Seven Minutes to Change Your Life

Modern life leaves us always on the run. Juggling the pressures of work and money, family and friends, often leaves us little time for our health and well-being. Seven Minutes of Magic is a mind-body program designed for busy people who need a wellness routine that can dramatically improve their life in an amount of time that everyone can find in even the most hectic day.

Just how long is seven minutes? Putting it into perspective, most of us spend seven to eight hours sleeping, two to three hours making and eating meals, three to four hours watching television, and eight or more hours working. Is committing to a brief seven minute routine worth the effort if it means more energy and less stress in your daily life? Is it really that hard to find a seven minute block of time to rejuvenate, recharge, and reinvigorate your mind and body? Look at it this way…there are seven minutes of commercials in a half hour television sitcom. If you have to, you can do your seven minutes of magic two or three minutes at a time during the commercials. It’s not ideal, but it will still work. This book is about taking away the excuses in order to be healthy and full of energy.

Life today demands a seemingly endless amount of energy and all too often we are left feeling drained and exhausted. Everyone needs more energy, but most people have forgotten how to access it. Seven Minutes of Magic will show you how to awaken the energy in your body and to harness the energy that exists in the world all around you.
Energy is True Magic

The word magic in this book has nothing to do with pulling rabbits from hats or with the use of charms and spells. The word “magic” is the term used by people who have learned these flowing routines when describing the changes they experience in their body and mind — more energy, greater health, and less stress. Let me explain how this seemingly magical transformation occurs.

Within every person there is a place that is full of energy, health, and happiness. This is our natural state, but we so often lose touch with it in our busy, distracted lives. A visit to this place of inner vitality and harmony everyday, even for a brief seven minutes, allows us to access a higher level of energy, to strengthen our immune system, and to transform the patterns and assumptions that limit our body and mind.

By clearing physical and mental stress everyday, the body finds its natural state of balance. Stress compromises the immune system; exercise, deep breathing, and flowing movements strengthen it.

Real magic is not external; it is about an inner transformation and alchemy. You will learn to change the leaden, lethargic, low energy state that so many of us experience when we wake up or return from a day of work into a golden, abundant, high energy state that everyone craves and needs for true well-being.
Our habits shape the outcome of our life, both internally and externally. To lead healthier, happier lives we need routines that support that outcome. Our bodies, like nature, grow from the inside out. To cultivate greater levels of energy and strength, the body needs consistent growth in that direction. A little bit everyday, just seven minutes, is better than a lot once in a while.

Seven truly is a “magic” number. Modern psychology has shown that seven is the number of things that most people can remember—this is the reason that telephone numbers have generally been limited to seven numbers. Both the morning and evening routines are designed as seven flows that any one can remember and do, regardless of their age, body type, or level of fitness. The word flow is used to describe the exercises because one movement or stretch is followed by another, like moving water, each routine is a seamless extension of the one that precedes it.

Seven minutes is the minimum amount of time needed to make a change in your body and mind that will have a lasting effect throughout your day. Think of boiling water. There is a certain amount of time that is needed to reach a new state – to change from water into steam. For our bodies and minds, seven minutes is the amount of time needed to change your energy to a new and healthier state. By having seven flows in seven minutes we can absorb and integrate the benefits of these routines into our body and mind most efficiently.

Seven Minutes of Magic draws on the principles and practices of ancient mind-body traditions, but presents them in a fluid and efficient practice for maximum benefit in minimal time. My
goal in sharing these routines is to give you something powerful and enduring that you can do in a short amount of time—no matter what other pressures and commitments you might have in your life. I want you to be able to wake up in the morning and charge up your mind and body to begin the day stronger, more energized, and more focused. I also want to help you end the day joyfully, clear stress and tension, and be able to truly let go and unwind for a better night’s sleep. Then, as you sleep, your body can restore its energy so that you can wake up again even more refreshed and revitalized.

Before you learn the routines, I want you to know a little about the many traditions and techniques that come together in *Seven Minutes of Magic* and how they transformed my life. Then you will see how East and West, ancient traditions and modern fitness, come together to create a powerful and effective practice. I hope that knowing this background will enrich your practice and help you to understand the many levels—body, mind, and spirit—at which these practices can make a difference in your life journey. However, if all you have today is seven minutes, feel free to skip ahead to the flowing routines themselves!

**My Story: Discovering Ancient Secrets for Modern Life**

During college my greatest teachers were not professors, and the greatest lessons were not revealed in the classroom. The University of California at Berkeley, which I attended, was home to more than 20 Nobel Prize winning teachers, had an unprecedented research reputation, and was the number one public university in the country. Still, the wisdom I discovered came from
teachers without Ph.D.s who taught in a small building across town that I would never have
known existed if I had not been lead there.

When I arrived on campus for my freshman year I had no idea what lay ahead and was just
trying, like the thousands of other students, to handle the newfound freedoms that I had living for
the first time away from the watchful eyes of my parents. I quickly realized that smart,
disciplined high school students can go a little overboard when finally let loose—and I was no
exception.

By my junior year, I was trying to complete my psychology degree, play Division I soccer, and
maintain a full social calendar. Part of me was having the time of my life; yet, another part of me
was stressed out, unhappy, over-stimulated, and yearning for something deeper and more
meaningful. I knew that my psychology classes and studying the behavior of rat’s in mazes were
unlikely to reveal the secrets of happiness. My grades were starting to slip, I was sitting on the
bench on the soccer team, and my girlfriend had just broken up with me. I had reached the ocean
bottom of my college life: I had a choice to make, become a better swimmer, or drown in my
self-pity.

It was about a week later that circumstances threw me a life-preserver. I was sitting in class as
usual, when I noticed a woman sitting a few seats away from me. To my surprise she was not
taking any notes. Imagine a room of four hundred students frantically scribbling, straining to
write down every detail, while she just sat there, spine straight, hands folded, keenly observing
the professor. I smiled with amazement and disbelief. How could you actually do that, go to class and not take notes? Berkeley was highly competitive and intellectually challenging. Students worked extremely hard to grasp the information. After a few weeks of watching her, I finally introduced myself.

After a brief conversation, I asked her how she managed to go through a class like Statistics and Industrial Psychology without putting a pen to paper. Her answer was simple, “The Tao.” I looked at her like a dog cocking its head when it hears a funny sound. What? She offered to escort me to a class at a local Tai Chi studio that gave lectures on Taoism, Zen, Chi, and Yoga. She explained that there was a common thread that linked all these disciplines and how they could be used for practical purposes, like remembering everything in a lecture without taking notes. She explained to me that before her training, she was a stress case, a B student at best. Now, she was the picture of mental calm, getting straight A’s, and feeling energized everyday. It sounded too good to be true.

