

Drawing from the Well of Life

The key to perfect equilibrium is to focus on the most basic element – breathing by Ken Rosen M.S. L.A.C.

THE NATURAL CLOCK

Put your watch down. Turn the clock around, and breathe.

Feel your body's natural rhythm, your natural clock, and your vital connection to the world. Focus on each breath. In and out...

Some may wonder why the fuss when breathing is a natural process. Sadly, that is not so; many of us have forgotten the natural act itself.



The word 'breath' comes from the root-word for 'burn' or 'heat' in Chinese. It represents the liberation of steam, heat, or vapour that rises when something is cooking. Likewise, the character for Qi shows a pot of rice cooking and steam rising above it, indicating that the finest and most imperceptible vibration is akin to the air that we breathe.

In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), our lungs are the organs that govern the Qi (energy or breaths) in the body. Described to be a delicate, wet, and fleshy umbrella covering the heart, the lungs govern the rhythm of our breath and our lives. Pumping like bellows around the fire of the heart, the

lungs compress air out of the body and draw in fresh air again.



The Chinese character for lungs represents one organ with two branches. It shows the flesh radical that is part of most organ descriptions. On the right, the second part of the ideogram represents plants, which creep to the ground and branch out. This indicates plant growth and diversification reflecting the natural structure of lung fibres. Within the five-element system, the lungs are related to the metal element. The metal element is reflected in our ability to know what to take in and also what to let go in life.

MOST IMMEDIATE CONNECTION

Breathing is the most natural and is our immediate connection to the world around us. Try holding your breath for over a minute. You will be quickly reminded of the need for, and sanctity of breath. Clear, full and fresh breaths expand and diffuse energy throughout our body.

Because the lungs are the closest intermediary organ between the organism and its environment, they are more susceptible to diseases than any other organs. Lungs that are in good working condition help to regulate qi and increase immunity. Thus, when a body is overburdened with too much dampness (phlegm), the lungs will become congested. When this happens, the body is automatically alerted to decongest itself, often more water can help to dissolve the phlegm and provide for free circulation of qi in the body again. As the old adage goes: "the solution to pollution is dilution".

Breathing is central to all disciplines in life. Whether you are a dancer, a yogi, a meditator, a qigong master, a swimmer or a kick-boxer, conscious breathing improves your practice. In fact, proper breathing technique usually precedes the beginning of any form of training.

"Since Man is created by the Universe, it is the relationship with the Universe which is taught. Everyone depends on the qi (breaths) of Heaven for their life and animation; and on the qi (food) of earth for their sustenance, constitution, and maintenance of their bodily form." Extracted from *The Way of Heaven: Neijing Suwen* translated by Claude Larre. Monkey Press page 19.

“Breathing is the most natural and is our immediate connection to the world around us.”

TAKING HOLD OF ONE'S BREATH

Conscious breathing is the only control we have over the involuntary rhythm of our beating hearts. Slow down your breath, you slow down the beat of your heart; when your breathing slows, so do your thoughts. Slow, full breaths would allow for calmness to flood your whole being. Rapid, shallow breaths tend to create scattered, hurried, and easily excitable sensation in you. The key is to breathe deeply and remain calm even in the face of stressful and tense situations.

Any athlete or opera singer knows that in order to inhale deeply, first you have to exhale fully. In fact, the character for 'breath' in Chinese indicates exhaling first. As is the norm in all things, it is best to make them totally empty before filling them up again with a fresh fill of the same thing. The same applies to the lungs and breathing.

RECLAIM YOUR NATURAL GIFT – PRACTICE

Stand. Sit. Lie down if you can. Expand your chest, lengthen your spine. Imagine your lungs as soft balloons that stretch and expand with super elasticity.

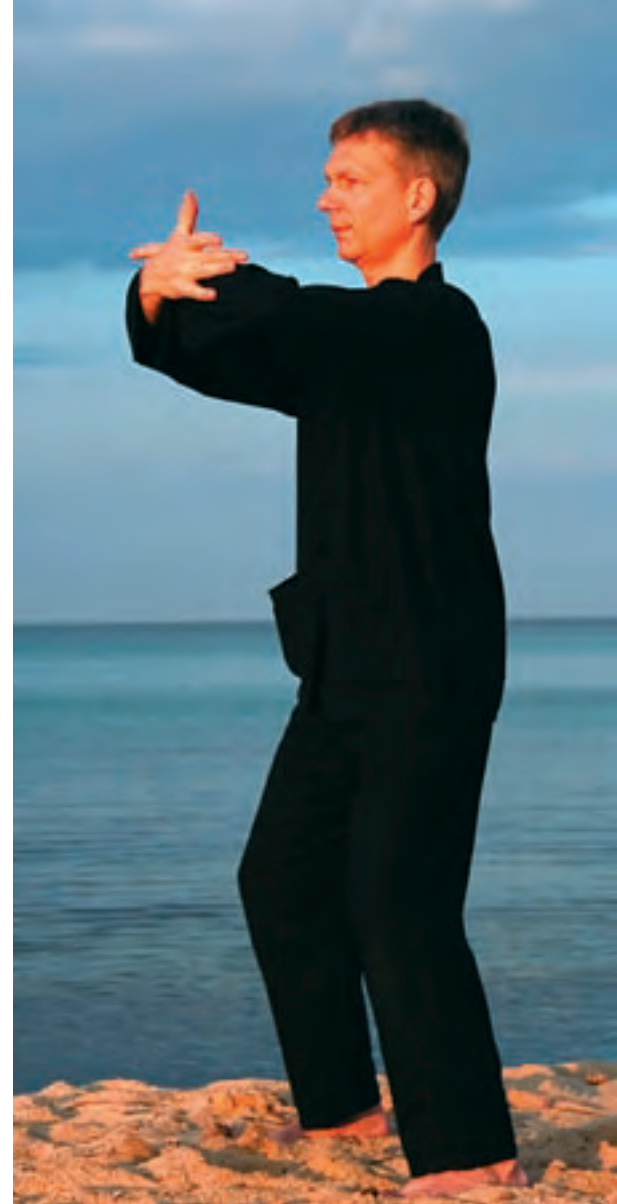
Slowly let your diaphragm contract your abdominal area. Draw it towards your spine. All the muscles in your abdominal area and the sides of your body are now slowly engaged in squeezing stale air out of your body. Pulling your belly button up and toward your spine.

Now, inflate these balloons by expanding your abdominal area, slowly. Fill yourself up with air and then take in more air.

Slowly, let go of the air in a wave-like motion. Again, use your diaphragm as a guiding force with your other abdominal muscles following closely by squeezing out any stale air.

Follow this slow undulating method of breathing for more or less than one minute. Allow for calmness to permeate throughout body, as though, your whole body is breathing with the gentleness of an ocean swell.

The next time you find yourself sighing or even out of breath because of some physical or emotional stress in your life, make a conscious effort to tune into your breath fully, slowly, and deeply. **sa**



The ancient Chinese identified an area just below the navel as a major centre of energy in the body. This area below your belly button is called *Tan tien*, “a field of heaven”, or “ocean of limitless energy”. In Western anatomy, it corresponds to muscles that control the abdominal cavity and diaphragm. Muscular control in this area influences breathing and hence a control over energy for the rest of the body. Try contracting this area just below the navel. Pull it in toward your spine. And, then even more. There are limitless ways to contract all the strength in your abdomen.