature of the universe: the Tao.

Be Gentle with Yourself
Do not force your chi. Taoism is the path of gentleness, of flowing water. Do not try to push the river. If you have a block you cannot dissolve, go around it and dissolve the rest of your body. Eventually, you will be able to dissolve it—there is absolutely no rush.

Practice Lesson Three for a minimum of two weeks. Then, integrate it into the next level of standing qigong, Opening the Energy Gates of Your Body.
Dissolving practices working with the energy gates of the body may be done sitting as well as standing. Beginning practices are generally done with the eyes closed to prevent distraction and keep the student’s attention inwards. Once this awareness has stabilized, more advanced practices may be done with the eyes open.
Opening the Energy Gates of the Body

What Are the Energy Gates?

The energy gates are major relay stations of the body, where the strength of the life current (chi) moving through the system is regulated. Many gates are located at joints or, more precisely, in the actual space between the bones of a joint. Initially, during your standing and dissolving practice, these are the most important places to clear our blockages.

The concept of “energy gates” is not new; rather, it has been passed down to us from ancient China. Originally worked out by Taoists, it has become common to many traditions. However, to the best of my knowledge, prior to the first publication of this book in 1993, it was never completely described in English.

These gates should not be conceived of as simple anatomical locations. They must be felt with the mind, for they are part of your subtle energy body. From an internal perspective, their locations are approximate and can fluctuate slightly. For acupuncturists, the anatomical location of acupuncture points is valuable, as they utilize these points to put something into the body and use physical markers on the body to get to the approximate location into which a needle is inserted. (The needle indirectly stimulates the body’s chi.) Some of the energy gates are the same as the acupuncture points; others are different. The energy gates are like the critical step-up booster stations, each of which controls many smaller power stations.

In qigong the mind is being put directly into the energy gate. You must learn to feel these points in order to channel the flow of your chi to stimulate the subtle body to the greatest extent possible. The object is not merely to visualize the gate (though a knowledge
of anatomy can help in locating it), but to feel the gate precisely so you can learn to increase or decrease the amount of power flowing through the gate, using your will or intent with the same amount of ease with which you can now open or shut your eyes, mouth, or hands. Bear in mind that these gates are inside your body and fluctuate minutely in size, depending on the strength of your chi body. Consequently, the exact depth inside the body and the exact location of a gate inside your body at a given point in time is not amenable to visual analysis. The physical and energetic bodies are not identical in form and function, though a good qigong practitioner can feel these energy-gate points in the same manner that other people feel acupuncture needles in their skin. In fact, qigong masters can feel these points in other people as well.

Generally speaking, when we practice “opening” the gates, we will do so in the order given below. Be aware, though, that this order is not written in stone. The most important aspect to remember is that energy and internal sensations always travel down the body during the releasing (dissolving) process. The next section explains the locations of the gates to be dissolved.

Important Major and Minor Gates of the Body

When you actually practice the dissolving process, you do not work your way skipping from point to point, energy gate to energy gate, as presented in this book. Rather, you dissolve downwards from the top to the bottom of your body (front, back, and sides simultaneously). The energy gates are points where special attention must be paid as your awareness descends through your body, but anything that is blocked between the energy gates is important and also must be dissolved before moving downward to the next gate. Imagine a great sheet of water descending from the top of your body downwards, dissolving everything in its path. This is how the dissolving process works. This universal energy naturally descends on us every moment, and the important issue is whether or not we can make use of it. This descending “water” is the best defense against burnout from working with the ascending energy or “fire” that emanates from the earth.

Head and Neck

In the beginning, for all the gates of the head, the dissolving process should only reach a depth of half an inch, thereby avoiding the brain. There is a very specific methodology for
brain qigong, and it is not a subject for beginners—it should only be studied under the direct supervision of a master. After a month or two of practice it is permissible to dissolve the entire brain at once, but do not dissolve points in the brain separately.

