

养生之道

Yang Sheng

Bā Duàn Jǐn

The Eight Sections of Brocade

by Xiaoyao Xingzhe

AS PROMISED, in this issue we will explore the first four moves of the Daoist life-nourishing exercise sequence known as the *Bā Duàn Jǐn* – the Eight Sections of Brocade – so named due to their precious effect on health. Designed to be simple enough for children to learn, and gentle enough for old people, this consists of eight associated exercises that stretch and strengthen the body from top to bottom. The movements also have the intention of opening the major acupuncture channels in the body, including the eight extra channels: the movements often include repeated running of the hands over the pathways of the channel for this purpose.

Bā Duàn Jǐn involves slow and gentle but deliberate stretching of the major tendons and the joints in the body, combining this with mindful breath regulation and relaxation of the body in depth. It also involves specific contraction of the pelvic floor muscles during certain phases of each movement.

To assist recall, there is a mnemonic ode for *Bā Duàn Jǐn* which heads each movement; this will be explained together with the actual sequence of movements.

Each move opens and closes by bringing the feet together, and circling the hands out to your sides, palm up, to shoulder level, while you inhale; then continuing the circle as the palms move to your centre, turn palm down, and press down to your waist, while you exhale. See illustrations 1–3.

The inhale brings in the beneficial qi of your surroundings and lifts it upward in your body, the exhale pushes out bad qi, and helps expel turbidity downward to be absorbed in the earth.

双手托天理三焦

Shuāng shǒu tuō tiān lǐ sān jiāo

Both hands support the sky to regulate the San Jiao

San Jiao means Three Burners, and refers to the three parts of the trunk, the upper burner includes the Lungs and Heart, and metabolises the air that we breathe and mixes it with the blood; the middle burner is the digestion, which transforms the food we eat and sends it around the body for nourishment; and the lower burner is the source of our constitutional energy and reproductive energy. This, of course, is crucial, which is why we focus our mind on the Dan Tian, the Cinnabar Field in the lower belly, to build up energy here, and supplement the constitutional energy underlying all the others.

The first movement — standing with feet comfortably apart — links the hands, palm up, low down below the belt, then lifts them upward over the head, turning them so that the palms face upward again as they press into the sky. Your eyes look at the palms, and then the backs of the hands when they reach over the head. The mind should continue to stretch

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upward, the Daoists say, even when the body can reach no farther. As the palms reach their peak, however, they smoothly break apart and continue their circle downwards, pressing out to the sides as they go, then circle in to link again below the belt.

This, like each move, is repeated nine times, or a multiple of nine. Again, in each move when there is an upward movement, the breath is inhaled and the anus is contracted; on the downward movement the breath is exhaled and the anus relaxed.

This sequence is shown in illustrations 4-7.

After nine times, you close up, as shown in illustrations 1-3.

The hands lifting past the 'three burners' helps to regulate all the movements of energy, which need to link these burners and their functions into a seamless whole. The emphasis on lifting the anus ensures that the qi of the lower burner rises, rather than leaking out the bottom. As the hands descend, this again ensures that qi moves downward through each of the burners. The lifting brings up the stable energy of the Earth, while the descending carries the qi of Heaven into the body, while simultaneously driving 'bad' qi downward and out through the legs and feet. This is augmented by the breath out.

左右开胸如射雕

Zuǒ yòu kāi xiōng rú shè diāo

Left and right opening the chest like shooting a bolt (holding a bow)

This is also called the "Shaolin archer": One stands with feet somewhat wider apart (depending upon your fitness, the lower the better), while the arms cross in front of the chest. Then the left hand, palm facing away from you and fingers pointing upward, pushes out, while your right hand, lightly curled, draws back as if pulling back a bowstring; while you push out the left hand your head turns to look left as if aiming over the bow. The chest should feel a slight stretch at the completion of the move.

Without moving the feet, the arms then circle down and around to cross in front of the chest again, as you do the same move to the right.

This sequence is shown in illustrations 8-11.

After nine times (counting a single side as one), you close up, as shown in illustrations 1-3.

