

How to restore balance to body and mind

The mind and body are deeply connected. The state of one invariably affects the state of the other. If we default, and leave the condition of our mind-body system to chance, nature, and time, this connection will produce a negative cycle as tension in the body creates stress in the mind, and stressed emotional states send waves of tension through the body. However, by bringing conscious awareness to your inner-state, and learning to nurture your body and mind as a synergistic unit, you can experience health, vitality, and inner calm and contentment.

The first step in achieving this is to focus your awareness inward. Most of the time, our awareness is focused externally. We're so concerned with the world outside that we forget to attend to the world inside. Physical ailments and emotional stress are manifestations of an advanced process of inner imbalances. The challenges of everyday life put strain on your body and mind. If you are not vigilant and attentive to the subtle forces affecting your inner harmony each day, the negative effects can accumulate, resulting in pain and illness in the body, and stress and depression in the mind. By taking some time each day to focus inward, you can recognize and prevent negative affects to your internal well-being, and begin a movement toward inner harmony.

The next step is to cultivate your breathing. Breath is the bridge between body and mind. The way we breathe is both revealing of our inner-state, and a powerful tool to moderate it. Mind-body exercises such as Yoga and Qigong (which translates as "breath-work") have several methods of breathing designed to generate a balanced internal state. The primary method is the same for nearly all mind-body practices. This method is often called "natural breathing," because it is the way we breathe when we are young. The goal is to make your breath longer, smoother, and fuller. This is done by breathing with a "HA" sound, in and out through the nose, and primarily using the lower abdomen as the motor of the breath, rather than the upper chest. Breathing in this way uses the full capacity of the lungs and reduces tension in the neck and shoulders, which can be caused by breathing with the upper chest. In addition, lower abdominal breathing gently stretches the connective tissues in the lower back and hip girdle – a common area for tension and chronic pain – as well as massaging the internal organs and aiding the digestive process. Making your breath slower and smoother can also calm the nervous system and relax tension out of the muscles – all aspects of restoring a balanced internal state.

In addition to cultivating your breathing, you must also learn to consciously relax your muscles and joints on a deep level. Most of the time, we carry excess tension in the body. This is because our mind-body system has not been trained to direct force efficiently. Simple everyday life brings us into contact with external forces both physical and spiritual. The effect of physical forces such as gravity and momentum from natural movements, and emotional forces such as deadlines and relationships should not be taken lightly. It's the subtle stresses of these mundane forces that accumulate unnoticed until we hurt and we're not sure why. Learning a system of meditative movement, such as Tai Chi, will teach you how to direct these forces rather than confront them, and meet challenges with balance and equanimity. Emotional stress is stored in our muscles and connective

tissue. Learning to consciously relax can release stored tension and not only heal the body, but relieve the spirit as well.

Sometimes relaxation isn't enough, you have to actively restore the body to healthy

alignment. Long term habits of excess tension create patterns of muscular imbalance in the body. This takes the joints out of optimal alignment and causes chronic pain and injury (or at least loss of physical ability). Overly tight muscles must be stretched and lengthened back out, and overly stretched and weak muscles must be strengthened. Alignment-based Yoga is specifically designed to do this by combining breathing, internal awareness, and relaxation techniques with specialized movements which strengthen and stretch the muscles and connective tissues, and restore optimal alignment to the body.

The final aspect of bringing mind and body into a harmonious state is to infuse your actions with a life-affirming intention or attitude. This attitude comes from your genuine desire to achieve a state of inner harmony and freedom. By approaching your mind-body practice with a particular quality of spirit, such as steadfastness, or acceptance, your actions are infused by your attitude and become an expression of the very balance and harmony you wish to achieve. The power of the mind and the attitude you express cannot be underrated. There are many examples of people curing themselves of serious illness because they believed they were cured. Their happiness and belief had a real, significant effect on their physical condition. By concentrating on a positive emotional quality, you infuse your body with that quality and you begin to embody it in your inner state and actions. This is what is meant by "transforming from the inside out."

We all want to experience health, vitality, and a sense of being rooted in ourselves. Achieving and maintaining this centeredness is not automatic though. It is necessary to bring conscious awareness to mind and body, and engage in a regular practice that has the power to restore balance to your internal state of being. Otherwise, you leave yourself open to the negative effects that the forces of life can have on your well-being when left unchecked. If however, you make the commitment to devote time each day to yourself and what you require as an integrated being of mind, body, and spirit, you can unlock your true capacity for enjoyment of life.

The *Classics* say that there are three requirements to achieving inner harmony: a genuine desire to learn, commitment of personal time and effort, and a qualified teacher to guide your growth. If you are ready to begin your journey toward personal fulfillment, take the first step; contact us and make an appointment for your first yoga or tai chi class. Call 954-227-8080 or email info@darsanamartialarts.com