CHINESE THERAPEUTIC MOVEMENTS

Introduction

These ancient Chinese folk exercises are selected from hundreds that were used therapeutically by those injured from the martial arts. I learned most of the exercises from Nirtan Lim (who learned them from his teacher, Master Kwan Sai-Hung.) They have been edited and arranged to provide a simple stretch and warm-up of about 10-15 minutes in the morning. The write-up is most useful after one has seen the exercises demonstrated and performed them oneself.

The exercises work to gently adjust and stretch the connective tissue throughout the body so that it provides the proper accommodation for the position of bones, ligaments, muscles and organs. Connective tissue holds every structure in the body. If the connective tissue is out of alignment (like a rumpled suit of clothes), then blood, lymph, ground substance and the other fluids of the body have difficulty reaching their destinations. Muscles, ligaments, tendons, nerves and organs become "dried out". Fatigue comes more quickly; posture and relationship to the earth suffers - causing even more fatigue (especially in areas like the lower back, base of the neck and shoulders.) These exercises lightly stretch the connective tissue in all directions toward the periphery, so that it resettles in its natural position. The gentleness of the exercise is essential to their neuro-physiological effects.

Do each exercise several times (in each direction where applicable), beginning with 3-4 and working up to 12-16. The breath should be natural and through the nostrils, except for exercises 12, 13, and 14, where the exhalation is through the mouth. In many cases the exercises produce an "internal breath" and massage, which is part of the Chinese breathing science (Chi Gung.) This is part of *feeling* each movement, rather than just "going through the motions." Attention should be given throughout to one's relationship to the earth and how that produces the "posture" that supports one.

-- Neil Douglas-Klotz

Before beginning, allow yourself to feel your feet in the earth, knees soft, open from the sides, front and back to the horizon. Inhale chi (life energy), as you exhale, absorb it.

1. SMALL CIRCLES WITH THE TOP OF THE HEAD - Bring your awareness to the top of your head. Begin to imagine a thread connecting your crown with the top of the sky. Feel your neck long and lifted and yet completely relaxed. Now begin to make very small circles in a clockwise direction, as if you are gently opening the top of a very small bottle. Breathe naturally. Make an equal number of circles in a counter-clockwise direction.

2. CHIN TO CHEST AND BACK - Keeping the neck long and lifted, begin to gently bring your chin to your chest. Do not force or collapse. Bring the chin back to position and bring the back of the head toward the backbone, still keeping the neck long and lifted. Remember to breathe. When you've completed a cycle, bring your head to center and relax.

3. EAR TO SHOULDER AND RETURN - Keeping the neck long and lifted, allow the right ear to gently lower towards the right shoulder. The shoulder should remain still. Allow the weight of the head to do most of the stretch. Breathe. Gently bring the head back to center. Allow the left ear to gently lower towards the left shoulder. Continue breathing. Gently bring the head back to center and relax.

4. BIG CIRCLES WITH THE TOP OF THE HEAD - Check the posture. Feel the spine, the neck, the head gently lifted upward. Now begin to make big circles leading with the head. First in a clockwise direction. Then in a counter-clockwise direction. Remember to breathe.

5. SHOULDER ROLLS - Check the posture. Begin rolling both shoulders first in a backward direction. Experience what it is like to find the balance between forcing and collapsing. Begin the shoulder rolls in the opposite direction. Let the breath be natural. This stretch loosens the entire shoulder girdle.

6. ONE SHOULDER GOES BACK - Check the posture. Begin to bring the right shoulder up and backwards in a circular motion. Allow it to drop around on its own weight. Experience the feeling of the shoulder moving up to the top of its arc and then letting go on its own. Move in both directions. Breathe. Now the left shoulder first in one direction, then in the opposite direction.

7. ONE SHOULDER MOVES BACK AS OTHER SHOULDER ROLLS FORWARD - Check the posture. Widen the stance to allow more sway in the upper body. Gently begin in one direction. Experience the chest loosening, feel the lungs receiving a massage. Now move slowly in the other direction. Notice how your breathing can be directed by the gentle, rhythmic movement.

