



...Those new to t'ai chi AND those wanting to continue their t'ai chi practice are WELCOME to join this community event. In each session we will focus on our breath, engage in gentle movement, learn t'ai chi basic exercises and over time explore t'ai chi postures (movements).

Breath: The Song of T'ai Chi

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Monona Terrace • Group Health Cooperative Complimentary Medicine • Madison Daoguan

PDF of handout is located at communityevents.mononaterrace.com under Health/Wellness Programs, T'ai Chi at Monona Terrace.

All styles of t'ai chi integrate mind, breath and action. It is the mind that guides/integrates the breath and movement. However, not all styles of t'ai chi focus as strongly on the breath as Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan – the style of t'ai chi I study and teach.

In the Yangjia Michuan (Yang Hidden Tradition) style, breath is considered to be the 'song' of t'ai chi. Those leading a t'ai chi session will often call out the inhale and exhale. While it is typically difficult for someone new to t'ai chi to focus on both movement and breath, having the breath in the background helps with later integration. In essence, the person 'singing' the breath is holding the space open for others.

The breathing pattern we engage in is called 'prenatal' breathing. When we inhale the lower part of our body expands. Consider the image of a balloon. When air comes into a balloon, it fills up. When air leaves a balloon, it contracts and relaxes. Some of us have lost the ability to breath as we did in the womb and as a young child. The prenatal breathing exercise (below) will help us return to our natural way of breathing.

PRENATAL BREATHING EXERCISE

- Settle into your body and quiet the mind. A good way to do this is to put your mind in your dantian (lower abdominal area) and focus on your breath.
- Start out by simply being aware of your breath; breathing in any way that is comfortable for you. Notice how the breath comes into your body and how it leaves your body.
- After doing this for a while (few minutes), transition into a breathing pattern where you inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth. As you exhale through the mouth, notice the breath as it gently passes by your lips.

- Keep the breath slow, comfortable and in your own range; meaning within your own lung capacity. In t'ai chi we do not take anything to the extreme, including our breath. This means when you inhale do not bring your breath into your fullest capacity. When you exhale do not deplete yourself of breath, leave a little in reserve.

When inhaling (through the nose)...

- Keeping the chest area quiet and relaxed. Slowly bring the breath deep into your body until you see the dantian (lower abdominal area) slowly expand. Should you find the breath seems to stop at the chest area, no worries. Continue to keep your mind in the dantian as you inhale and follow the directions for the exhale. With time (and ongoing practice) the inhaled breath will find its way deeper in your body.

When exhaling (through the mouth)...

- Have the breath leave your body slowly.
- Allow the rib cage to move down.
- Contract the abdominal muscles towards the spine.
- Lift the muscles on the floor of the pelvis (similar to a kegel exercise).

For a more advanced practice, add the following...

- When inhaling (through the nose) put the tip of the tongue lightly on the roof of the mouth. When exhaling (through the mouth) relax the tongue away from the roof of the mouth.

For more info see Madison Daoguan website [http://madisondaoguan.org] – Meditation.