**The Crown (Figure 8-1, Gate 1)**

The first gate to be dissolved is at the exact center of the crown of the head, which the Chinese call *bai hui*, or the “meeting of a hundred points.” At this point, a line drawn over the head from the nose to the cervical spine (neck) would intersect another line drawn from the apex of one ear to the apex of the other.

**The Third Eye (Figure 8-1, Gate 2)**

Located between the two eyebrows, this point is called the third eye. A person with a history of mental illness should not dissolve this point unless under the supervision of a master. (This gate can open up suppressed areas of a person’s psyche, which is best done under the guidance of a qualified master versed in subtleties of the psychic realm.)

**The Eyes (Figure 8-1, Gate 3)**

This gate is found directly in line with the pupil, just behind the eyeball. This gate is very important for people involved in visually demanding jobs, such as computer operators, as it controls the chi of the visual apparatus and is the interface with the brain. Dissolving this gate can greatly reduce stress that is visually induced.

**The Center of the Temples (Figure 8-1, Gate 4)**

Usually located on a line from the top of the ear.

**The Center of the Ears (Figure 8-1, Gate 5)**

The next gate is in the center of the ear, no more than one-quarter of the way into the inner ear. (Except for points along the body’s centerline, all gates are found on both sides of the body.)

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1 Specific points in the brain may be felt in qigong practice. Connecting these points energetically in certain configurations can be quite dangerous and can cause serious damage to the brain; other connective configurations can enhance the latent power of the mind. It takes a master with the appropriate knowledge to guide one in this practice.

2 Remember that the locations of the gates are approximate. The exact locations are to be found by feeling inside your body with your mind.
The Base of the Skull (Figure 8-1, Gate 6)
This point is located at the back of the head, where the spine (atlas vertebra) and skull (occiput) meet. Here, the spinal cord meets the brain stem.

The Roof of the Mouth (Figure 8-1, Gate 7)
This gate is located where the tongue meets the roof of the mouth on the hard palate, where the two main meridians, the governing and conception vessels, join. This gate is where the tongue touches the roof of the mouth.

The Jaw (Figure 8-2, Gate 7a)
There are four minor gates in the jaw that are particularly useful for dealing with TMJ (temporal mandibular joint) problems, jaw tension, and the grinding of teeth. These problems are often results of high-stress conditions. Four points are important for dissolving the jaw: two are at the hinges of the jaw, located at the depression just in front of the lower edge of the ear; the two others are located inside the mouth, on its bottom, behind the front teeth. For the location of these last two gates, imagine lines descending from the inside corner of the eyes down to the bottom to the mouth. All four of the gates of the jaw should be dissolved simultaneously.

The Throat Notch (Figure 8-2, Gate 8)
The depression just above the breastbone (the sternal notch) is the location of the last major gate of the head and neck.

The Seventh Cervical Vertebra (Figure 8-1, Gate 9)
This gate is found at the big vertebra that usually sticks out at the base of the neck.
Shoulders

The Shoulder Notch (Figure 8-3, Gate 1)

This gate is found at the junction of the acromion and the clavicle, that is, at the end of the collarbone. If the arm is lifted up and to the side, it is where a depression is formed on the top of the shoulder.

The Armpit (Figure 8-3, Gate 2)

This gate is in the center of the armpit, inside the body, about one-third the distance from the skin of the armpit to the shoulder notch. Deeper inside the center of the armpit is another gate connecting all the shoulder gates to the left or right channel.

The Shoulder’s Nest (Figure 8-3, Gate 3)

This gate is located in the depression below the outer end of the clavicle (collarbone), lateral to the throat notch. Eventually this area will become soft and pliable, until a depression, or “nest” is formed. Most people are actually very tense and bound up here, so the depression may not be immediately noticeable.

Opening this area dramatically improves flexibility in the arms. This gate is very important for women, because, together with the point in the center of the breast, it

Gates of the Shoulder
A) Anterior gates. B) Posterior gates.