8. BEATING THE HEAVENLY DRUM - Using a movement that extends to include the shoulder and upper back, gently mime beating a drum, alternating arms, and continuing to loosen shoulders. Hands hold the "drumsticks," and the "drum head" is about 1Ω to 2 feet in front of you at midriff level. Arms and hands are soft and relaxed.

9. MONK WIPING SNOWFLAKES FROM FOREHEAD - Using the same movement as in exercise 7, above, begin to bring the back of the hand toward the face and wipe an imaginary snowflake from the forehead, first with the right hand, then with the left hand. Do the movement slowly at first, then increase the speed. Experience the wider movement to the rib cage. Other way. Palm of hand leads, first slow, then faster. Remember to breathe.

10. CIRCLE FROM BASE OF MID-STERNUM OR HEART - Remain long and lifted with crown connected by a thread to the top of the sky. Now focus your attention on the heart center. Allow your heart to lead the movement as you begin to circle the upper body first to the right, then to the left. Remember to breathe.
11. CLAW/ BEAK/ PAW - Starting with the right hand. Spread the fingers and turn fingers slightly inward like a tiger's claw. Move fingers together and rotate wrist to the outside as if you are forming a bird's beak pointing to the outside. Bring fingers together into a fist while rotating wrist back to return position. Image a bear's paw. The wrist has completed a full rotation. Other direction. Now left hand makes claw/beak/ paw. Alternate right and left hands. Now both hands together in both directions. Then both hands together in freeform movement.
12. TIGER GREETS THE DAWN (from heart) - Hands are positioned like tiger's claws (exercise 11, above.) Beginning with bent elbows, extend hands outward from the heart, circle around towards the back, rotating hands inward, and then extend again from the heart. Breathe out through mouth as the arms extend.
13. TIGER GREETS THE DAWN (from sky) - Hands are positioned like tiger's claws. Reach both hands up towards the sky. Now move to the heart and out. Exhale through mouth as arms extend.
14. DRAGON EMBRACES THE SKY, TOUCHES EARTH - Place feet about shoulder distance apart. Check posture. Hands are raised to sky with palms up. Gently shift weight from both feet to right foot. Turn palms to the earth, rotate hands inward and lower them. Then as you raise palms, shift weight to left, until both feet experience the weight evenly. Shift weight to left foot, as palms turn to the earth and extend downward. Continue, exhaling through the mouth. Slow, easy movements. Feel the vastness of the dragon as it lightly touches the earth.
15. SLAPPING ARMS - Check the posture. With the legs and hips remaining fairly still, begin slowly turning the body from side to side. The upper body is twisting smoothly around to the right, then around to the left. Let the arms swing loosely and begin to bring legs and hips into motion. Notice how the arms can gently touch the hips as you twist. Allow the arms to move upward until they gently touch the ribs as you twist. Now the shoulders. And over the shoulders.
16. LUMINOUS EGG OF BREATH/ TRANSITION TO LOWER TORSO - Interlace loosely held fingers with palms facing inward. Hands and arms extend overhead and come down in a shape of an oval, as one breathes out. The oval is completed as one breathes in and the hands come up along the body. In a coordinated movement begin to bring hips forward as arms go down and backward as arms go up. As you find comfort in the practice begin to engage the entire spine, moving it into convex and into concave directions

as the arms move also in both directions. Feel a luminous egg created by your breathing and movement, connecting the lower (hara) and upper centers.

17. HAWK VERTICAL FLYING - Place right foot forward and left perpendicular and back. Bend over halfway with arms out, palms up. Begin rotating hips. Arms follow through with movement of the hips. Same arm as hip moves forward. Repeat several times. Step back with right foot and repeat with left foot forward.

18. BUZZARD CLEANING BEAK - Feet are parallel to each other. Hands are loosely held like wings. Begin making figure-eight-movements with the back and arms. Follow through with the arms and hands as a buzzard cleaning its beak. This relaxes the lower back and massages the kidneys.