We walked into an ordinary looking house on the north side of campus, up in the hills, with a view of the San Francisco Bay. The living room was large and spacious with nothing but cushions on the floor. There were about twelve to fifteen students sitting in the room. The teacher, Master Sun, smiled as we walked in and sat down. He was bald, wore loose pants and a white t-shirt, and had warm radiant eyes. The strange thing was that I didn’t feel weird walking into this room, even with fifteen curious eyes on us. There was a tranquility and peacefulness about the space.
The class began with deep breathing exercises, progressed to vigorous stretching, and ended with flowing movements. Trying to hold some of these postures required tremendous abdominal strength and balance. I was sweating as if I was sprinting through a soccer game on a hot day. The flowing movements required a dexterity that I was completely unfamiliar with. I was not used to moving my body that slowly and coordinating all the movements from the center of my body. Yet, by the end of class, my body felt completely different. My hands and arms were tingling, my head was light, as if all my thoughts were put to rest, and I could feel an inner power coursing through my veins.

After the class, Master Sun lectured on the mind. He said something that I still remember to this day. “There is much more to the mind than just thinking. When your mind is silent, the Universe surrenders.” Maybe this was a clue to how my classmate was able to get straight A’s without taking notes.

During the off season of soccer, I trained diligently at the center. The students here were quite different than the university students; it wasn’t about getting grades or competition, it was about going deeper into oneself. I learned the classic 108 Tai Chi moves. I took yoga 3 times a week, and I learned to meditate. Looking back, these were the most important life skills I acquired in the five years I spent at Berkeley.
As Master Sun emphasized in every class, Tai Chi is the art of effortless power; by learning to go with the flow of life, the struggle ceases. Now, this sounded great in theory, but I really didn’t believe it in my gut. My whole life, I had worked hard in both school and sports to succeed. Effort, tenacity, and perseverance were all principles I could count on to get me through. But the more I trained in Tai Chi, the more I was beginning to witness effortlessness in my own life. In fact, during the next season, my soccer playing was transformed. I went from mediocre to outstanding. My endurance, speed, agility, and focus were all dramatically different. It was weird, like I had grown another lung. Not only was I faster, but I could play much longer with more stamina. The benefits extended beyond my athletic ability. I was getting better grades without any extra studying. I was still taking notes in class, but my focus was noticeably improved.

Master Sun went on to explain that Tai Chi, Zen, or Yoga didn’t give you something that wasn’t there, but like a sculptor carving a statue out of rock, revealed an inner potential that was always present.

When I graduated from university, I immediately set out for Asia to study these disciplines where they had originated. I went to Northern Thailand to study with Master Mantak Chia. I had attended one of his workshops while he was in Berkeley, and was struck by the simplicity and the power of the exercises. Here was a practice that was easy to learn, yet had tremendous benefits. Master Chia talked of longevity, vitality, and how to achieve a passionate, spiritual relationship with your partner. Master Chia described how one could use spirituality in a
practical way that enhanced everyday life without having to renounce the material world, as many monks, priest, nuns and spiritual practitioners do. He emphasized how the health of the body, the state of the emotions, the quality of the mind, and cultivation of the spirit practice were all intricately connected.

I spent four years going back and forth to Thailand. During my third trip, I was asked to be the Chief Editor for all of Master Chia’s publications. This was a fantastic opportunity to study and work directly with one of the foremost modern day Masters of Eastern philosophy, tai chi, Taoist yoga, and meditation. I would soon find that I had to pass rigorous tests before I was allowed to write each new chapter or book. Master Chia wanted to make sure that I embodied the practices and principles that I was writing about.

Working with such a revered Master like Mantak Chia was an awe-inspiring experience. I remember the first day of my new assignment, waking up at 5:30 am, before his group lectures and class instruction. I walked from my room to Master Chia’s house through the lush Thai palm trees and jungle orchids. The sky was just beginning to open with color, the deep violet of night giving way to streaks of bright orange light peaking onto the horizon. As I walked, everything around me was a new experience. The tropical air was warm and thick. Even the sounds of the birds were a mysterious melody, like listening to music in another language. Despite the beauty all around me, I was nervous. I had no idea what to expect or what Master Chia expected from me. As I approached his door and lifted my hand to knock, I hesitated. What if he meant 5:30pm? I stopped, leaving my outstretched fist frozen in the air. I stood there listening for at
least a minute. No sound. Just then, a voice above me said, “Your monkey mind is already thinking too much.” I jumped at the words. Master Chia was above me stretching on his balcony. “Come up,” he said without looking down, or breaking the flow of his movement.

For the next month, I would go to Master Chia’s house and workout everyday. We would train for about an hour and a half, practicing tai chi, qi gong, breathing exercises, and meditation techniques.

What I kept realizing again and again with this practice was that this was not new age fluff, but a body-mind-spirit science. Master Chia was showing me formulas that had been tested for the last 4,000 years. He explained that these exercise and meditation routines were like a well trodden path to the top of the mountain. If you practice them, you will reach the peak and enjoy the expanding vista of a clear mind and radiant health.

Getting this information first hand was an incredible learning experience. But, keeping up with Master Chia was no easy task. He only slept four or five hours per night and had the energy of a power plant. He explained to me that nature had an unlimited amount of energy and all we needed to do was be receptive to it. Here was a man in his late 50’s who slept very little, who never got sick, who traveled to 15 countries a year, who wrote 16 books in 5 years, and had developed the Tao Garden (the first holistic health center to incorporate fitness, organic nutrition, tai chi, qi gong, and meditation).
Master Chia expected the most from me and was not easy on his students. I remember one day during lunch, I asked him a question about the tai chi form. He replied, “Show me your form.” I hesitated. There were over 100 people in the dining hall. “Right now?” I asked pleading with my voice to postpone his request. “Now.”

I took a deep breath, brought my feet together and began the form. When I stepped into the first posture, my legs where shaking with nervous tension. I felt like Elvis as my knees shook back and forth. I could feel everyone in the room watching me, happily eating their Pad Thai noodles while I was sweating through the form. As I continued, Master Chia got up from his chair and walked around me. He slapped me in the back, three or four times firmly, “more power here.” I continued focusing my awareness on the lower back area called the “door of life.” Master Chia then began to push on my shoulders and hips as I moved. I struggled to keep my balance and maintain my center. I stumbled a few times as he pushed, but kept moving through the form as best as I could. This went on for what seemed like an eternity. Finally he sat back down and said, “You only need to do form 1,000 times more.” It was a nice way to say that my form completely stunk, and I had a long way to go before I could pass the test.

The next day, he had me standing in the turtle posture (imagine a downhill skier in a tuck position, deep knee bend to ninety degrees, elbows in and head down) for five minutes at a time. He then would push me on the shoulders and hips to make sure my structure was intact. I had suffered through double days in soccer, but this was even more grueling. This training pushed me past my limits of what I thought was possible. He often showed skepticism about how a
white kid from California could master these internal martial arts. But I was not going to give up. I did the exercises another 1,000 times and then another 1,000.

