



Qi Gong - Wu Qin Xi 五禽戲

Five Animal play

The "Five Animal play" this exercises were organized and created into an effective combined set and promoted by the famous Chinese physician Hua Tuo (Yuan Hua) (141-208 CE.) was a contemporary of Zhang Zhongjing. He travelled from town to town treating patients and learning from other doctor's practices. He is famous for his skill as a surgeon and his use of anesthesia. The anesthesia was given as a powder called mafeisan that was dissolved in a fermented drink before performing surgery. It has been suggested the powder may have been hemp since its uses were unknown at that time. Besides performing surgeries, Hua Tuo also recommended the use of physical exercises for his patients. He devised movements that were similar to the movements of five different animals.

The five animals in the exercises are the tiger, deer, bear, monkey and Bird. According to TCM theory of Wu Xing (Five Elements), each animal has two exercises corresponding to the five yin (Zang) and five yang (Fu) internal organs. Regular practise of this Qi Gong is said to improve functioning of the Liver/Gall Bladder (Wood Element - **TIGER**), Kidneys/Bladder (Water Element - **DEER**), Spleen/Stomach (Earth Element - **BEAR**), Heart/Small Intestine (Fire Element - **MONKEY**) and Lung/Large Intestine (Metal Element - **BIRD**) respectively.

虎

Tiger (Hu)

The first animal is Tiger. It relates to the wood element, the season of spring and therefore the liver and gall bladder. The liver's emotion is anger and has many important functions including storing blood (xue), ensuring the smooth movement of qi in the body and housing the ethereal soul (hun). Liver xue nourishes the sinews therefore allowing physical exercise. The liver is often compared to an army general because it is 'responsible' for the smooth flow of qi, essential to all physiological processes of every organ and part of the body. The hun provides the mind (shen) with inspiration, creativity and a sense of direction in life. The emphasis of this exercise is grasping and stretching. By reaching up to bring down Heaven and reaching down to draw up Earth grasping is encouraged; which relates to sinews and therefore the liver. Rolling through the spine stimulates both yin and yang of ren mai and du mai channels activating the microcosmic orbit. This is then completed with a slow 'stalking' forward bend and sudden shout (release of anger) as the Tiger catches its prey with vigor while standing on one leg, to stretch the sinews while activating the jing well points at the tips of the fingers, opening PC-8 and incorporating another important Wood trait - balance.



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鹿

Deer (Lù)

The second animal is Deer. It relates to the water element, the season of winter and therefore the kidneys and bladder. The kidneys emotion is fear and is often referred to as the 'root of life' as they store essence (jing). Jing determines basic constitution, is derived by our parents and established at conception. The kidneys are the foundation of yin and yang in the body and therefore every other organ and governs birth, growth, reproduction and development. They also produce marrow, control bones and the Gate of Life (Minister Fire), while housing willpower (zhi). By twisting the torso, the energy of one kidney is opened while the other is closed creating a pump to regulate chong mai and therefore yuan qi. Fire (heart) and water (kidney) must connect energetically to maintain health. The hand gesture replicating horns calms Shen and connects with the heart by keeping the middle fingers in touch with the palms via the pericardium and san jiao channels. The eyes are the 'window' to shen and are smiling and joyous as we turn to look at the back heel and medial malleolus (kidney channel), also connecting fire with water. In the second part, hunching the back activates the microcosmic orbit again and the gentle skip exemplifies the Deer's playful and fluid nature.

熊

Bear (Xiong)

The third animal is Bear. It relates to the earth element, the season of late summer and therefore the spleen and stomach. The spleen's emotion is worry and is the central organ in the production of gu qi; from the food and drink we ingest. The spleen's transformation and transportation of gu qi is paramount in the process of digestion which is the basis for the formation of qi and xue. The spleen is where the intellect (yi) is said to reside and is responsible for applied thinking and the generating of ideas, memorising and concentration. This animal is cumbersome and its awkward traits are expressed in each movement. It starts off with circular abdominal massage to aid digestion by warming and supporting spleen yang, using the entire upper torso to move the hands. The arms are then poised to open and stretch the armpit activating the spleen's close relationship with Heart and Liver (Heart is the 'mother' of spleen and liver stores xue) by stretching the flanks. The palms are empty to open PC-8 as the hip is raised to shift the leg forward while keeping the knee straight. The swinging torso and heavy step activates kidney yang to support spleen yang in heating and 'cooking' food.



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猿

Monkey (Hou)

The fourth animal is Monkey. It relates to the fire element, the season of summer and therefore the heart and small intestine. The heart is considered the most important and therefore the 'emperor' of the internal organs. It relates to the emotion joy and its main function is to govern and circulate xue in the vessels to nourish tissues and house the mind (Shen). Shen is used to indicate the entire sphere of mental and spiritual aspects of a human being and therefore encompasses hun, zhi, yi and corporeal soul (po). Similar to the heart, the monkey is forever moving like the flickering of a flame. With the first exercise, suddenly lifting the hands with hook palms up towards the chest, the shoulders towards the ears and balancing on the toes with the monkey looking to the side, squeezes the heart and pumps xue as you release down again. The second part calms Shen by clearing the mind (moving the branch) to grasp the peach (fruit of heaven) with the thumb inside the palm to hold the Hun within. Grasping in this exercise relates to the liver's ability to hold and store xue, while the lifting of the back heel activates the Kidneys also supporting the Heart. The peach is then brought into view but is too heavy and must be supported as the monkey enjoys his find and soon to be 'treat'.

鳥

Bird (Niao)

The fifth animal is Bird. It relates to the metal element and the season of autumn and therefore the lungs and large intestine. The Lungs emotion is sadness and governs qi and respiration, while being in charge of inhalation and the regulation of water passages. They are the intermediary organ between man and his environment, likened to a prime minister in charge of qi regulation particularly in the blood vessels to assist the heart in controlling blood circulation. The lungs house po the most physical and material part of the human soul; sensations and feelings. The activation of the microcosmic orbit is again featured by firstly working the spine in a concave fashion. The shoulders are raised and squeezed into the neck to squeeze the heart and pump xue while the arms are brought up to mimic a beak and the tailbone is thrust out. The arms are brought back along with one leg to mimic gliding. The second part of the exercise regulates the ascending (liver - xue) and descending (lungs - qi) function of qi in the Lungs. The ultimate yin and yang expressed by breathing in (kidneys) and breathing out (lungs) connects these two organs to regulate xue and assist the heart. The rhythm created by the up and down movement of the body, the opening and closing of the arms (lung and large intestine channels) and the in and out breath helps us adapt to the rhythmical changes of the seasons. The final stretch upwards on one leg stretches the flanks and therefore the liver and gall bladder channels to balance with the Lungs. The lungs are said to be 'spoilt' being the last organ to start working just after birth and are therefore fragile and sensitive to change, explaining why gentle exercise is preferred.