This claims nothing more than to "open the ancestral qi of the chest". How it does this is straightforward: just by stretching the chest. Hidden within, however is the stretching of the tendons of the inner forearms, by extending the fingers upward as if holding a bow. What this does is stimulate the Pericardium channel. The Pericardium is the envelope surrounding the Heart (These organ names are capitalised to show that they do *not* refer to the anatomical organs, but rather to the Chinese medical concept). How it all holds together is this:

The ancestral qi (zong qi) is the combination of the air that we breath with the qi derived from food and drink, which is carried from the digestion upwards to the chest (remember the action of the first movement, regulating the San Jiao). This combining is accomplished by the actions of the Lungs, naturally, and the Heart, which collects part of this qi to provide the nourishment found in blood. Once the ancestral qi is formed, it is carried around the body by the descending action of the Lung energy, assisted by the Liver, which helps all qi movement. The Pericardium channel has a relationship with the Liver channel, in that it shares a particular type of moving energy.

Thus the Lungs, the Heart, the Pericardium, and the Liver are all supported in the function of promoting the production and the circulation of the zong qi, also known as the da qi — the great qi. And you thought you were just shooting a bow. There is also a pelvic floor lift and contraction of the anus here, too, which like the previous movement (and indeed all the movements) functions to hold in the qi and prevent leakage downward.

Our pilgrim, early New Year's morning



调理脾胃需单举

Tiáo lǐ Pí Wèi xū dān jǔ

Regulating the Spleen and Stomach requires single [hand] lifting

The move begins with holding the Taichi ball, gathering qi, then lifting this up on first one side then the other. Feet are just shoulder width apart, and left hand is over the right to begin with. Then the right hand lifts up as the left presses downward, the right palm turning over at ear level to continue palm up until it reaches the apex, then it turns over and presses gently palm downward as the left hand lifts palm up, turning over at the ear to continue palm up to the top of its stretch.

Again the mind continues the stretch, even though each palm can no longer reach higher. Here too the lower palm presses strongly downward. The effect is a strong stretch of the ribs on each side.

This sequence is shown in illustrations 12–15.

After nine times (counting one side as one time), you close up, as shown in illustrations 1–3.

Note that the hand turns palm up as it passes the ear, with the thumb in front of the ear and the fingers behind. This area of the ear holds a number of channel connections, particularly the San Jiao (Three Burners) channel and the Gall Bladder channel.

As the hands reach the end of their stretch, they turn slightly in toward the body, forming a Taichi circle, the centre of which crosses the Spleen and Stomach area.

This move restores the ascent of clear Spleen qi and the descent of turbid Stomach qi, thus assisting the distribution of qi and blood throughout the body. At the same time, Gall Bladder and Liver qi are stimulated through the rib stretches, as Wood assists Earth to fulfil its function.

五劳七伤往后瞧

Wǔ láo qī shāng wǎng hòu qiáo

Look backward [to treat] the Five Exhaustions and the Seven Injuries

A stiff neck greatly reduces blood flow to the head and brain, causing exhaustion, loss of memory and concentration, headaches, and many other problems. This move is particularly designed to prevent this, and in some *Ba Duan Jin* variations, only the head itself is moved, without the arms. The key point in doing the movement correctly is to keep the eyes level when looking around to the back.

In beginning the move, feet are comfortably shoulder-width apart. Hands are palm down below the belt, with the fingertips pointing at each other, giving a stretch through the wrists and forearms.

The move begins by turning the head and eyes to look over the right shoulder, keeping the eyes looking levelly at the horizon behind you (ie. not looking down at the ground behind you). The eyes should continue to turn as far as they can.

At the same time, the hands – the wrists staying close to the hips – turn the fingertips out and down to point at the ground to the side and behind the feet. This should cause an aching stretch in the wrist.

One then returns the eyes and fingertips to the original position before repeating on the other side. As the head comes back to the front, the chin should describe a slight arc upward, which is very comfortable for the neck.

Then repeat on the left.

This sequence is shown in illustrations 16–19.

After nine times, you close up, as shown in illustrations 1–3.

■ Next issue of *The Lantern*: moves 4–8

The mind should continue to stretch upward, the Daoists say, even when the body can reach no farther.

■ Wang Ru-Zheng Laoshi from Beijing teaches Ba Duan Jin and other Daoist exercises in the Exhibition Gardens in Melbourne on Saturdays between 8:45 and 11am.

