

Zen Imagery Exercises

Meridian Exercises for Wholesome Living

By Shizuto Masunaga

Beginning and ending position for all Imagery Exercises:

Lying on back - Imagery Breathing

- Close your eyes
- Keep your awareness on your breathing and how your body feels "breath of life".
- Relaxed and still, breathe slowly and deeply through your lower abdomen, your attention focused on your breathing through your hara. (In yoga called Shavasana, or the "corpse pose")
- Now, eyes can be open or closed.
- Arms and legs just comfortably apart, not too far out to the side
- Become entirely detached from the external world
- Tune in to internal events of your body. You may begin feeling various sensations like tingling or buzzing along the course of meridians, which can be regarded as energy flow.

Standing position

- Feet apart slight more than shoulder width - hands over your lower abdomen, just below the navel
- Our waist is our second foundation, "waist" in this case is the hara, the focal point of energy in our lower abdomen from which the Ki in each breath ebbs and flows
- Let a sensation of fullness or weight extend from the hara, down to your feet to firmly support the whole body
- If you become too conscious of your feet, "your Ki will be set on end," to borrow a Japanese expression, this will cause you to feel restless and uneasy. As a result you will find it difficult to stand in one place for any length of time.
- Your body is made ready for movement by standing upright from the reclined position before, the energy in your body has been shifted from a Yin (passive) state to a Yang (active) state.

Conception and Governor Vessels

- These two Basic Exercises represent the two most basic functions of life where the force of Ki (circulating life energy that in Chinese philosophy is thought to be inherent in all things) is directed either to the inside or to the outside (i.e., drawing in or otherwise reaching out).
- Along the center line in the front & back of the body, regulate the flow of energy in all the regular meridians
- Reservoirs of Ki for the Yin and Yang meridians
- These vessels connect the uterus with the kidneys, heart, and brain.

Conception Vessel

- Begin with the stretching of the Yin Conception Vessel to stimulate all six of the Yin meridians to open yourself up to the outside world and external influences, received without resistance
- Energy for movement comes up from the bottom of your feet
- To activate and extend your Ki, picture your hara moving forward as you lean back.
Place both hands against the back of your thighs in a relaxed way to give support as you lean back and let your head tilt back gently.

Lines of tension produced:

In front, along the centerline of the abdomen, from the perineum ending in the middle of the lower jaw. (it connects to both eyes from there)

Governor Vessel

- Second the Yang Governor Vessel, to stimulate the six Yang meridians, your energy is drawn inward.
- Imagine that you are moving your hara, the center of your physical presence, toward your back. Then make your body bend forward as if you were trying to put your head between your legs and reach both arms around your thighs so that your face is hidden.

Lines of tension produced:

Down the center of your back, from the tip of your tailbone (uterus), up and around the top of the head to end up at the midpoint of the upper jaw (gum).

The Organ Related Exercises:

Lung and Large Intestine Meridians

- Stand with your feet apart slightly more than shoulder width. The tips of your toes point slightly outward.
- Put your hands behind your back with the palms facing backward, and hold them together by hooking your thumbs together. Spread your fingers out so that your fingers point as much as possible in opposite directions.
- Keep your knees straight and think of your weight as going mostly on the base of your little toes and bend forward as you exhale. Stretch both arms over yourself, keeping your elbows straight. Imagine that your arms are being pulled away from your back (forward) by someone other than yourself.
- Hold the mental image of Ki energy flowing from the center point of your hara out to your arms and legs.

Lines of tension produced:

Along the back of your legs, abdomen, back, and arms.

Spleen and Stomach Meridians

- Sit in the Seiza position.
- Lean down to the rear, move your feet apart, out from under your buttocks so that your buttocks come to rest on the floor. The knees may raise off the floor when lying all the way back. Just keep your lower legs out to your side next to your hips so that you can keep your knees close together.
- After your back and shoulders are resting on the floor, stretch both arms over your head, interlace your fingers, and turn the palms toward your head. While your knees do not have to be kept together rigidly, keep them together as much as you can with comfort. To make this easier, keep your feet out from under your buttocks and keep your back and hips against the floor as far as comfortable.

Lines of tension produced:

Down the front of your body and along the spine, as well as on both sides of the arms.

