

Introductory to the Shaolin Life Method



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The Shaolin Life Method

The Shaolin Live Method is based on the synergic combination of the ancient oriental Taoist and Buddhist practices and methods and the most developed experiences of western live sciences. Utilizing the original sources of the thousand-year old but living experiences of the ancient East and putting them together with a well sorted set of the modern Western sciences, the Method may give a useful toolkit into the hands of the humans of our age. It may be used in order to relief the shocks and the stress, and it may bring some ideas about balancing the spirit and soul, as well.

The easy to learn and use physical practices, the easy to understand meditation methods and their combinations can be practised by everyone, everywhere and every day. No “musts” and “obligatory to do”-s are in the method. All practitioner of the method is free select the appropriate means and tools, even to alter and develop it, in order to harmonize the used techniques to the everyday’s needs and deeds.

Elements of the Shaolin Life Method

Eight Section Brocade Exercises (Ba Duan Jin)

Nowadays, there are numerous versions, seated and standing, of Bodhidharma's exercise sets - including the related "Tendon-Changing and Marrow-Washing" qigong set. Some versions of the 18 Lohan Hands have up to four levels, and scores of movement forms for qigong and martial purposes.

In the Shaolin Life Method we shall follow the way of *Bodhidharma's Lohan Qigong* exercises and will provide and explain all the four levels of *Eight Section Brocade exercises*. The sequence and execution methods of the practices (Nei Dan) are based on the everyday experiences of the Shaolin monks. The related internal principles (Nei Dan) are based and explained in accordance with the Taoist way of philosophy.

Wai Dan (external) level of the Eight Section Brocade exercises. This is the “introductory” level of the system. The students will learn and practise the steps of the *physical exercises* one by one, the appropriate way of the *Dao Yin* (breathing and stretching) and to reach the state of *Wu Ji*. “*Wu Ji stands and body follows the mind*”.

Nei Dan (internal) level of the Eight Section Brocade exercises. This level is complex and worldwide well known Eight Section Brocade. The students will learn to develop the internal Qi and control it to flow in synchrony with the physical moves (*Daoqi Yinti*). “*Wu Ji stands, Qi flows and the body follows the flux*”.

Jing (essential) level of the Eight Section Brocade exercises. The six healing sound will be added to the internal techniques. The practices are extended with the silent sound meditation. This level frequently called as Opening the Gate of Spirit. (Shen Men). This is the point of real internal understanding of the trinity of the human being. “*Soul still listening alone, Wu Ji moves and let the Qi flow to control the moves*”.

Shen (spiritual) level of the Eight Section Brocade exercises. This “phase” is the supreme and mostly meditative level of Eight Section Brocade understanding. A kind of moving meditation. *Mind, spirit, soul and body are separated anymore. The state of spiritual integrity. The*

practitioner “just meditate” about the practices and they will happen. “Soul lives in Wu Ji and just think about the ideas of flux”.

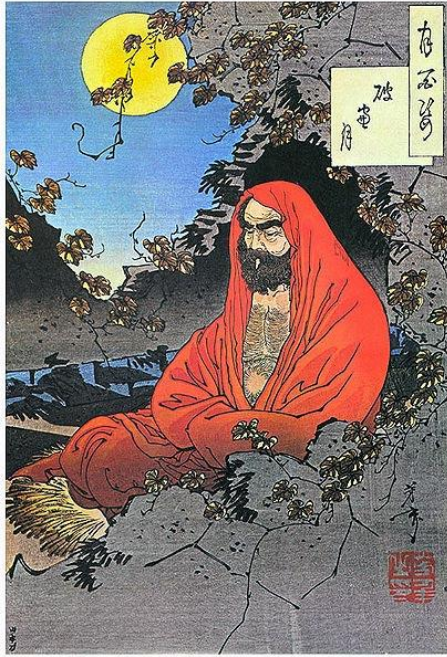


Historical Background of Shaolin Life Method



The use of calisthenics, stretching, and breathing exercises to maintain good health, fight disease, and enhance the quality of life is of great antiquity. This type of physical activity has a long documented history in China. Artwork, medical manuals, folklore, treatises, scriptures and reports on the subject go back over 2,500 years. Likewise, military physical conditioning techniques, military codes of conduct, and training with military weapons (bow, sword, staff, sabre, knife, spear, etc.) are of comparable antiquity. Over many centuries in China, traditional medical remedies (e.g., herbs, massage, diet, heat, acupuncture, exercise routines, etc.) were combined with esoteric and magical Taoist practices. In addition, trade and cultural exchanges between India, Tibet and China transferred Buddhist theory and practices, Tantra, Yoga, Dao-yin, medicinal herbs,