Six months later, I thought I was ready for the Tai Chi test with Master Chia. I found Master Chia and asked if he would test me in the form again. He smiled, as if to say, didn’t we just do this? I started my form with much more confidence. Master Chia came around and pushed me a few times. I felt completely different than the previous time that I tested, more rooted and grounded. I moved through his pushes with greater ease and effortlessness. He chuckled, as if to say, now let’s see what you can really do. He demanded that I perform the advanced movements, and I as I did, he began to lean on my back and yank on my arms. At first, I wanted to confront his force with force, but reminded what I had learned from the Tai Chi classics, “Don’t push the river, let the energy move through you.” I relaxed and channeled his force into my center. I expanded my energy and pushed him backward. He grinned casually and nodded. “Good,” he said. I had passed.

During my trips to Thailand, I would also venture off to different countries in Asia to study with other Masters. I studied bodywork and pressure points in China and Japan. Over the years, I completed two-week silent retreats with nine hours of meditation per day. I meditated for ten days in complete darkness. I trained with Tai Chi masters in Hong Kong and Indonesia.

Back in the United States, I spent four years studying Chinese medicine and became a licensed Chinese medical doctor and acupuncturist. I wanted to understand the ancient theories and
practices that had allowed for such a profound understanding of the human body, mind, and soul.

At the time, I was on staff with Deepak Chopra and facilitated some of his workshops on MindBody Medicine. I completed numerous Yoga Intensives, stood on my head, and could almost get my ankles behind my ears (soccer players have tight hips). I wanted to absorb everything from as many different teachers and disciplines as I could to understand where their teachings merged and validated the insights into life that I was learning.

What I finally realized was that these practices and the Eastern approach to health that I was learning was not about extremes or competition; it wasn’t about who could stretch the farthest or whose tai chi form was the best. This was all about an inner awareness and an awakening of inner potential. All of these teachers and traditions had many similarities, but the most important was to maintain balance. One of my teachers told me, “To maintain a garden all you need to do is give it a little water and sunlight each day.” He explained that my practice should be the same – a little bit every day. This is what I hope to offer you in this book. A little bit of the essential elements…every day.

This book is a culmination of my studies through Asia, my personal daily practice, and what I’ve learned after teaching thousands of people these skills. What I have realized is that you don’t have to spend years in a monastery or hiding out in a cave to get enormous benefits from Tai Chi, Zen, or Yoga. In fact, all you need is Seven Minutes in the Morning or Seven Minutes in the Evening to transform your life. Think of this seven minute workout is a distillation of the most
complete, full-body, energizing routines from the 4,000 year-old traditions of tai chi, qi gong, and yoga combined with research on Western fitness and strength training

Don’t take my word for it, try it yourself for one month, and experience the difference.
East Meets West: Your Body, Mind, and Spirit

Throughout my travels and training I met amazing people that seemed to glow with an inner radiance. To me, these people were ageless, healthy, and full of vitality. I wanted to know their secrets. The knowledge and experience that I discovered during my travels was beyond western medicine and transcended western fitness routines. To really see the magic, I had to both understand my western upbringing and see beyond it.

Typically, in the west, we are trained to specialize, to segregate, and to compartmentalize. For example, if you have a physical injury, you see a doctor. If you have mental or emotional challenges, you visit a psychologist. If you have spiritual concerns, you seek the advice of a pastor, priest, or rabbi. This is how it has worked in our culture since the rise of modern medicine. Now there is great benefit from this system and it allows for great improvements in many specific areas.

The downfall of this paradigm is that we become fragmented. In reality, we are not segregated into the body, mind, and spirit. Just because you put up a fence between you and your neighbor doesn’t mean that the earth is divided underneath.

From the Eastern perspective the body, mind, and spirit are a continuum, and the integrative whole is more important than the separate parts. Take water, for example. It can be in three different states; solid (ice), liquid (water), or gas (steam). Yet in each of these states, at the
fundamental level, it is still H₂O. The same applies for us: The physical body is the densest form of energy, like ice; the mind and the emotions are more liquid, like water; and the spirit is like mist, more effervescent. One reason why people are so unhappy and unsatisfied, according to Eastern medicine, is that they feel disconnected, disjointed and out of touch with this feeling of wholeness.

Eastern Medicine has always described how each of these elements – body, mind, and spirit influence each other. For example, negative emotional energy and stress has a negative influence on the health of the body. Poor health on the other hand, will have a negative influence on emotions and mind. The relationship is reciprocal. Imagine that you are in a beautiful place, like Hawaii – white sand beaches, perfect weather, crystal clear water. Now, imagine that you have the stomach flu. The unhealthy state in the body, will limit any joy you can experience. The energy of the body, mind, and spirit are part of one continual cycle

We are more than all our separate parts; more than organs, tissue and muscles; more than emotions, thoughts, and feelings; more than our religious beliefs and cultural ideologies. We are the unity of all of these seemingly separate facets.

There are many different ways to accomplish our goals. Both Eastern and Western medicine have accomplished great feats in treating diseases, saving lives, and improving the quality of life. The East and West achieve this through completely different styles, each shaped by a unique paradigm.
As it stands now, our Western health care model revolves around people having pain and getting sick. If no one gets sick, nobody gets paid. Where conventional medicine differs from holistic medicine is that it is passive rather than dynamically proactive. Doctors give you things to take, and do procedures to you. Holistic medicine focuses on prevention and the root cause of a problem rather than its symptoms.

In Asia, there were and still are places where the health care model is reversed. Clients pay their health care practitioner a monthly fee as long as they stay healthy; when they get sick, they stop paying. Imagine a system where your health care practitioner is this motivated to continually keep you healthy. It is a complete paradigm shift. How different would our Western medical system be if this were the practice today? As the saying goes, what you put your attention on grows.

When a health care model immerses itself in prevention and wellness, these qualities flourish. It is like the sports coach telling his players that a good offense creates a good defense. By being proactive and focusing on health, we become stronger, more resilient, and even when we do get sick, it is for a much shorter period of time.

True healing goes to the source of the problem and uproots the pattern of disease. If you only focus on symptoms, it is like trying to hold ping-pong balls under water. They eventually spring up in many different directions. In the same way, masking symptoms often creates other health
issues. For example, those who take anti-inflammatories for an extended period of time can sometimes cause life threatening damage to the internal organs. Real healing solutions lie in our ability to prevent problems before they arise or to seek long term solutions in a holistic manner.

