

Class 2: 1/30/07

Belly Breathing

Breathing deep or shallow, affects greatly our longevity. Dogs, for instance, breathe shallowly, and thus live a short life. Most people breathe usually only with their chest. That is, breathing only into the upper parts of chest and then out. This way, they inhale inadequate amount of air, and as a result, they need to take another breath quickly. This kind of breathing allows only an inadequate amount of oxygen to enter capillaries for exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide and limits the full functionality of our organs. In the long run, our body may degrade and illness may arise.

We all breathed through our belly in our infancy. Somehow, as we grew up, we gradually adopted Chest Breathing. Perhaps we needed to quickly inhale sufficient oxygen for our fast-paced modern life. If we can go back and readopt Belly Breathing, our organs will be massaged on one hand, and the amount of oxygen in our blood will be enhanced on the other. Additionally, all parts of our body will function better and the body as a whole will become healthier. All these benefits can not be gained by Chest Breathing alone.

Belly Breathing, like any kind of breathing, is a spontaneous process. We will not be able to do it well in our daily lives without training and practicing. Besides, a meditative state would be very difficult to attain without Belly Breathing. There are other benefits of doing Belly Breathing. For instance, the full concentration in meditation provides an excellent environment for cells to obtain sufficient oxygen and other nutrients through Belly Breathing. This explains why, as we often see, Zen practitioners are healthier and younger in look, often with silky skin, than those who do not practice Zen.

Note that breathing without making any noise (even those hardly audible) is very important. Otherwise it is a sign of an unhealthy body. In which case try to find out the cause of it.

Surpassing Soreness and Numbness

The first challenge in meditation is to conquer the soreness, pain and numbness that arise during meditation. It is our legs determining how long we meditate. "Why do I experience such discomfort during meditation?" "Why is my pain worse as I continue to meditate?" These are common questions often asked by beginners.

In fact, human body is like water. If it is clear you can see through it. If it is murky or muddy, it is probably blocked by some filth. Our body is no different. If our body is not "clean", then our Qi is blocked. And we will feel pain where it is blocked. This kind of pain, however, is relatively minor compared to the benefits of Zen meditation that could be brought to you after this short-term physical discomfort. This kind of pain is like a flu shot. It pains you first then protects you after. Once you surpass this stage of physical uneasiness, you will be healthier.

When you begin to meditate, your lower back and legs cannot escape from soreness, pain or numbness. How do you be relieved from it? Just follow the three secrets outlined below.

1. Practice, practice and practice.

Honestly, practice is always the best way to master anything. Just meditate once or twice daily at the same time and place. You will overcome these discomfort and find yourself able to sit longer and longer.

2. Switch legs with your eyes closed.

In case you truly no longer can withstand the discomfort, you may switch your legs with your eyes closed. But still try to spiritually remain in a meditative state. Since Zen meditation is about reinforcing your willpower to surpass difficulties, it is desirable to try to retain the same posture. If you are unable to overcome the difficulties of your body, how could you face the even more challenging world outside? In fact, your body and mind are both in your control. It is your willingness to master that truly matters.

3. Utmost concentration

The best way to overcome physical discomfort is not to “confront” but to “accept” it. As you focus totally on a Chakra, your thoughts are gone except your intense concentration. Thereby you will not feel anything else. Besides, as you concentrate more, the Chakra being focused on will generate energy, from physical to spiritual state. It incubates your inner potential energy, as your true life force, which can energize your entire body.

Live in the Present Moment

“Zen lives in the present. The whole teaching is: how to be in the present; how to get out of the past which is no more and how not to get involved in the future which is not yet, and just to be rooted, centered, in that which is.”

-- Osho

“The miracle is not to walk on water. The miracle is to walk on the green earth in the present moment, to appreciate the peace and beauty that are available now.”

-- Thich Nhat Hanh

“The present is always complete. There can be nothing lacking. We might wish there was something else in our present, but this, too, is something we add. Just being in the present moment is enough and complete, and as a result, perfect.”

-- Rev. Harvey So Daiho Hilbert