medical techniques, and martial arts training techniques between the three regions. Taoism emphasizes the underlying unity of the individual and the cosmos, living in harmony with the true Way or *Tao*, giving up petty viewpoints, solitary retreats, avoiding violent interference with others, a simple natural diet, natural and compassionate living, sharing with others, seeking insight into "emptiness", seeking a higher understanding or enlightenment, living a healthy lifestyle, storing and circulating energy (*Qi*, *Chi*, *Prana*), practicing meditation, studying and working diligently, and seeking mystical insights. These methods and practices were explored and adapted in China for thousands of years to help maintain good health, to prevent and cure diseases, to restore vitality, to calm the mind, and to enhance the spirit of the patient or practitioner. Seeking ways to enjoy a long, healthy, energetic, ethical and enchanted life were, of course, of widespread and perennial interest. *Ba Duan Jin* first appears in writing in an eighth century Taoist text, *Ten Treatises on Restoring Original Vitality*.



Interesting theories about the origin and development of the Eight Section Brocade Qigong abound. It is likely that ancient dances, military drills and exercises, shamanistic rituals, and Taoist practices were all sources for the specific and formal movement routines of *Dao-yin* or *Qigong*. The ancient terms for these types of *Qigong* or *Chi Kung* (energy/qi/breath training) fitness exercises were *Dao Yin* (breathing and stretching) or *Daoqi Yinti* (guide the *qi* and stretch the body). Literature that talks about such health and fitness exercise postures or routines, with some movements quite similar to movements in the Eight Section Brocade, goes back nearly 2,150 years.

One tradition is that the Buddhist teacher, *Bodhidharma* (448-527 CE), the famous founder and Grand Master of *Chan* (Zen), introduced a set of 18 exercises to the Buddhist monks at the Shaolin Temple. These are known as the "Eighteen Hands of the Lohan." This Shaolin *Lohan Qigong* (the art of the breath of the

enlightened ones) is an internal set of exercises for cultivating the "three treasures" of *qi* (vital energy), *jing* (essence), and *shen* (spirit). The first eight Lohan Hands are the same as the eight exercises in a famous set of chi kung exercises called the *Eight Pieces of Brocade*.



During the Southern Sung Dynasty in China (1177 - 1279 A.D.), General Yeuh Fei developed a set of exercises that were used to train his troops, and they were one source of an Eight Section Brocade style. He recorded each of the movements in the form of a poem that explained its execution and purpose, and taught them to his soldiers to improve their health, stamina and martial art skills.

In more recent centuries, eight of the Lohan exercises, done with far less speed and force, became widely used as a warm-up exercise set in many soft style internal martial arts, or in parts of other Chi Kung practice routines; and, became widely known as the *Eight Section Brocade* or *Eight Treasures Exercises*. The soft qigong style of the Eight Section Brocade, emphasizing Taoist exercise methods and the aims of inner qigong, and general bodily and mental health benefits, is arguably the most popular qigong exercise set now practiced all around the world.

Parts of Eight Section Brocade exercises in the Shaolin Life Method

Starting and Resting Position: *Wu Ji*

This posture is often called the "Wu Ji Posture" in Taijiquan. It is the resting position, the position before any motion begins, a state of "grand emptiness." It is the primordial condition - empty, free, motionless, without qualities. It precedes the movement of Yin/Yang both logically and temporally. The Chinese Classics talk of *Wu Ji* giving birth to *Tai Ji*, emptiness transforming itself into the manifold of cyclic dualities.

1. Pressing the Heavens with Two Hands

Health Benefits:

Deep soft breathing helps to lower your heartbeat and blood pressure. Stretching helps contribute to the relaxation of stiff and tense muscles. Standing up straight helps realign the back muscles and the spine. In traditional Chinese medical theory this movement helps regulate and improve the heart, lungs, stomach, spleen, and liver. It stimulates the internal organs in the upper trunk area. The Triple Warmer or Triple Burner (*Sanjiao*) refers to the heart, lungs, and stomach. Clear and peaceful mind reduces negative stress on the body. Shoulders and triceps are exercised a little. Bending the knees exercises the front thighs.