Figure 8-3
regulates the female hormonal system, especially as it affects the breast. In China, these two points are commonly used in qigong treatments for breast problems, including cancer.

The Center of Each Shoulder Blade (Figure 8-3, Gate 4)

This gate is found inside the body in front of the center of the anterior (front) side of each shoulder blade (that is, the side of the shoulder blade that faces the chest).

Arms

Elbow Joint: Back, Inside and Sides—10 Minor Gates; 1 Major Gate (Figure 8-4, Gates 1)

As the elbow, wrist, knee and ankle are the most frequently used joints in the body and must move in many directions, it is important to release the small gates surrounding each of these joints before releasing the main gate that is found deep in the center of each of these joints. The gates of the elbow are:

**Back:** The two indentations just above and the two just below the elbow tip, on either side of the tip (4 minor gates).

**Inside:** The two indentations just above and the two just below the crease of the elbow, on either side of the tendons (4 minor gates).

**Sides:** In the center of either side of the elbow (2 minor gates).

**Center:** Directly in the middle of the elbow joint (1 major gate).

Dissolve each of the back, inside, and side gates of the elbow joint. Then dissolve the center of the joint.

Wrist Joint: Back, Inside and Sides—10 Minor Gates; 1 Major Gate (Figure 8-4, Gates 2)

**Back:** the two indentations just above and the two just below the back of the
wrist joint, on either side of an imaginary line running from the middle finger to the elbow (4 minor gates).

*Inside:* The two indentations just above and the two just below the crease of the wrist, on either side of the tendons in the center (4 minor gates).

*Sides:* In the center of either side of the wrist joint (2 minor gates).

*Center:* In the middle of the wrist joint (1 major gate).

**The Carpal and Metacarpal Joints—Illustration Not Shown**

Dissolve all the spaces between the small bones in the palm of the hand.

**The Center of the Palm (Figure 8-5, Gate 4)**

The gate in the center of the palm is commonly called the “eye of the hand.” Dissolve it. Also dissolve the corresponding gate on the back of the hand. The back-of-the-hand gate is a critical part of the hand for those involved in any form of hands-on energetic healing. Note: It will help to release the center of the palm if you dissolve the space between the palm and the base of the thumb.

**The Fingers (Figure 8-5, Gates 5)**

In dissolving, pay particular attention to the center of the joints in the fingers.
Complete the dissolving of the fingers by concentrating on the exact center of the fingertips.

**Torso**

*From the Corners of Your Mouth, in a Channel as Wide as Your Mouth, Down the Throat and Sternum to, but Not Including, the Solar Plexus (Figure 8-6)*

For the vast majority of the population, the area from where the tongue meets the roof of the mouth, down the throat to just before the solar plexus, is the most difficult for chi to pass through. This region is where the majority of people are blocked up, and it must be completely opened for any chi development practices to progress.3 Special Note: There are minor energy gates in the joints where the ribs attach to the sternum (breastbone), in the spaces between the ribs around the sides, and in the joints, where ribs attach to the spine (Figure 8-10).

**The Center of the Breast (for Women Only) (Figure 8-7, Gate 2)**

The breast gates, which have significance only for women, are extremely important for balancing the female hormonal system. These gates, along with those at the shoulder’s nest, are commonly used in qigong breast cancer

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3 For example, in yoga pranayama, the throat lock is used to open this area.
Many minor energy gates exist in the area between the shoulder blades. Figure 8-8

Gates at Solar Plexus (above) and Lower Tantien (below). Figure 8-9

Between the Shoulder Blades
(Figure 8-8, Gate 3)

Between the shoulder blades and the spine there are a large number of minor energy gates. For athletes, dancers, and martial artists, it is extremely important to open all the gates in this area. The strength of the arms derives in large part from here, while the flexibility of the arms comes mainly from the shoulder’s nest.