Pharmaceutical drugs temporarily alleviate pain; diminish anxiety and depression; or kill hostile germs in the body. Yet the root causes of our ailments are often left untouched. The containment, suppression, or elimination of symptomatic problems does not sustain vitality or vibrant health. Pharmaceutical treatment of secondary symptoms prunes the branches of our health problems while ignoring the roots. And these short term solutions often come with long-term costs.

When it comes to generating abundant energy and creating vibrant health, Western medicine falls short. One reason is that there is a lack of focus on staying healthy and preventing problems before they arise.

Despite continual advances in medical technology, we have more illness and pain than ever before. This is not to say that Western medicine is not truly amazing. It is. Just look at all the medical wonders it has achieved. Nothing compares to Western medicine when it comes to emergencies, vaccines, or finding solutions to life-threatening diseases. But, this approach falls short when it comes to creating abundant energy, intrinsic health, and a sense of integration within. The East reminds us to focus on enhancing our life force energy and becoming healthy from the inside out.
Eastern Medicine and Western Medicine are starting to move closer together in philosophy, as Western medicine takes an increasingly holistic approach to health. Recently, Western medicine is recognizing how stress and negative emotions can cause all kinds of problems in the body. Prevention begins with stress management and alleviating excess mental and physical tension.

There is a saying in Chinese medicine: *trying to get healthy after one is sick is like digging a well when you are dying of thirst.* The idea here is to focus on your health while you are healthy. That is not to say that if you are sick or in pain there is nothing to do. It just means that wherever you are on your path to health and vitality, now is the best time to begin.

From an Eastern perspective, and more and more a Western medical perspective, prevention is the key to lasting health and happiness. In taking charge of your own preventive health, we are not suggesting that you start performing acupuncture on yourself nor that you start concocting herbal potions. Let the professionals do what they do best. But, controlling your own health destiny is real. By doing a little energy cultivation, stress clearing each day, your entire system will become much more resilient and strong. That is what Seven Minutes of Magic is all about, a little bit of water and sunshine everyday.

Think of this book as a guide for prevention, a simple way to have your well dug and the water of health and vitality flowing. Seven Minutes of Magic is a quick and easy solution for
preventing the effects of low energy, stress, and premature aging. These seven minute routines will keep you feeling, looking, and staying younger than your calendar age.

**Stress**

Stress is a buzz word. It shows up everywhere; magazines, newspapers, doctors offices, at work, and on TV. You probably can’t make it through a single day without seeing or hearing the word stress.

In our modern world, life has become ever more fast-paced and is increasingly complex, in a word, stressful. Even with our advances in technology, our bodies are still the same. Lights turn night into day, stores make it easy to get whatever we want at any time, yet our bodies still operate on the same cycles and rhythms as they have for thousands of years. It’s no wonder that balance is so difficult to achieve when we push ourselves in so many unnatural ways.

This type of lifestyle leaves millions too depleted to get sufficient exercise, relaxation, play, or even to spend quality time with their families. This energy-depleting way of life and chronic stress lead to anxiety, fatigue, depression, a weakened immune system, and a host of serious physical and psychological ailments.

These problems arise not only from stress itself, but in the way people handle stress. The steady rise of addictions, drug use, unhealthy relationships, zoning out with entertainment (too much
TV), excessive shopping and purchasing of material possessions are all examples of how we respond to stress in detrimental ways. This is especially true if people feel a lack of support or a lack of inner resources.

It isn’t always possible to remove an outer problem. You can’t always quit your job, make your child behave, get out of a traffic jam, or heal a serious injury. But you can change your response and your inner state of consciousness. Dealing effectively with the stresses and problems in your life is a choice. When you have more energy and vitality, stress and problems don’t seem so overwhelming. By taking time for yourself, you will cultivate the energy you need to handle your problems more skillfully and effectively.

The “stress response” evolved for a good reason, to protect you from danger. I became all too familiar with this response early in my life. On my thirteenth birthday, my father took me to Alaska, a sort of initiation into manhood, an adventure into the wild. On our second day in the bush, we were hiking along a beautiful trail next to a river watching the salmon jump up a waterfall. As we stopped to admire the spectacular scenery, a huge grizzly unexpectedly came out of the trees and onto the trail a mere four feet from us. His head was bigger than my entire body. I froze. My mouth went dry and my heart felt as if it were going to pop out of my chest.

At that moment, all these bodily changes were basically giving me a choice – I could put up my dukes and have a wrestling match with the bear or I could find the quickest way to escape. Scientifically, this is known as “the fight-or-flight response.”
I had heard the fisherman and the local Alaskan folks say not to run if you came face to face with a bear, but at that moment, my mind went blank and my legs moved like a roadrunner. Both my dad and I were sprinting away down the trail and scrambling up into a tree faster than a squirrel. Of course the bear was much more interested in the salmon, but we still stayed in that tree until the bear walked off and looked for lunch elsewhere.

Physiologically, here’s what happened to my body in that situation: My sympathetic nervous system kicked in to high gear. The hypothalamus (a gland in the brain) activated the pituitary which released a hormone into the bloodstream called ACTH (adrenocorticotropic hormone). This hormone went to my adrenal glands which in turn produced more adrenalin (also known as epinephrine) along with other hormones called glucocorticoids (cortisol is an example). This set off an array of biochemical changes in my body:

• My heart rate sped up, and my blood pressure went up (more blood is pumped to the muscles and lungs).
• My breath was rapid, nostrils flaring, causing an increased supply of air to my lungs.
• Blood was directed away from my skin and internal organs and was sent to my brain and skeletal muscles. My muscles tensed. I felt stronger (although not strong enough to wrestle the bear!).
• My blood would clot faster, just in case the bear actually caught me and tossed me around like in a World Wrestling Federation match. This would repair damage done to the arteries much faster.
• My pupils dilated, giving me better vision (not so necessary when a 1,000 lbs grizzly is four feet away; I could see him very clearly)
• My liver converted glycogen into glucose, which teams up with free fatty acids to supply me with fuel and quick energy.

Under these circumstances, the fight-or-flight response was totally appropriate. This same bodily reaction served the cave man when confronted with a saber tooth tiger. Yet, as a modern
man, this same response can be elicited while sitting in a traffic jam or giving a presentation to a group of colleagues. In fact, any perceived stress can put a person into this fight-or-flight state.

This incredibly important, life-preserving stress reaction is hard-wired into our system. The reality is, in today’s modern society, we are required to deal with very few grizzly bears or life-threatening stresses. The problem is that our bodies do not know the difference between a grizzly and a traffic jam, reacting in a similar way.

In the situation of the grizzly bear, this stress response has an outlet. The body uses this energy to get away or fight off the enemy. In a traffic jam, the stress response has no outlet and runs around the body like a caged tiger. Over time, this type of stress is detrimental to our health.