Heart and Small Intestine Meridians

- Sit on the floor and place the soles of your feet together in front of you by bending both knees out to the side. Draw your feet in toward yourself as close as you can by grasping them around the toes from the bottom.
- Then bend forward while exhaling, keeping the thighs down as far as possible.
- Actively open your elbows out and to the floor, pulling on your feet so that the arms are part of the stretch

Lines of tension produced:

Heart: on inside of arm, from small finger to armpit

Small intestine: from small finger on outside of arm, over shoulder to clavicle
outside of nose

Kidney and Bladder Meridians

- Heels kept together, toes can be apart.
- Keep your knees straight and try to keep the back of your legs in contact with the floor as much as possible.
- Then bend your upper body forward and reach your arms out toward your toes, letting your palms face outward to the arches so that the thumbs are turned down toward the heels.
- Your head hangs down over your knees and your arms are stretched forward all the way, your toes will be drawn backward

Lines of tension produced:

From your hands and running along your arms then down and back along your legs to your feet.

Heart Constrictor and Triple Heater Meridians

Triple Heater: Kindhearted, stable mind and emotion of joy

Heart Constrictor (also pericardium meridian): Is the heart's protector

- Lotus position of yoga and Zen meditation, legs crossed and each foot is placed on the other thigh, or "half lotus," only one foot is placed on the other thigh, or simply cross-legged. Knees are close to the floor.
- Next cross your arms one over the other and hold the opposite knees. The arm on the same side as the leg on top goes over the top of the other arm.
- Next bend forward and use your arms to gently pull yourself down, your forehead reaches down toward the floor, letting your head hang down.
- Switch arms and legs and do the same

Lines of tension produced:

Along your back and down the outside of your arms and legs.

Liver and Gallbladder Meridians

- Sit on the floor with both legs extended out to either side. Relax and spread your legs as far apart as you can. Keep your knees straight so that the back of your legs stays on the floor
- Next clasp your hands high over your head and turn your palms upward.
- Straighten your elbows and start leaning down to one side, bending down toward one foot. Keep facing forward as you bend down to one side. Instead of turning your torso, face the front and bend down sideways.
- Keep the sit bone/pelvis of the side that is lengthening close to the floor. This creates a more deliberate contraction on the shortening side, essential to activate liver & gallbladder.

Lines of tension produced:

Along the outside of the leg you are leaning toward, down the inside of the opposite leg, and along the side of your body that is fully extended, as well as along the front of your body toward the side that is down.

Lying on back - Imagery Breathing

Relax your whole body and to experience your own breathing.

See in the beginning for details.

More Helpful Hints:

General Orientations of Self-Observation

- Practice slowly and attentively, bring your attention to what happens inside your body and do not become overly concerned with external form
- Imagine/experience the energy flow in the meridians, a "living sensation".
- Move your arms and legs into position for the next exercise before beginning to shift your center of gravity
- Always keep your attention on your breathing and be sensitive to how your body is responding to each exercise
- When the position is reached, let go and do Imagery Breathing and just observe what goes on in your body, let the breath be even.
- If your attention is drawn to one painful area, or if you do not experience a sense of relaxation on the outbreath, you may be too far into the position
- Inhalation: When breathing in, tension, the resistance increases naturally and this tension is most pronounced along the meridian lines. At times this sensation extends from one end of the body to the other. Envision & experience the meridians as something distinct from muscles and nerves. You may feel a pulling sensation in the muscles, or a tingling sensation build up along the meridians. Remain in this position and feel the lines of tension after taking a deep breath, and then slowly let yourself breath out.
- Exhalation: You can feel how the line of tension begins to relax as you exhale. This is the sensation of relaxation accompanying the release of Ki. How much you are able to relax with each exhalation depends entirely on the depth and smoothness of your breathing. Imagine that Ki is being released (like air leaking out of a balloon) as you slowly exhale, feel your whole body slowly relax. Allow the stretch to happen a little bit at a time with each exhalation, reach the farthest point of the stretch at the end of each exhalation.
- Repeat this breathing and stretching routine several times in a row.
- Envision to extend and expand to liberate the energy lying latent within you, a physical expression to release, through the act of stretching, those things which you have been holding inside, an opportunity to get in touch with your body and give expression to your inner being through movement.

Recommendation: Originals, Photos and more Exercises:

New Edition:

Meridian Exercises: The Oriental Way to Health and Vitality – February, 1997
by Shizuto Masunaga

Old Edition:

Zen Imagery Exercises: Meridian Exercises for Wholesome Living– July, 1987
by Shizuto Masunaga