

# 养生之道

## Yang Sheng



# Ba Duan Jin

## The Eight Sections of Brocade



*With each punch, the eyes stare at the fist as if furious – this brings energy to the eyes, again stimulating the Liver.*

**T**HIS ARTICLE INTRODUCES the second half of the series of exercises known as Ba Duan Jin – eight sections of brocade. The first half was introduced in the last issue. Thomas Cleary records this about the origin of these exercises:

*Another popular type of exercise, called pa-tuan-chin (baduanjin) or “eight-step brocade,” is said to have been originated by one of the great neo-Taoist wizards, Chung-li Ch’üan (Zhongli Quan) of the T’ang dynasty (618-905). Chung-li is sometimes said to have been a warrior and general of the Han dynasty who gave up his career and went into the mountains to study Taoism ...*

*Like the “play of the five animals” and other ancient systems, the “eight-step brocade” has been modified over the ages, with the result that it now exists in numerous different forms. Generally speaking, however, it can be said that this type of exercise is distinguished by simplicity and flexibility, it can be readily adjusted to suit the physical condition of an individual and it requires little space or time. There are standing and sitting versions, hard and soft versions. Overall, the “eight-step brocade” system of energy maintenance is typically characteristic of the devices of the Complete Reality school descended from Chung-li in being easy to learn and easy to practice, simple yet remarkably effective.<sup>1</sup>*

### 摇头摆尾祛心火

Yáo tóu bái wěi qū xīn hǔo

#### Wagging both the head and tail eliminates Heart fire

This is the fifth movement, and the most strenuous move in the set of eight. It need not be done to the full count of nine: one does what is comfortable. The key requirement is that, without bobbing up and down – ie. keeping the height of the hips constant – one moves the head through an arc, the chin almost touching the chest in the middle of the arc, while the back of the head and neck press up and out at each end of the arc, the eyes looking at the acupuncture point Yongquan (K-1) on the sole of the opposite foot. The hands too should not press on the knees to support the body, but be held there lightly, and the legs should not straighten out. If the movement is properly done, there is a palpable stretch in the lateral and medial muscles of the leg.

See illustrations 4–6

### 击拳怒目增气力 Jī quán nù mù zēng qì lì

#### Punching and staring furiously increases energy and strength

The “punching” move works by stimulating the areas of the Liver. With a relatively steady, sedate, soft but deliberate force, one punches outward on the midline of the body with a “standing fist” (which means the thumb and forefinger are on top: if you were holding a pencil in your fist it would point straight up and down). The elbow remains bent, so that the arm is not fully extended, and the tip of the elbow points down toward the ground; as the arms move forward and back, they brush and rub the ribs tightly, and thus massage the Liver area. With each punch, the eyes stare at the fist as if furious – this brings energy



to the eyes, again stimulating the Liver. This is a useful exercise in a culture where “staring furiously” is discouraged.

See illustrations 7–9.

*Masters of this style suggest that if one is tired, lifting up and dropping solidly on the heels often will release enough energy to accomplish the task at hand.*

## 仰面躬身固腎腰

Yáng miàn shè shēn gù shèn yāo

### Facing upward [then] bowing the body makes the Kidneys and waist solid.

Ba Duan Jin helps to balance the eight extra meridians, as well as the standard 12 meridians, and the important organs. This is most obvious in this second-to-last bending over exercise, where the bending backwards opens up the Ren channel (“conception vessel”), with the palms of the hands pressed to the Kidneys. Then one bends forward, keeping the back straight and looking forward until the head dips close to the ankles, while the fingers trace the Tai Yang channel (Urinary Bladder channel) down the back of the legs, around the toes, and back up the Stomach channel along the front of the shins, keeping the head close to the legs as it comes up, until the back straightens up again. At this point the hands trace the course of the belt channel (Dai Mai, one of the eight extra channels) when the hands slide around the waist to start again at the Kidneys. This move is extremely comfortable when done well, and should be performed the full nine times.

See illustrations 10–14.



## 扶背七顛百病消

Fú bēi qī diān bǎi bìng xiāo

### Supporting the back, seven jolts dissolve the Hundred Illnesses.

This move has two variations: in one the hands support the Kidneys, in the other (referred to here) they are held behind the head. With the fingers intertwined behind the head, and the heels of the palms pressing on the skull, one rises up on the toes, then drops sharply down on the heels. The rising up on the toes should roll up through the instep, while the dropping down should roll along the outside of the foot. The jaw should be kept relaxed so that with each jolt, the teeth click lightly together. Jolting like this has a number of effects, of which two are most important: the first is the stimulation of the lymph glands, which empty the “garbage” in the body. Jolting frees any stuck residue and allows it to move on and out of the body. The second is the stimulating effect this gentle jolting has on the joints throughout the body, “drumming up the *qi*” as the Chinese refer to it. This is a noted characteristic of Chen-style Taijiquan, which includes stamps; masters of this style suggest that if one is tired, lifting up and dropping solidly on the heels often will release enough energy to accomplish the task at hand.

See illustrations 15–16.

■ Following a session of Ba Duan Jin, it is a good idea to stand well centered and shake the body all over for several minutes, gradually reducing the shaking until one is standing quietly. This allows you to feel the glowing vibrancy throughout the body that results from opening the flow of *qi* through all the major channels and the extra channels – a perfect basis for standing meditation (illustration 17), which may be discussed in a future instalment of Yang Sheng.

## Endnotes

1. *Vitality, Energy, Spirit: a Taoist Sourcebook*, Thomas Cleary, Shambala, 1991, introduction, p. xix. See a review of this book in the book reviews section of this issue of *The Lantern*.

■ 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.

Each move begins and ends with this sequence (1-3) – as explained in the previous issue ...