The Rib Cage. Minor gates at all points where the ribs attach to the sternum. Figure 8-10

prevention and treatment in China. These gates are located in the center of each breast, directly behind the nipple in front of the ribs.
Solar Plexus (Figure 8-9, Gate 4)

This gate is located just below the sternum, or breastbone. It is the first soft spot you hit where you tap the middle of the breastbone.

The Lower Tantien and Mingmen (Figure 8-9, Gate 5 and Figure 8-11)

The lower tantien is located in the central core of the body, about two to three inches below the belly button. The mingmen, also known as the “Door of Life,” is directly behind the tantien and anterior to (just in front of) the spine.

The tantien is the single most important gate with regard to physical health. Located in approximately the center of the body, all energy lines to physical health and well-being connect here.

The mingmen is an energy point that transfers energy between the spine and the tantien, via a connecting channel inside the abdomen. It is also called the back tantien.

The tantien is the first main focus of all qigong and Taoist alchemical practices. Taoist practices all begin from the premise that physical health is the foundation upon which spiritual development is built, and it is in the lower tantien that all energy affecting the physical body is processed, purified, and generated.
This energy can later be connected to the middle and upper taniens for purposes of emotional and spiritual growth. Martial artists in China who did not have a deep understanding of how to use the lower tantien to purify their grosser emotions merely became very proficient fighting animals.

Eventually, many of the health problems caused by the premature development of the higher psychic centers can be alleviated through practices that involve the lower tantien. For this reason, most of the energy and meditation practices of Japan, China, and Korea, ranging from Zen, to qigong, to the martial arts, pay particular attention to the lower tantien.

Development of the energy in one tantien does not necessarily lead to development of the others. We have all met people who are physically healthy and emotional, psychic or spiritual wrecks. It is also common for people who are advanced on the emotional, psychic or spiritual planes to have incredible health problems. This is often because the energy of the higher centers is creating more energetic pressure than the body can handle.

Many people in the Zen community, for instance, develop bad health problems from meditation. Even the enlightened Japanese Zen master Hakuin had to go to a Taoist to repair the damage he had done to his body by prolonged sitting.

Chan Buddhism, the precursor to Zen, had a very strong qigong component to its practices, which was lost when Chan techniques were introduced from China to Japan. In Tibetan Buddhism, the initial 100,000 prostrations (nundro) have the function of developing the body before a practitioner gets into the more psychic aspects of the teachings. Yogis in India, Tibet, and China usually do some sort of physical and energetic practices to maintain the health of their bodies during their multiyear retreats, or else risk health problems.
Back Muscles—Illustration Not Shown
Dissolve all the energy in the back muscles, especially the energy around the kidneys. Begin from the neck and shoulder area and work slowly downwards to the top of the buttocks.

Spine (Figure 8-12)
Beginning at the base of the skull, dissolve the entire spine, especially between the vertebrae. Pay special attention to the following locations: the place where the spine enters the skull; the big vertebra at the base of the neck; the vertebra between the shoulder blades; the vertebra just below the shoulder blades; the vertebra level with mingmen; and the tailbone.

Pelvis
The Pelvic Girdle (Figure 8-13)
Dissolve the bones that make up the pelvic girdle; that is, the ilium, ischium, sacrum, and coccyx (tailbone), especially the places where they join.

The Hip Socket, or Acetabulum (between the Head of the Thigh Bone and the Hip Socket)—Illustration Not Shown.

The Area Inside the Pelvis, Starting from the Crest of the Hip Bones All the Way Through to the Inguinal Crease (Kwa)—Illustration Not Shown

The Genitals—Illustration Not Shown
Women should dissolve the whole vaginal canal up to the cervix, but not the cervix itself. There is an energetic wall at the cervix that separates the womb from the vagina, and this should not be dissolved.4 Men should practice the dissolving

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4Dissolving the cervix area excessively can disrupt a woman's reproductive energy and may subsequently lead to menstrual problems, PMS, vaginal infections, and the inability to conceive. This natural energetic seal should be broken only at childbirth. It is also possible to dissolve the womb, but excessive practice can make a woman more fertile—an important issue in this era of birth control.
procedure from the prostate and down the shaft of the penis, as well as from the prostate to the testicles.