In today’s modern jungle, public speaking, a disgruntled spouse, dealing with a difficult client, having a demanding deadline, and raising children are all stressful situations, yet are not life-threatening. But, these situations release the same bombardment of stress hormones into the body. Your body isn’t just reacting; it’s overreacting. Constantly triggering this fight-or-flight response repeatedly wears down the body and mind. The stress response was designed to work best in short term situations – not the prolonged stress that we deal with on a routine basis.

Every bodily system is affected by stress. The statistics are striking: 112 million people take some form of medication for stress-related symptoms. One reason this is so high is that stress
seeps into all aspects of our lives, both physically and psychologically and it can exacerbate previous health related symptoms.

From muscle tension to headaches, from irritable bowel syndrome to acid indigestion, from heart disease to cancer, the steady rise in stress-related illness reflects our inability to cope with our lifestyle. This gives birth to a billion-dollar healthcare industry that at times masks the deeper problems of the roots of stress. The numerous medical studies on the Eastern practices discussed in this book like Qi Gong, Yoga, Tai Chi, exercise and meditation have shown to reverse the bombardment of many stress-related ailments.

Signs and Symptoms of Stress on the Body:
- Tight muscles and body aches
- Fatigue, lethargy
- Shallow, short breathing
- Chest tightness, rapid pulse
- Heartburn, indigestion, diarrhea, constipation,
- Dry mouth, and throat
- Excessive sweating, clammy hands, cold hands/feet
- Skin irritations, eczema
- Nail-biting, fidgeting, hair-twirling
- Lowered libido
- Overeating or loss of appetite
- Insomnia, excessive dreaming
- Increased use of alcohol and drugs

Psychological Signs of Stress:
- Frustration, irritability, anger
- Impatience
- Worry and anxiety
- Sadness, depression
- Insecurity, fear
- Panic attacks
- Moodiness, emotional instability
- Intrusive and racing thoughts
• Memory lapses, difficulty concentrating
• Indecision
• Loss of a sense of humor

Stress robs people of many of life’s pleasures and deprives them of life’s many satisfactions—including laughter. Stress can take many forms—work pressure, financial concerns, health issues, relationship challenges, being single, a new baby, a new mortgage, or having too little time for oneself.

The following facts begin to reveal the problems so many of us face:

• **Stress and Daily Life:** 89% of adults describe experiencing "high levels of stress."

• **Stress and Medical Visits:** 75-90% of adult visits to primary care physicians are for stress related problems.

• **Stress and Work:** 1 million employees are absent on an average workday because of stress related problems.

• **Stress Can Be Deadly:** More people have heart attacks on Monday morning at 9:00 am than at any other time of the week.

• **Stress Can Cause Illness:** Stress is linked to the following diseases—hypertension, heart attacks, diabetes, asthma, chronic pain, allergies, headache, backache, various skins disorders, cancer, immune system weakness, and a decrease in the number of white blood cells.
• **Stress and Sex:** Stress can affect sexual performance and rob you of your libido. Disturbed sexual performance may appear in the form of premature ejaculation, erectile dysfunction and other forms of difficulty in reaching orgasm.

• **Stress and Cholesterol:** Stress is more powerful than diet in influencing cholesterol levels. Several studies, including one of medical students around exam time, and another of accountants during tax season, have shown significant increases in cholesterol levels during stressful events, when there was little change in diet.

• **Stress and Heart Disease:** Stress is now considered a major risk factor in heart disease, right up there with smoking, being overweight, and lack of exercise.

• **Stress and Digestion:** Stress can affect the secretion of acid in your stomach and can speed up or slow down the process of peristalsis. Constipation, diarrhea, gas, bloating, irritable bowel syndrome and weight gain can be stress-related.

• **Stress and Muscle Tension:** Your muscles are prime targets for stress. Under stress, your muscles contract and tense. This muscle tension affects the nerves, blood vessels, organs, skin and bones. Chronically tenses muscles can result in a variety of conditions and disorders, including muscle spasms, pain, and teeth grinding.

• **Stress and the Immune System:** Stress hampers the immune system. Four hundred people were intentionally exposed to common-cold viruses. Those who scored highest on a test of stressful life events were more than twice as likely to develop colds after exposure than people who scored lowest.

• **Stress and Risk of Stroke:** Severe stress is one of the most potent risk factors for stroke—more so than high blood pressure—even 50 years after the initial trauma. In a study of
556 veterans of WWII, the rate of stroke among those who had been prisoners of war was 8 times higher than among those not captured.

Regardless of whether you are working from an Eastern or Western approach, there is a fundamental question that health practitioners have puzzled over for years. Why does one person catch a virus while someone else does not? Increasingly the evidence is leading us to look at energy levels, vitality and response to stress. One such study took four hundred people and intentionally exposed them to the common-cold viruses. Those who scored highest on a test of stressful life events were more than twice as likely to develop colds after exposure as people who scored lowest.

Researchers have now coined a term for the study of how stress and low energy affect the immune system. It is called psychoneuroimmunology (try to say that seven times fast). In short, stress can compromise your immune system, rendering it less effective in resisting bacteria and viruses.

The good news is that stress can be alleviated with the right exercises, movements, stretches and relaxation techniques. This is exactly what this Seven Minutes of Magic program is designed to do. It’s about tapping into your resources so that the inevitable stress and tensions of life makes you more productive, rather than becoming self-destructive. These seven minute sequences give you the ability to transform stress into a catalyst for creativity and manifesting what you want out of life.
Energy

Energy is that elusive substance we are all seeking. It is that vital force that makes life exciting, fun, creative, and joyful.

Call it qi (Chinese) prana (India), ruach (Hebrew), spirit, youthfulness, or vibrant health, energy is what we crave. The quantum physicists describe energy as the nature of the universe, but can’t really explain what it actually is. You can allude to it, you can feel it and perceive it, but it is beyond our best mental concepts and explanations. Instinctively we know that the more energy we have, the better we feel.

Energy is the invisible, immaterial substance that propagates life and animates our bodies with movement. It gives birth to our thoughts, emotions and consciousness. Energy describes and is infused in both the infinite space of the Universe and the infinitesimal space of the smallest particles. It is the spiral dance of the planets, the magnetism between the electron and proton, and the attraction between male and female. Energy is in the air we breathe, the food we eat, and the emotions we feel. It is the force that allows the planets, stars, and galaxies to work in perfect harmony. Mountains arising, forests growing, rivers flowing, and all life proliferating are expressions of this life-force energy.
Quantum physicists and mystics from all ages agree that we are literally made of and living within a limitless sea of energy. How is it then, that we suffer chronic low energy, fatigue, or poor health? Medical surveys show that “lack of energy” and high levels of stress are the biggest complaints in physicians’ offices today.