2. Drawing the Bow and Letting the Arrow Fly

Health Benefits:

Horse stances condition and strengthen the legs, knees, waist and back muscles. Shoulders, biceps and forearms are conditioned and strengthened. In traditional Chinese medical theory this movement helps regulate and improve the kidneys. Balance and brain functions are improved by coordinated movements. Stretching helps contribute to the relaxation of stiff and tense muscles. Standing up straight in a horse stance helps realign the back muscles and the spine. A clear and peaceful mind reduces negative stress on the body. Increased heart rate and breathing rate provide some cardiovascular benefit. Useful imagery can have positive effects on mental functioning and performance. Using both sides of the body (mirroring in a movement form) can have positive effects on the structural alignment of the body and enhance coordination. Slow, deep and regular breathing positively affects mood, energy levels, and alertness; as well as improving the mechanical functioning of the lungs. Exercises the eye muscles.

3. Separating Heaven and Earth

Health Benefits

Conditioning and stretching the arm, shoulder, back, and abdominal muscles. Opening up the chest for deeper breathing. In traditional Chinese medical theory this movement helps regulate and improve the spleen and stomach. Rotating and bending the wrists are part of many spiral energy techniques. Balance and brain functions are improved by coordinated movements. Stretching helps contribute to the relaxation of stiff and tense muscles. A clear and peaceful mind reduces negative stress on the body. Increased heart rate and breathing rate provide some cardiovascular benefit. Using both sides of the body (mirroring in a movement form) can have positive effects on the structural alignment of the body and enhance

coordination Slow, deep and regular breathing positively effects mood, energy levels, and alertness; as well as improving the mechanical functioning of the lungs.

4. The Wise Owl Gazes Backward

Health Benefits

Exercises the neck muscles. Exercises the eye muscles. Balance and brain functions are improved by coordinated movements. Stretching helps contribute to the relaxation of stiff and tense muscles. A clear and peaceful mind reduces negative stress on the body. Using both sides of the body (mirroring in a movement form) can have positive effects on the structural alignment of the body and enhance coordination Slow, deep and regular breathing brings extra oxygen into your blood.

5. Punching with Angry Gaze

Health Benefits

Horse stances strengthen the thighs, back, and cardiovascular system. Shoulders and wrists are exercised. Balance and coordination are improved Angry and tense feelings are dispelled eye muscles and face muscles are exercised. Breathing is deep and frequent - additional oxygen is supplied to the blood. In traditional Chinese medical theory this movement helps stimulate and revitalize the liver Emulation of the fighting spirit helps engender courage and toughness.

7. The Big Bear Turns from Side to Side

Health Benefits

Most of the qigong and traditional Chinese medical literature says that this exercise benefits the heart, and gets rid of "heart fire." Exercising the lungs (metal) helps absorb the heat and control the fire, the heart fire - heartburn (*Hsin For* - heart fire). The horse stance will strengthen and condition the legs and lower back. Movingwhile in deeper horse stances will have some aerobic conditioning effect if the exercise is done with many repetitions. Bending and turning at the waist will strengthen and stretch the hip, abdominal, and lower back muscles The upper back and triceps will be tightened and stretched as you turn and look forward when facing the side. The spine is gently turned to effect realignment and prevent stiffness

7. Touching the Toes then Bending Backwards

Health benefits

Stretching and lengthening the muscles of the lower back. Inversions bring more blood into the upper torso. Works both the quadriceps and hamstrings. Both hip flexors and abductors are challenged. Massage increases circulation and feelings of pleasure to the lower back area. Back bends strengthen both the abdominal and lower back muscles. Stimulates various meridians in the body.

8. Bouncing on the Toes

Health Benefits

The calves and thighs are exercised. Raising your heel up and down using the resistance of your bodyweight and/or additional weights will strengthen and enlarge the calf muscles. In Chinese medical theory, bouncing in this manner stimulates the immune system and helps rid the body of many diseases. The hips and lower back are exercised. Stretching and lengthening the spine can align and strengthen the back. The muscles in the feet and ankles are exercised and stretched. The Achilles tendons are stretched. Leg muscles are strengthened as more work is done on one leg.