**The Anus and Rectum—Illustration Not Shown**

Dissolve from as far up the anus as any blockage is felt, but generally no more than an inch or two. This is an extremely important gate, and is definitely helpful in relieving constipation, hemorrhoids, and preventing colon cancer.

**The Perineum—Illustration Not Shown**

Located between the genitals and the anus, the perineum is the point where energy from the legs and the body joins.

**Legs**

The legs and buttocks support the spine, both physically and energetically.

**Knee Joint: Front, Back and Sides—10 Minor Gates; 1 Major Gate (Figure 8-14 and Figure 8-15)**

![Gates of the Knee](image)
Front: The eyes of the knee; that is, the two indentations just above and below the middle of the kneecap, on either side of its centerline (4 minor gates).
Back: Beneath the tendons on either side of the back of the knee, above and below the crease (4 minor gates).
Sides: In the center of either side of the knee (2 minor gates).
Center: Directly in the middle of the knee joint (1 minor gate).

Ankle Joint: Front, Back, and Sides—8 Minor Gates; 1 Major Gate
(Figure 8-16, Gates 2 and Figure 8-17, Gates 2)
Front: Just above and below the crease formed by pulling the foot up, on either side of the centerline of the shin bone (4 minor gates).
Back: Just above the point of insertion of the Achilles tendon into the heel bone, on either side (2 minor gates).
Sides: In the center of the ankle bone on either side (2 minor gates).
Center: Directly in the middle of the ankle joint (1 major gate).

The Tarsals and Metatarsals—Illustration Not Shown
Dissolve all the spaces between the small bones of the foot.
The Toes (Figure 8-16, Gates 4)
Dissolve all the toe joints, up to and especially including the tips of the toes.

The Heel (Figure 8-17, Gate 5)
About one inch from the very back of the foot, on the centerline of the foot.

The Arch (Figure 8-17, Gate 6)
In the center of the arch, on the midline of the foot (inside the foot).

The Bubbling Well (Figure 8-17, Gate 7)
About one quarter of the distance from the base of the toes to the heel, on the bottom of the foot. This gate is in the center of the depression formed in the ball of the foot when you point your toes.

Below the Feet and Above the Head
Your energetic body extends below your feet and above your head. The size of your energetic body, unlike your physical body, grows and shrinks with time. It is in constant flux. Over time, and with practice, your energy body will grow in size and strength, but it will still fluctuate.

Feel below your body until you cannot feel anymore and you find where your energy body has reached its natural end. Dissolve the energy from the bottom of your feet downward until the energy ends. No matter in what environment you find yourself, always dissolve to the ends of your energy body.

Your energy body also ends above your head. (Some of the Yoga traditions refer to the eighth and ninth chakras, located above your head.)

Feel above your head until the sense of energy ends (see p. 124 and p. 238). This is where you will now begin all dissolving practices. One complete standing exercise will constitute dissolving the energy from above the head, through the body, and culminate with all the energy dissolving into the energy point below your feet, that is, your root. After standing, open your eyes slowly, making sure that you do not jar the comfortable relaxed feeling you had when your eyes were closed.
Opening the Gates: A Lesson Plan

Each lesson should be practiced for at least three days, or as long as you need to stabilize the gate or gates referred to in the lesson. Moving too fast creates strain and scatters energy, resulting in little benefit.

First, lightly dissolve all energy gates you have previously opened, and then spend the remaining 80 percent of your practice time on opening the next set of gates below. It is important to dissolve all the blocked energy above these new gates; this includes not just the energy that is blocked at the major gates, but energy blocked anywhere else as well. For example, when moving from the crown to the third eye, be sure to dissolve the forehead, and when moving from the hips to the knees be sure to dissolve the thighs.