Think about it this way: If the power lines go down or flicker on and off during a storm, everything in the house stops working or only works sporadically. Without electricity, we have no heat, we can’t cook our food, watch TV, or use the computer. If we apply the same principles to our minds and bodies, we see that low energy causes shortages in our overall vitality, the way we metabolize food, our stress levels, our libido, our creativity, and our enjoyment of life.

The choices we make everyday, from exercise to diet, change the way we feel and work from the inside out. As we cultivate more energy within ourselves, life’s stresses that we normally face aren’t so overwhelming. As our energy increases, so does our ability to handle stress and create effective solutions. It’s when we are depleted that stress seeps into our body and mind.

In Eastern terms, the more energy circulating in the body, the healthier we are. Abundant energy manifests in the body as better functioning organs, more flexibility in the muscles, supple joints, and balanced emotions. Loss of internal energy creates fatigue, tension, low metabolism, inability to cope with stress, insomnia, depression, and turbulent thoughts.
Energy level is a great indicator of our general health. A Yale University study found that energy levels had the highest correlation with general-health status and were the best predictor of both physical and psychological health over time. Energetic people, the study showed are generally healthy, whereas the enervated are often ill, becoming ill, fighting off illness, or struggling with their low energy condition. Illness, apathy, fatigue, anxiety, chronic stress, depression and the like are all signs that we are becoming depleted.

**Cultivating More Energy**

Nature pulses with energy. In the Eastern forms of exercise, tapping into this abundant energy all around us and within us is one of the goals. Sometimes, cultivating more energy is as simple as getting out of our own way, of letting go of stress, tension, old emotions, and discordant thoughts. Abundant energy is not something that we have to create or make. It is always there, wanting to flow, wanting to express itself as creativity and balance.

Searching for energy in the material world, as we so often do, often leads to disappointment. It is important to remember that the path to more energy is not product related. What we want in the material world is a reflection of an inner feeling – security, fulfillment, health, power, excitement, youth, and vitality. These are all inner qualities. One of my teachers calls this incessant desire for material goods the search for “Dragon eggs.” In other words, it is a search for something that doesn’t exist.
To cultivate energy from the inside is something that lasts – a way to go to the source of energy and allow it to grow. Happiness and joy already exist inside you. The notion that acquiring something material to elicit this inner quality only leads to continual grasp of external things. If we are constantly pulled outside ourselves in our quest for happiness, it is like trying to capture waves by scooping up the ocean in a bucket. By cultivating energy from within, you can enjoy the material world without attachment. The material world is truly for our enjoyment and experience, but when we approach it from internal balance and strength, we can appreciate all our possessions without being controlled by them.

The key to happiness and vitality is balance: a harmony with your relationship with life in every area, both internal and external – diet, exercise, work, relationships, sleep, play, and contemplation.
PART II: THE FLOWS

Think of a river moving down a mountain – effortless, liquid, powerful. These morning and evening routines mirror the movements of nature and the natural rhythm of the body to build energy and vitality. There is no lack of energy in nature, only cycles and rhythms. These flows are designed to get you connected to your inner rhythm and cycles.

The morning routine wakes the body up as nature comes to life, so that you charge your body with the energy of life itself. The evening routine clears stress and tension, calms the mind, and prepares the body for deep restful sleep.

The routines themselves are continuous, each movement giving rise to the next in one cohesive flow. No movement is wasted, giving you the most benefit in the least amount of time and with the least effort. Tai chi and Qi Gong are called the art of effortless power because of their simplicity and rhythm, one movement giving rise to the next. Here, each posture and each stretch combine together in a flow to give maximum benefit.

Stretching is so important to the body because it clears residual tension as it builds up in the muscles. When the muscles get tight and tense, this impedes circulation creating stagnation in the body’s energy system. Anything in nature that is full of youthful life force is supple. A tree
that is healthy is resilient; if you bend a branch down, it springs back. If the tree is old or stiff, when you pull it, the branch breaks. This same idea applies to our bodies; if we want to cultivate youthful vitality, becoming supple and flexible is a necessity. As the Taoist sage Lao Tzu says in the Tao Te Ching, “Those that are supple are disciples of life. Those that are brittle are disciples of death.”

Health is an ongoing process, not a goal that is ever reached. It is a daily journey; you are either taking steps toward health or away from it everyday. That is the beauty of this program; you only need seven minutes a day to increase your energy, vitality and overall health. I hope after these flowing exercise routines have become a part of your life that you too will use the word “magic” to describe the changes that you experience in your body and mind.

**Breathing – The Bridge Between Your Mind and Body**

The benefits of working with the breath are profound in many ways. The way you breathe directly influences the quality of your life. In fact, the way you breathe might be the most important element in how you feel.

Think about how people breathe when they are sad and crying. They inhale with short shallow gasps and exhale with either long wails or choppy sobs. If someone is angry, in-breaths are usually constricted and out-breaths are long and forceful. During stress, the breath can actually becomes so shallow that it is almost non-existent. On the other hand, when someone is feeling
good, the breath is calm, deep, and even. The amazing thing about breathing exercises is that the relationship also works in the reverse; by changing the way you breathe, you can also change the way you feel.

Try this: Look up, take a really deep breath, filling up your belly, ribs, and chest. Smile, and say out loud, “I am so depressed.” As you might have noticed, this exercise is fairly comical. What’s even more interesting is the fact that it is almost impossible to breathe deeply and feel depressed while holding an expanded posture. There was a great study done on depression. One group took anti-depressants drugs, the other group simply had to look up, smile, and breathe deeply periodically throughout the day. Surprisingly, the group that held this posture while incorporating the deep breathing had even better results than the group on drugs. How we hold our body powerfully affects how we feel. If you want to feel better, breathe more deeply and smile more. Remember that breathing is a reflection of thought and emotion, the bridge between the mind and the body.

Breath unleashes the vital energies of life. Inhale fully to be inspired and take in more of life; exhale completely to expire the old and no longer useful out of the body. This process refreshes the system in every moment, clearing out stagnant emotions and thoughts and taking in the new possibilities with each breath. If we cannot inhale completely, psychologically we cut ourselves off from new experiences, adventure, and creativity. If we cannot exhale completely, we hold
onto the past and are weighed down by old emotional hurts and wounds. To breathe is to be alive. To breathe deeper is to delve into life more fully.

Think of your breath as Vitamin O, oxygen being the most important nutrient that you take into your body.

Benefits of Deep Breathing:

1. Energizes the entire system.
2. Provides cells with sufficient oxygen for optimal functioning.
3. Clears stress and tension from the muscles.
4. Supports the lymphatic system for cleansing the blood.
5. Detoxifies the blood.
6. Massages the internal organs for better functioning.
7. Increases our lung capacity for more energy.
8. Calms the mind.
9. Facilitates communication between the conscious and unconscious mind.
10. Acts as a bridge between the mind, body, and spirit for balance, harmony, and spiritual growth.
11. Promotes health and healing.
12. Increases communication between the left and right hemispheres of the brain, in other words it stimulates both sides of the brain at the same time.
13. Helps us harmonize our nervous system and reduce stress.
15. Deepens meditation.

