

Sitting Meditation and Healing Colors

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(with 4-7-8 Breathing sidebar)

Sitting meditation and T'ai Chi complement each other. I believe the deepest, ultimate goal of both is to knit together our conscious and subconscious so that we become all one thing. By transcending the separation between material and immaterial, we can indeed become one with the universe.

Meditation and T'ai Chi put us in touch with the dan tian, the primary reservoir of qi in the middle of the abdomen. I see the dan tian as the conductor of the body/mind/spirit orchestra, and my umbilical cord to the universe. It is the Tao within me.

My favorite time to meditate is in the morning before breakfast. Sometimes I precede sitting with strenuous physical activity—running or stretching—then slow down with T'ai Chi or qigong, and finally arrive at stillness while sitting. The vigorous exercise gets cleansing, stimulating circulation going and vents physical tension. T'ai Chi, qigong, and breathing exercises slow me down, calm me, and get me ready to be still. Sometimes it's clear to me that I need no preliminaries—I'm ready to simply sit and drop down into stillness.

(I can also achieve a state of unity and stillness with very slow, focused T'ai Chi or qigong practice—they're moving meditation.)

I think it's important to bathe before sitting, to wear clean clothes, and to have a special, very comfortable garment reserved for meditating. It should be a color that is currently soothing and alluring to you.

There are many positions that can be used for meditating. Maintaining a straight back from the tailbone up through the back of the neck is the common element in all of them. The crown is uplifted which means the chin naturally points down toward the heart. The lower back is flat. The tongue rests on the palate, just behind the front teeth. Full lotus, half lotus, cross-legged, legs extended out in front, sitting on a cushion, bench, chair, or even lying flat are all possibilities. I subscribe to the idea that being comfortable while meditating assists in the process of becoming truly still. I don't believe being uncomfortable or enduring pain—such as in the knees in full lotus—is anything other than an

unnecessary distraction, not to mention potentially damaging to the body. And because the body, mind, and spirit are inseparable, damage done to one is damage to the others. A preoccupation with holding a prescribed form denies the infinite particularity of each individual and inhibits the process of internal exploration. We can try out whatever we like, combine elements that suit us, and devise our own eclectic ways.

Many years ago I attended a Yoga retreat. During lunch, I was talking with a couple other participants who were devotees of the person leading the retreat. One told me that when she meditated, her arms felt as if they wanted to rise. But she didn't let them do that because that would be breaking the form laid down by the teacher. What a shame, I thought. I often have the same impulse and I always let my arms do whatever they want—I'm curious to see how high they'll go and where and how and when they'll come down. It's not just my arms that move—my body rocks and circles; tears or smiles may appear on my face. This is part of the intrigue, the mystery, and the fun of meditation. It's how we gain authentic information about ourselves.

Some people say it isn't possible to stop thinking. I disagree. Now and then I reach that point. I have two ways of describing it and they sound like direct contradictions of each other. One is that I'm being suctioned out of ordinary space and time and flung into something else—some existence that doesn't have space and time. Another is that a gate opens and raw energy gushes into me, blotting out everything else. I vanish. This "door" may open and close repeatedly while sitting or doing T'ai Chi. It's beyond sensation or accurate description. It frightens me (because my self is obliterated), and it thrills me. When I experience this loss of self, duality is transcended; there is no longer subject and object; me and not-me; movement and stillness. It is complete integration of material with immaterial. The dancer becomes the dance.

Every day is different. Sometimes I'm ready to sink into my dan tian as soon as I sit down. But normally I need to use breathing exercises—like slowing and deepening my breath—to usher me into a quieter state. I also silently repeat two words that appeared to me in a vision—my own mantra—the first word with inhalation, the second with exhalation.

From there I often use healing colors. It's a technique I learned in my original experience with natural healing thirty-five years ago. Green, blue, and yellow are generally considered the most effective healing colors—in that order. (But a person may resonate with or feel a need for some other color in the moment. It's important to respect the wisdom of intuition.) I put myself into a place and time of my choosing, saturating myself with a particular color. It's important to know that I can be *where* I want to be *when* I want to be.