19. OLD WOMAN WITH STICK - Still bent slightly forward from exercise 18, mime holding a stick in one hand, hand held about shoulder high. Begin walking forward in small, swaying steps, rocking gently from side to side with each step, still softening lower back. Every few steps the Old Woman gives a kick forward, backward, or to the side with one or the other foot.

20. ANGRY EYES TO CATCH FLIES - Furrow the brow over the third eye area to activate the kidney meridian. Right arm reaches to the left across the body about shoulder-high, torso twisting gently, and right hand "catches a fly" by all four fingers snapping closed against the thumb. Then the left arm reaches across to the right, left hand "catching a fly." Continue alternating arms, gradually increasing the twisting of the body to reach further and further behind each shoulder.

21. FIGURE 8'S WITH HIPS - With feet parallel about shoulder width apart, place hands on hips and begin moving hips in a Figure 8 pattern. First right hip comes forward and then back to the right, then left hip comes forward and then back to the left, each movement flowing into the next. Shoulders, knees, and ankles are soft and relaxed, and respond to the movement of the hips.

22. HIP CIRCLES - Still with hands on hips, rotate hips in a small circle forward, parallel to the side of the body (as one hip goes forward the other goes back). Then reverse direction with hips rotating backward. This movement allows for an inner breath that goes all the way to the base of the spine.

23. BIG CIRCLES/ UPPER BODY - With feet parallel, place hands on lower back near the area where kidneys are located. Bend forward in three small movements. Now rotate the hips keeping the head long and lifted as though connected by a thread to the sky. Knees stay bent throughout the rotation so that no strain is put on the lower back. Again feel the whole spine pulled lightly upward as through by a thread. Both directions.

24. STANDING IN THE BARREL - Place feet together. This time keep the head more or less stationary like a top, and spiral the movement down a little more towards the hips. Begin rotating the hips clockwise with hands still on lower

back, hips first touch front of the imaginary barrel, then side, then back, then other side. After a few repetitions, smooth the movement out, sliding hips sliding along the entire circumference of the imaginary barrel. Repeat in other direction.

25. KNEE ROTATION - Continue spiral motion. Move hands to the knees. Now rotate the knees, first to the right, then to the left. Breathe.

26. CHINESE CHARLESTON - Feet stay together. Begin opening the knees in the front and closing them in the back. Now close them in the front and open them in the back. Breathe.

27. SOUP STIRRING - Using a chair or wall for balance, if necessary, bring the right knee to the chest while balancing weight on the left foot. Begin rotating the lower leg first to the right, then to the left. Now stir from the bottom, moving the lower leg back and forth. Bring right leg down and repeat with the other side.

28. ANKLE CIRCLING (SOUP STIRRING WITH FOOT) - Lft right foot slightly while balancing weight on the left. Rotate right ankle to right, to left. Move ankle back and forth. Change sides and begin ankle rotations with opposite foot. Circle to right, circle to left. Move ankle back and forth. (This, too, can be done in a chair.)

29. ARCHING UP - Weight is distributed evenly over both feet. Scrunch the toes of both feet in and under, stretching the arches up. Hold briefly. Now spread and flex out the toes, to exercise the arches in both directions. Hold briefly. Continue alternating stretches in and out.

30. TYPEWRITER TOES - Stand with the feet fully planted on the earth. Have the weight evenly distributed along both feet. Begin to lift the little toes, the fourth toes, third, second and big toes. Notice how the movement is rolling from the outside of the feet to the inside. Now return from the big toes to the little toes, from the inside to the outside of both feet. Continue. Let the entire foot move.

31. CHINESE JOGGING – Standing upright, arms and shoulders relaxed, knees flexed, begin bouncing the body gently up and down. Balls of the feet remain on the ground, but the heels may rise slightly with each bounce.

32. GECKO CLIMBING TREE – Stand with feet about shoulder width apart, knees soft, hands held softly open, palms facing out and parallel to chest. Move first right hand across body to the left, then left hand across body to the right, continuing to alternate, hands moving higher and higher on each repetition, while the hips and head gently rock from side to side, snaking the spine in a soft zigzag movement. When the hands reach their highest point overhead, the gecko climbs down the tree gradually; hands moving lower and lower on each repetition, until shoulders hunch slightly. (Lower and mid-back remain upright). Then begin to climb up the tree again. Repeat several times.