Chronic shallow breathing drains our energy and allows stress to take root in our bodies, resulting in tight muscles and tension. Most of us are unaware that our respiratory systems are chronically constricted. In fact, medical researchers believe a lack of oxygen in the system is the prime cause of 1.5 million heart attacks each year.
Shallow breathing under-oxygenates the blood, the organs, muscles, glands, and all the cells in the body. Deep breathing helps take pressure off the heart. Deep diaphragmatic breathing acts like another pump to circulate blood more efficiently through the body.

Shallow constricted breathing overworks the heart, suffocates the brain (fifteen to twenty percent of the oxygen goes to the brain), weakens the immune system, leads to disease and premature aging. Many catastrophic illnesses have their roots in chronic under-oxygenation caused by chronic shallow breathing. Under-oxygenation leaves toxins in the blood that are then recirculated throughout the body. Dr. Otto Warbug, winner of two Nobel Prizes for cancer research, explains that cancer has only one prime cause, which is the replacement of normal oxygen restoration for the body’s cells by oxygen deficient respiration. Deep breathing increases oxygen to the cells which is one of the most important factors in living a disease free and energetic life. He goes on to say, “Where cells get enough oxygen, cancer will not, cannot occur.”

Oxygen is our most essential food, the fuel that ignites the essential bodily processes – everything from digestion and assimilation to hormone secretion to numerous brain functions.

**Mouth Breathing versus Nose Breathing**

In qi gong, there is a saying, “The mouth is for eating, the nose, for breathing.” This seems fairly intuitive, yet the majority of us, are sucking in air through the mouth. Energetically, we are not
making use of the amazing health features of the nose. The nose is the body’s primary defense against germs, impurities, dust, and bacteria entering the lungs, the bloodstream and the body. The nose has bacilli-fighting glands, mucous membrane passages, and thousands of filtering hairs to protect the body. The mouth has none of these protective features, and allows a virtually unprotected passage directly into the lungs.

When we breathe through the mouth, there is a tendency to only fill up the chest. When you inhale through the nose, the breath naturally penetrates the body more deeply. Try taking a deep breath through the mouth and notice where you feel the expansion. Now, take a slow deep breath through the nose. Did you notice how the breath is drawn deeper into the body when inhaling through the nose, expanding into the lower abdomen? Breathing through the nose uses the diaphragm, the most natural, healthy way to breathe. Watch the way babies and children breathe: their abdomens and rib cage naturally expand and contract.

Though the lungs have a total air capacity of about 5,000 milliliters, the average breath is only about 500 milliliters. But we can learn to inhale much more air than we normally do. With the proper breathing techniques, we can almost double our breathing capacity, taking in twice the amount of energy per breath.

The proper functioning of every cell in our body depends upon the quality of our breathing. Breathing is the dance of life, uniting all living things in a necessary symbiotic life-support system. We live on the exhaled oxygen of plants; plants live on our exhaled carbon dioxide.
Every breath reveals interdependence with the environment. We live in an ocean of energy. Life offers each of us a full portion of vitality. Why decline this abundance of life-force through shallow breathing? Why breathe just enough to get by, when you can breathe deep enough to truly thrive?

{Evening Photo: 131}

**Magic Breathing, the Wave Technique:**

Think of the tide of the ocean lapping up onto the shore. The water rolls in, pauses, then returns to the ocean. Between the incoming and outgoing tide there is a lull— a stillness before movement. This is how we should breathe, mirroring the movement of the tide.

As you will soon experience, the movement of the breath flows through the entire torso like a wave in the ocean. The breath starts in the lower abdomen, then rises up through the ribs and crests in the chest. On the exhale, the wave of movement descends back down – from the chest, through the ribs and down into the abdomen. Try it for yourself.

1. Find a comfortable position, either sitting up with a straight spine, or lying face up on a comfortable surface. Sitting is preferable and keeps you more alert, but lying down works well too. 
2. Bring your right hand over your navel and the left hand on the center of the sternum at the center of the chest. 
3. Take a deep breath in through the nose. Feel the lower abdomen expand first. 
4. As you continue to inhale, let the breath rise up through the ribs. 
5. Keep inhaling until the breath reaches the upper hand in the chest.
6. Exhale out through the nose.
7. Feel the breath relaxing and descending from the chest.
8. Allow the breath to move down through the ribs.
9. At the end of the exhale, allow the abdomen to move back toward the spine as you squeeze the breath all the way out.
10. At the top of the inhale, allow the breath to pause for one or two seconds.
11. At the bottom of the exhale, allow the breath to pause once again for one or two seconds.
12. A pause in the breath is like the lull of the tide and creates balance in the mind and energy in the body.
13. Continue taking these full deep breaths.
14. Take at least seven breaths. You will start to feel the benefits almost immediately. If you can do this exercise for seven minutes, it’s even better.

Meditation – Coming Back to Your Center

Some people, when they think of meditation, imagine an old man sitting under a tree with a loin cloth and a long beard in search of enlightenment. Or, some think of meditation as boring, an impractical waste of time in our modern world. Whatever your thoughts are about the subject, I want to spark your curiosity and explain to you the numerous and practical benefits of meditation in your daily life. This section of the book will show you how meditation can be one of the most rewarding and healthy activities in your daily routine. It will also give you a simple Seven Minute Meditation.

Think of meditation as a mini-vacation from the fast-paced, intense, emotionally draining world we live in. It is a journey, an inner journey where you will discover peace, tranquility and a state of deep relaxation.
Meditation is an exploration of your own inner potential. We all want more energy, greater health, deeper understanding, more joy, and more fulfillment. These qualities already exist. You don’t have to create them. Meditation is a practice of unwinding and coming back to a place of being centered and balanced. It is a natural remedy, a form of relaxation that benefits the mind/body system in a myriad of ways.

This section, like most in the book, isn’t about going into the history or the countless techniques developed over the centuries. The purpose here is to distill meditation into a practical technique that will give you more energy and less stress. It is as simple as that, nothing too complex.

Meditation offers dozens of scientifically proven benefits. The ancient Eastern traditions suggest that the real cause of suffering and stress is not what happens to you, but how your mind responds to it.