The following is my own way of using the colors—just an example. People will have their own most penetrating experiences and memories (or imaginings) involving colors.

I bracket the colors with white light (which I see as the color of qi itself), beginning and ending with it:

I am the white light; I glow with white light; I am the seed, the core, the center, the focus, the source, and the receiver. The white light is dense and powerful within me. All the white light of the universe comes and goes through me. From the moon and stars; the oceans, lakes, rivers, and streams; from the rocks and mountains; the trees and forests; and from everything animate and inanimate on Earth; the white light comes and goes through my center, my dan tian. It's easy. I simply breathe it in and breathe it out. I am surrounded by a sphere of white light that feeds me and protects me. (A teacher once told me to imagine the sphere at least twenty-four feet in diameter.)

I breathe the white light for as long as I like, then I go to blue, making it the first color because of its calming, comforting qualities.

I'm stepping out of the forest and onto the sands of Washington Island in Green Bay, Wisconsin. It's August; it's vacation. The tiny, pale, sun-warmed, grains of sand roll and crunch under my bare feet. As I arrive at the water's edge unclothed, I turn my palms outward and open my eyes and skin to absorb the wavering sapphire-blue water and sky-blue sky. My arms rise by themselves and I float up into the air over the bay. I start to expand, particle by particle, both warmed and cooled by the infusion of blue light. Everything softens, loosens, spreads out, until it's no longer possible to see the outlines of my body. I hover over and dip lightly into the water. Every particle of my body is caressed and perfected by the blue light—cleansed and purified, soothed and massaged, nourished and healed. I look at a single radiant particle and know that all the other particles that make up my body are equally illuminated with the healing blue light and equally cared for. I focus the blue on parts of my body that need help just now. Toxins and poisons—physical, emotional, and spiritual—fall away. All that's left is the best and purest of my being. I glow with blue light. I *am* the blue light. This is the color of serene strength and confidence. I stay here as long as I like.

Then I move on to green. I touch down on lush spring grass, open up the centers of my bare feet—the yong quans or “bubbling wells”—and let the green flow through me like a river—washing and cleansing, soothing and massaging, healing and nourishing as it passes. The emerald river streams upward and out through the crown of my head and the tips of my fingers that are held upward like the branches of a tree. Toxins and poisons—physical, emotional, and spiritual—are rinsed away. Again, I give special attention to any part of my body that requests it. I'm in the Shakespearean Garden of Portland's Rose Garden. I lie

down beneath a maple tree, buoyed by the elastic tendrils of grass, seeing and feeling their vitality penetrate through my back, my limbs, my head. This is the color of growth and regeneration and persistent life. I linger here.

Then yellow. I get up and walk to where the roses are planted by the thousands. I look for the most beautiful yellow rose that I can find, put my face up to it, breathe in its fragrance, and stare into its depths. It pulls me in, draws me into its center, and envelops me in a quiet, velvet, golden intensity. I lose my self. I enter the rose and the rose enters me. I can feel its golden warmth, its gentle power gravitating toward and radiating outward from my solar plexus to heal my entire body. It fulfills me; I feel replete. There I am, sitting in the center of the rose with the rose sitting in the center of me.

I always end with white:

I am the white light; I glow with white light; I am the seed, the core, the center, the focus, the source, and the receiver. The white light is dense and powerful within me. All the white light—the qi—in the universe comes and goes through me. From the moon and stars; the oceans, lakes, rivers, and streams; from the rocks and mountains; the trees and forests; and from all the animate and inanimate inhabitants of Earth; the white light comes and goes into and out of my center, my dan tian. It's easy. I simply breathe it in and breathe it out. I am filled with white light. I *am* the white light. An immense sphere of white light surrounds me, feeding and protecting me.

Now there's nothing more to be done. I settle into the dan tian and simply maintain my presence there. "Be at Peace," I say to myself. "Be at..." "Be..." I drift. Thoughts appear and I watch them, take note, stop in midthought, and return to the dan tian. My breath is quiet. I become still.