If you feel that too much material is contained in one lesson, just divide it up. Go at your own pace—there is no pressure to complete this process in any specific amount of time. Generally speaking, allow at least one to three months to work your way down through all the gates to your feet.

At the end of any practice session, gently dissolve through the rest of the body to the floor. Suggested lessons for dissolving (each number consists of one lesson) are below.

1. Bai hui, or the crown of the head.
2. The third eye, the eyes, the center of the ears, and the temple. Also, the four jaw points.
3. Where the tongue touches the roof of the mouth and the throat notch.
4. The base of the skull and in between each of the cervical (neck) vertebrae down to the seventh cervical vertebra at the base of the neck.
5. From where the tongue touches the roof of your mouth to the end of the breastbone, on a line about the width of your mouth.
6. The four points of the shoulder.
7. The elbows.
8. The wrists.
9. The hands (all the points).
10. The joints where the ribs connect to the sternum, the spaces between the ribs, the joints where the ribs connect to the spine, the area between the shoulder blades and the spine. For women only: the gates of the breasts (directly behind the nipples).
11. The solar plexus.
12. The whole of the belly, starting from the front and dissolving through the internal organs back to the spine.
13. The tantien and the mingmen.
14. All the points along the spine, from the occiput to the tailbone, paying special attention to the occiput, the seventh cervical vertebra, the vertebra in the center of the shoulder blades, the one at the base of the shoulder blades, mingmen and the tailbone.
15. The hip sockets, the pelvic bones, and the kwa (that is, the area inside the front crest of the hip bones).
16. The anus.
17. The genitals.
18. The perineum.
19. The knees.
20. The ankles.
21. The feet.
22. Below the floor.
23. Above the head.

After completing this sequence, begin all further standing qigong from above the head, and dissolve down the body one level at a time. Imagine the body to be full of water, with the water being slowly let out from the bottom of your feet. As the water level drops, dissolve everything at the new level—front, back, and sides.

When dissolving the crown of the head, you want to dissolve everything else at the same level; that is, the entire tip of your head. As you work towards the next gate, the third eye, dissolve down the head so that all sides of the head at the same level are dissolved simultaneously. At the solar plexus, then, you would also be working on all the body parts that are located approximately at the same level, i.e., the lower ribs, those vertebrae at the level of the lower ribs, and the elbows.
Guidelines for Practicing Standing Qigong

1. Don’t Overstrain Your Energy System

Release as much as possible of the blocked (stuck) energy above the gate you are working on and drop what remains into the next lower gate. Continue on down through successive lower gates to below the floor. Spend three or four days until the mind has become reasonably stable there. Work slowly on each gate (or series of gates), releasing enough energy above each new gate so that energy can be released from the gate itself without overstraining the system. If you go too fast, it creates strain, energy is scattered and little progress is made.

2. Dissolve from the Skin Inward

In general, begin on the outer surface of the body, and over the next months begin to go deeper and deeper, until eventually you gain a direct experience of the bones. Also, remember that during the first month or two, you should not go more than one-half inch into the brain, though later it is permissible to extend the dissolving process through the entire brain. Just be sure not to do anything specific with the chi of gates you encounter inside the brain, such as making connections or geometric patterns.

3. Allow Six Months to Stabilize the Tantien and Mingmen

Moving down through the gates of the body to the tantien will usually take at least a month, it will probably be another month before the tantien stabilizes (fixes in location), and it will take anywhere from three to six months before you will be able to extend your mind from the tantien (in the center) to the mingmen (on the spine). It will also take three to six months to begin to store energy in the tantien. This process can be accelerated when studying with a master, and may take longer on your own.

