

Sitting Ba Duan Jin

By Xiaoyao Xingzhe

EIGHT SECTIONS OF BROCADE is a traditional Daoist health maintenance program reputedly created by Zhongli Quan in the Tang dynasty more than 1000 years ago. Over that thousand years it has spread widely among the people, and has a variety of movements, some standing and some sitting. In the past two issues a common version of the standing movements was introduced, and here we will complete the routine with the sitting movements, which are actually a form of self-massage the Chinese call dry bathing. If the room is warm enough, it is best to wear as little clothing as possible. One can sit in a chair or on the bed, or the floor if warm. Throughout the exercises the mind should remain (or be gently returned to) the area of the umbilicus, and one begins with three gentle deep breaths, then rub the hands vigorously together – especially the palms – for a full minute. Once the palms are warmed, the massage can begin.

Head, neck, eyes and nose

Rub the warm palms very gently over the skin of the face in circular motions, then use the fingertips to rub backwards through the hair at the sides of the head nine times, ending by rubbing the neck and the area around *Feng Chi* (GB-20) with the fingertips. Use the sides of the thumbs to rub outward along the eyebrows from the point between them (*Yin Tang*) nine times, then the thumbs massage the temples (*Tai Yang*) clockwise nine times, then counter-clockwise. Finally rub up and down alongside the nose, at the point *Ying Xiang* (LI-20).

Teeth and tongue

Now, instead of the hands, use the tongue to massage the gums both inside and outside of the teeth, circling all over the mouth. The saliva that gathers should be held in the mouth for the space of a deep breath, return the mind to the umbilical area, and swallow the saliva. Very lightly chomp together the upper and lower teeth 18 times.

Sounding the Drum of Heaven

Rubbing the palms together again until warm, put the palms over the ears, with the fingers pointing backward. Place the index finger on top of the middle finger, then flick it downward to strike the skull, creating a deep drum-like sound. After this rub fingers behind the ears up and down nine times, then rub the ears themselves.

Rubbing arms, shoulders, back and chest

Slide the palm forcefully up the inside of the arm, over the shoulder to the neck, and down the outside of the arm nine times, then repeat on the other arm. Rub the palms together until warm again and, with fingers pointing down, rub up and down the lower back until the area is warm and you have raised a light sweat doing so. Then massage the flanks and chest with circular motions.

Chafing the well of eternity

Roughly rub the legs all over, from top to bottom and back again, then place one foot on the knee and rub the point *Yong Quan* (K-1) 81 times before shifting to the other foot and repeating. Rub lightly between the toes with the fingers once or twice.

Two palms warm the Cinnabar Field

This can be done sitting, standing or lying down. Placing one palm over the back of the other hand, gently rotate the hands over the lower abdomen 18 times, then reverse the direction and do it again. One should by this point feel an utterly delicious feeling of tingling relaxation throughout the whole body. Lying down to sleep, one can concentrate the qi that has been generated by lying on the back, and placing the hands over the spot on the body where the breath naturally reaches – for some this will be the chest, for others the upper abdomen, for some the lower abdomen. The sleep that follows this routine is extremely beneficial and refreshing, and long-term practice will demonstrate why Daoists were often called ‘Immortals’ – they never seemed to age!

床上八段锦

Chuang Shang Ba Duan Jin
(Chuang shang = ‘On the bed’)