33. SPLASHING AND LAUGHING – Feel yourself standing in a pool of water, allow the arms to splash water all around you, laughing fully.

34. LAUGHING FROM CROWN TO BELLY – Start a full laugh with hands above head and progressively laugh down through the body from crown of head to full belly laugh.

35. LAUGHING FROM ABOVE – Look down on yourself as though from sitting on a cloud. View your problems and challenges. Laughing.

36. CONCLUSION – With hands and arms wide and open inhale life energy (chi) and while exhaling gradually bring hands to the *dan tien* (hara). 3x. The third time, feel the chi going all the way through you into the earth. Come to a standing position with both feet on the earth. Be aware of the entire body reconnected. Experience the entire body stretched to its most natural shape. Feel yourself refreshed and revitalized and ready for the rest of the day.

Elemental Purification Breaths

From the Native Middle Eastern Sufi tradition as originally taught by Pir-o-Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan. This interpretation with body awareness attunements by Neil Douglas-Klotz (Murshid Saadi Shakur Chishti).

EARTH: Inhale nose, exhale nose. Focus on rootedness, the feeling of support of the earth through the bones and ligaments. Standing, siting, lying or walking, ask inside: "how do I feel my support? Could I feel more supported anywhere?" Release "burdens," let the earth support. Honor all creation by feeling the bones of our ancestors, upon which we walk. Feel the first awareness in the cosmos of "underneath," the first self or particle. Through this, the earth becomes more conscious of itself through us.

WATER: Inhale nose, exhale mouth. A spring rises from the depths and is drawn up through you to the top, then showers down, over and through all the muscles, connective and digestive tissue--anywhere more flexibility is needed. Stretch and move into any areas of tightness. Consider: "how could I allow more flowingness to be felt there, less holding on?" Honor the water by feeling it return to its source with purity. Feel the first awareness in the cosmos of flow. Through this, the water becomes more conscious of itself through us.

FIRE: Inhale mouth, exhale nose. Awaken the heart-lungs area, feeling the inhalation loosening the solar plexus/diaphragm and the exhalation invigorating the heart. Notice the pulsation of your heart and blood, bringing the old to the heart to be released and carrying the new to all parts of the body. Consider your own sense of purpose: "towards what am I pulsing? What gets my blood moving?" Honor the fire by using it properly--to clarify, not destroy. Feel the first pulse that began the cosmos in you. Through this, the fire becomes more conscious of itself through us.

AIR: Inhale mouth, exhale mouth (all refined). Feel air passing over and as if through you. Allow the pores to open and feel the whole envelope of skin with just air inside and outside. Consider: "how could I feel more lightness and freedom in my being, more ability to change?" Honor the air by moving with it to communicate the child within to all creation. The skin comes from the same developmental layer of the embryo as the brain. Feel the skin open to healthy touch, organizing a new, more free sense of self. Feel the first breath of the cosmos. Through this, the air becomes more conscious of itself through us.

ETHER: Inhale and exhale all the elements together for a few breaths (refined, yet deep or in and out through nose or through nose and mouth together), feeling fully embodied. Breath becomes your own natural breath, like all of the colours of the rainbow. The combination of all the elements is more than the sum of their parts.

Through this breath, nature becomes conscious of itself through you. Allow some of this breath to go wherever needed, into your life as it comes today, anywhere in the earth that a breath of harmony and remembrance of right relationship can be used.

Gradually allow all of the elements to return to their source: their individuality disappears in lucidity, like the rainbow disappearing into clear light.

To conclude take a few breaths in and out feeling "Toward the One" with a feeling of unity in the heart. If done in the morning, consider what you need to do this day. Ask for any clarity and understanding that you need. "We thank the elements and we thank their Source." Ament. Amen. Ameyn. Amin: "May this sense of connection be the ground from which our new growth will spring."

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