4. The Legs Are More Difficult than the Arms

In general, especially for Westerners, the legs will be more difficult to open than the arms, as in the West we tend to focus on our heads and upper bodies. Also, we do not tend to sit or squat on the floor. Because Westerners do not tend to direct chi into their legs, the legs become insensitive to energy.
5. Stand for a Minimum of Five Minutes to Get Benefits

As a general rule, a minimum of five minutes of standing is necessary for any noticeable results. This presupposes that a person is able to drop into a state of complete relaxation in thirty or forty seconds, and after a few months of practice this is a highly realistic goal. In the beginning, however, it may take five minutes to attain a reasonable state of relaxation. If this is so, those five minutes must be added to the practice time; in other words, ten minutes would be necessary for any benefit to accrue. On a super-stressed day, you might require fifteen minutes just to relax enough to begin the standing practice.

The longest I have seen people do standing and still gain benefit from it is about six hours at a time. Usually they are still in their teens or their twenties and have little stress or work pressures. For the average person, standing beyond one hour at a time usually is impractical, and therefore one hour can be considered a maximum practice time. To reach this amount, gradually increase the length of practice by two or three minutes every day, or even every week or month.

If you can only practice five, ten or fifteen minutes a day during the week and then do an hour or two on the weekend, your muscles may become sore. A half an hour might be called for, but not much more until you have built up to it. Never strain yourself internally. Slow, steady, even, and with moderation should be the key guidelines for the average person who wants to maintain or improve health, flexibility, and well-being. Of course, these principles also apply to martial artists and athletes, but what is moderate for them, the average person would no doubt find somewhat excessive.

6. Standing for People Involved in Movement Arts

Since the movement arts require superior flexibility and body control, people involved in these arts should do a minimum of twenty minutes standing at a time, up to a maximum of two hours or more, depending upon how strong they want their energy to be and how deeply they desire mastery and knowledge of their physical being. Practicing in this range will take one beyond mere physical maintenance to a level of superior physical ability. For those under 25, the amount of practice time could quite possibly be increased, whereas those over 50 might want to start with a little less.

Always bear in mind never to overstrain, as this can create an internal resistance
to practicing. If the body or mind is pushed too far in one direction it will naturally
snap back in the other direction. Consistent practice will get you much further than
periodic blasts, which often cause your practice time afterwards to dramatically
diminish. A two-and-a-half hour marathon could be so internally exhausting that
the internal resistance to further exhaustion would prevent practice for the next
week or so.

7. Standing for Martial Artists and Healers

Martial artists should be aware that the standing posture has been used in China
for thousands of years to develop internal power. At more advanced stages, there
are many hand postures that open up every energy line in the body and allow the
manifestation of internal power from any part of the body at will. As part of both
internal martial arts and traditional Chinese healing and bodywork (qigong tui na),
there are approximately 200 different hand postures (see Chapter 15), each with
different mind components, which are capable of developing internal power and
healing the damage caused by illness and injury. Each of these postures deals with
a specific way in which energy is not moving through the system. With
practice, it is possible to make energy move through any blockage in the system,
whether in internal organs, nerve tissue, soft tissue, or the spine.

When I was younger I practiced six hours at a stretch in order to increase my
internal power. At that time I was actively involved in fighting competitions where
it was easy to get severely hurt, and this significantly increased my motivation to
learn. If I did not practice hard enough, I was realistically looking at an opponent
putting me in the hospital. Most people do not have this strong motivation, and the
majority of people practicing the internal martial arts are not in their late teens and
early twenties. Therefore, I would say that between one and three hours a day is the
maximum that the average dedicated martial artist or healer should be practicing.

8. Do Not Stand Too Long

It is important to realize that there is a point of diminishing returns, beyond which
the extra practice doesn’t really result in enough benefit to be worth it. Again,
beware of the internal exhaustion factor: If you get too internally exhausted,
you will not be able to practice for days. So find where this maximum benefit point
is for you and, keeping in mind the 70 percent rule, don’t go beyond it. It is normal
to learn through the school of hard knocks where your limits are. Internal exhaustion
is infinitely more tiring than exhaustion attained through external exercise, including marathon running—it is like nervous exhaustion combined with physical exhaustion.