In the East the incessant chatter in the mind is often referred to as “the Monkey Mind.” The analogy compares the mind to a monkey swinging uncontrollably from branch to branch – from idea to idea, from plan to plan, from this memory to that, from thought to emotion – without ever calming down. This mental turbulence leaves little room for creativity or intuitive thinking. In fact, psychological research says that about 95 percent of the thoughts we have today are the same thoughts we had yesterday. Meditation moves us beyond the habitual mental patterns and opens our minds to a deeper potential that we all have within.
Mind/body medicine reiterates what Taoist sages and yogis have been telling us for millennia – your body and your mind form one seamless and inseparable whole. When your thoughts keep leaping like the proverbial monkey from worry to worry, your body responds by tightening and tensing. Over time, this contraction creates stagnation in the energy system that eventually leads to pain and disease.

Meditation is simple, but requires discipline. Calming the mind is elusive, like grabbing at water and watching it slip through our fingers.

As our Seven Minute routine reminds us, the more you reconnect with your deeper self, the more you infuse your body and mind with life energy and healing. And, as researchers have proven again and again, this life-giving energy mobilizes your body’s healing resources, bolsters your immune system, and naturally facilitates the process of repair and renewal.

Meditation has been used for thousands of years as a way to tap into the body and mind’s innate healing capacity. By allowing the body to move into a state of deep relaxation and the mind to enter into a calm and clear space, the entire system returns to a state of equilibrium. Meditation is focused relaxation, the dynamic balance between tranquility and being full of energy.

Why spend seven minutes or more of your limited free time each day to quiet your mind and deepen your breath? You could be lifting weights, jogging on a treadmill, or surfing the Internet. Here Are Seven Good Reasons:
• **Rejuvenating the Body**: Meditation lowers blood pressure, releases stress from the muscles, and eases tension.

• **Calming the Mind**: An agitated mind inevitably produces emotional turbulence and stress in the body. As the mind settles, relaxes, and opens during meditation, stress evaporates from the system.

• **Experiencing Present Moment Awareness**: Getting connected to the beauty in the here and now, stepping out of the hustle and rush from one activity to another, allows for deeper meaning and balance.

• **Improving Relationships**: Meditation can help you feel more connected with others in positive meaningful ways.

• **Experiencing Flow**: Meditation helps you get in the zone where you feel connected to your sense of purpose. Meditation helps you delve into the space of being effortless, that place where life flows joyously.

• **Creating Balance**: Meditation can be a means of creating harmony and the feeling of being centered and grounded. Life can be chaotic, stressful, and full of change. Meditation is an antidote to discovering harmony amongst the chaos.

• **Enhancing Performance**: Studies have shown that basic meditation practice alone can enhance perceptual clarity, creativity, self-actualization, and many of the other factors that contribute to superior performance.

The paradox of meditation is that it seems to be an inconsequential activity, yet it eventually leads to so many amazing benefits. In our modern lifestyle, your body may feel perpetually braced against the next onslaught of stress and responsibilities, making it extremely challenging to relax and enjoy life. Meditation can provide a simple but powerful antidote. Meditation gives you inner resources to deal with difficult circumstances and the stress these situations evoke. Meditation practice elicits a state of balance and tranquility, allowing you to shed problems and slough off stress like old skin.

**How Meditation Heals:**
To begin with, meditation, like many of the techniques in this book, is preventative. By teaching you how to relax your body and calm your mind, meditation helps you to avoid getting sick in the first place. Meditation restores balance and harmony within by slowing the mind, regulating the breath, and focusing the intent.

Most physicians recognize the relevance of psychological factors and the importance of relaxation and stress reduction in maintaining health. In fact, the emerging field of mindbody medicine developed in the 1970s when scientists studying the abilities of Eastern-trained meditators began to realize that the mind can have an extraordinary effect on the body. More recently, researchers studying immune response have shown that the immune system and the nervous system are inextricably intertwined and that psychological and emotional stress can suppress immune function, encouraging the growth or spread of immune related disorders such as cancer and autoimmune diseases.

Herbet Benson, a cardiologist and professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School, coined the term “The Relaxation Response.” Benson pioneered the field of mind-body medicine with the publication of his best seller The Relaxation Response in 1975. Benson studied meditation and how it induced relaxation. Participants in this meditative state experienced a bodily response of relaxation. The benefit was a reduction in stress through the counteraction of the fight-or-flight response. In subsequent studies, Benson found that the Relaxation Response had a beneficial effect on hypertension, headaches, heart disease, alcohol consumption, anxiety, and PMS.
The autonomic nervous system, which regulates vital internal processes, becomes more stable, integrated, and adaptable, as indicated by its increased ability to recover rapidly from the effects of stress.

This body of research into the benefits of meditation is extensive and cross validated from many sources. For example, the finding that the Transcendental Meditation (a type of meditation using a mantra) programs decrease stress is validated by physiological changes such as decreased cortisol (the major stress hormone), decreased muscle tension, normalization of blood pressure, increased autonomic stability, and increased EEG coherence. At the same time, a variety of psychological changes also indicate decreased stress, including decreased anxiety and depression, decreased post-traumatic stress syndrome, and increased self-actualization.

Research has also found that meditators in their mid-fifties have a biological age twelve years younger than their chronological age. This means that if you were fifty-five years-old, your body would be functioning as if you were forty-three years-old. As we stated before, aging is accelerated by stress. By minimizing wear and tear caused by stress, meditation promotes both good health and greater youthfulness.

{Evening Photo: 132 }

**The Seven Minute Meditation**

The Seven Minute Meditation is designed to give you maximum results in the least amount of time. You can set a timer if you want to be exact or just have the intention that you will meditate for seven minutes. Commit to doing nothing more than sitting quietly, doing this visualization and watching what happens. Don't pick up the phone, don't answer the doorbell, don't add
another item to your to-do list. Just sit, breathe, and observe how your body responds to this
guided imagery.

This guided visualization comes from a Taoist meditation technique called the “Inner Smile.”
The Inner Smile adds to the many benefits of meditation by eliciting a subtle smile on the face.
This engages the eighty or so muscles around the eyes, jaw, and temples, sending positive energy
through the body. Whenever you smile, a positive, healing message is sent through the body.
Think of the Inner Smile as a way to awaken the dormant healing energy in the body and the
mind.

To begin:

1. Sit comfortably in a chair or on the floor.
2. Lift through the top of your head so that your spine is straight and tall.
3. Bring your hands on top of your knees or palms together in your lap.
4. Relax and take a few deep breaths.
5. You can incorporate some of the Wave Breathing throughout this meditation.
6. Imagine that you are watching a sunset. Golden light is streaming towards you and
   shining on your face.
7. Feel this light creating an uplifting quality in your face, a smile between your eyes and
   very slightly around the corners of your mouth.
8. As you breathe in, draw this image into your mind.
9. Visualize this light permeating your body, from the face down the neck, from the neck
down your arms, from the arms down through the torso, from the torso down the legs.
10. Direct golden light to wherever you need more healing or more energy.
11. Continue breathing deeply as this light moves through you.
12. Do this for seven minutes.