9. Dissolve Your Energy Blocks at Progressively Deeper Levels

The average practice period consists of a period of settling in, followed by a period where everything feels wrong and you begin concentrating on the weakest (most obviously bound-up) link in your chain. Then, after feeling like you’ve unknotted that block, a tremendous sense of liberated energy is felt moving within. The point at which this liberated energy begins to weaken is when most people call it a day.

However, after much practice (months to years), it is possible to find a second weak link, dissolve it, and get a new burst of energy. Only the most experienced practitioners can go through this cycle three or four times, and these people are rare.

Again, the keys to success are consistency and not overdoing it. If these are adhered to, standing can give a martial artist or athlete an easy, relaxed, and effortless power that cannot be gained through any amount of physical training or weightlifting.

10. Always Finish At the Bottom of Your Feet or Energy Body

Coordinating Your Breath with Qigong Movements

The chapters you have read so far have covered standing practices in detail and have described the basics of Longevity Breathing. Chapters 9-14 teach the movements of Opening the Energy Gates Qigong.

When physical movements of qigong are coordinated with breathing, it increases your chi. This practice can be either good or bad, and while some qigong and tai chi schools advocate it, some do not.

The classical Taoist position is that it is good to strengthen the breath under all conditions but not to coordinate inhales and exhales with physical movements in the beginning stages of qigong practice.

The chi that energizes your body and energy channels can simultaneously charge up your emotions. If your basic emotional predisposition is to be positive, happy or calm, more chi will provide you the energy to be happier, calmer and more positive. If the opposite is
true more chi can turn you more negative and release your inner demons. Thus, there is the possibility that the stronger one becomes physically, the more likely that one may develop into an emotional wreck. Many people in the sports and martial arts community have suffered on this account: they becomes aware of the physical, but not the emotional (or psychic) level of chi.

Breath and Emotions
Thoughts and emotions create “waves” in the mind. The way one breathes can create these waves and cause the mind to take on the thought wave pattern of specific emotions. For example, when you get angry, your breath rises to your chest, and then to your head with short, powerful bursts. Conversely, if you start breathing from the chest and head intentionally with short, powerful bursts, you will start feeling angry. On the other hand, if you are feeling depressed, which usually results in very shallow breathing, and you consciously start deep, regular breathing, you will feel less depressed. You can change or at least mask your true feelings with your breath.

Usually when the breath and the mind are coordinated, one simply experiences the emotion. However, if you practice the qigong method of coordinating the physical breath with specific body movements, you may cause emotional suppression to occur. You may only become more aware of your breath and movement and not your emotions. The artificial breathing pattern masks awareness of your actual emotions, and at the same time, you strengthen these invisible emotions by your practice. Coordinating breath with movement will increase your physical capacities and charge up your physical chi, but it may also charge up the deeper layers of your being, the emotional and psychic basement where the emotions reside that have been repressed over a lifetime.

There is also the possibility that emotional energy may be increased when you coordinate your breath with movements. If, for example, you are already angry or depressed and aren’t even aware that you are, you could find yourself becoming extremely explosive or even more overtly depressed without knowing why.

Dealing with Negative Emotions
The goal of many Taoist energy exercises is to make you aware of negative emotions and give you the tools to dissipate them. However, by coordinating your breathing with your movements in the initial learning stages, you may actually strengthen them and lock them in more strongly.
The better way to deal with negative emotion is as follows: As you stand, become aware of your negative emotions and notice what they feel like. Recognize how they create physical tension in your body and changes in your mood. Then relax and release the tension by using the dissolving methods explained in Chapter 7 to whatever extent is possible. Do not suppress the feelings that arise.

Repeat the same process while moving. Initially, do not consciously coordinate the extensions and retractions of your arms and legs with inhaling and exhaling. After you have the experience to recognize how and if emotions are being activated, and you can relax, dissolve and let go of them, you can then breathe in coordination with your movements and simultaneously release your emotions.