

Meditations On The Five Animals of Tai Chi
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Meditation on the five elements of the body is an old tradition which is used primarily to loosen the grasping at the self. In Tai Chi these elements take the form of animals and their corresponding organs. The dissolution of the elements/organs should be done in both creation and destructive cycles in your meditations. The creation cycle is air, water, wood, fire and earth. The destructive cycle is in the reverse order: earth, fire, wood, water and air. The destructive cycle is what I will present here because it is the order that is practiced in the form.

Element	Animal	Organ	Activity
1. Earth	Dragon	Spleen	Harmonizes all organs
2. Fire	Tiger	Heart	Creates Heat
3. Wood	Monkey	Liver	Nourishes skin
4. Water	Bear	Kidneys	Nourishes Blood
5. Air	Eagle	Lungs	Opens the body

This chart should be reviewed before you begin this meditation. Remember as well this meditation is done to revitalize the organs which can be done standing or sitting. I will present the standing method here but you can apply all the meditations to any body position you wish. If you know the Five Animals form well this meditation can be done as you do the form as well.

To begin this meditation your feet should be shoulder width apart and parallel with your torso right between your feet evenly. The knees are straight but not locked and the arms are at the sides about two inches away from the body. First relax the body by going through body and ask the places you feel tension to dissolve like water dissolving into steam. If you keep your body perfectly upright this will help you stay relaxed. When the gross body is dissolved then you can dissolve the tightness in your meridians, and eventually in the points along the meridians as well. Feel the top of your head be light and sensitive and feel your center dropping into your root which should allow your body to feel very active and alive.

While your mind is resting quietly in this relaxed state begin by feeling the heavy parts of your body, the bones and flesh. These heavy parts are the earth elements in our bodies which represents dragon. Dragon also represents the center of a spiral because of dragons spiral like nature. This ability to radiate from the center is precisely what the spleen does; it regulates the organs around it. In your meditations feel your spleen radiate outwards purifying all of your organs with white light or steam. At first you will notice

some darkness or vagueness in feeling your organs. This is normal. Try to persist until your whole body has become filled with light. You can use the breath to guide the light through your body or you can simply visualize the light radiating through your body. When you feel the heavy parts of your body turn very light this means the earth element has dissolved and the organs have been harmonized. When this is very clear in your mind it will be time to move on to the next element meditation.

Check in with your body and make sure you are relaxed and your mind is calm before beginning the meditation on the fire element. The lightness of your body allows the beating of your heart to become very pronounced. At the same time, your body becomes warm and craves movement. This is the element fire, or tiger. Continue your meditation by focusing on the heat in the center of your heart and feel that radiate outwards towards your extremities. The body should increase in warmth and feel very active but relaxed. When the warmth is felt throughout the body evenly and even into the skin, then the element wood meditation will begin.

Again make sure the first two meditations are still present through feeling in your body before moving on to the meditation on the liver or monkey. Bring your awareness of warmth to the right side of your abdomen and allow the warmth to enter the liver. The element wood is related to the skin which is now the most external part of our bodies. This skin is related to wood because of its transformative nature. The liver is one of the most flexible organs in our bodies and can help us adapt to new surrounding. Likewise monkeys can easily adapt to living in trees or on the ground. In your meditations make sure you feel your liver radiate out and nourish all parts of your skin from the top to the bottom of your body. When you feel the skin as an organ completely unified then it will be time to move on to the meditation on water.

The water element arises as your meditation on the skin dissolves into the water beneath it or your blood. Bear is related to water because of its heavy nature and the way a bear moves supports the kidneys. The kidneys are close to your lower back on either side of the spine. The meditation on water is to purify the blood which is the activity of the kidneys. To do this, visualize the blood moving through the kidneys like warm steam filling a sauna. Again notice where the blood is not moving evenly and bring awareness to that area of the body through the steam visualization. Once the blood is aroused in this way then the heat penetrates all the organ systems and makes one aware of the liquid part of our bodies or the blood. Once the whole body is unified through this practice you move to the next meditation on air.

Each element you are meditating is in order of their subtlety as you progress through the dissolution of the organs. For example, we started with earth and now we are meditating on air. This serves to make you mind also more relaxed and also more subtle in nature which allows it to penetrate deeper into pure awareness without discursive thought. The most subtle element is air which is arrived at when the element of water dissolves into steam and your consciousness becomes spacious like air. The element air is related to eagle which rides on air and purifies ones lungs. The purification is done through allowing the air element to fill up your body completely like a balloon. Imagine

your body is and empty container just filled up with air. When you can breathe and feel the air go through every pore of your body you can move onto the meditation on purifying the environment.

The last meditation purifies the external world. Once your body has been purified through these meditations completely you need to purify the environment. This is done by visualizing the Hexagrams of the I Ching as you walk the circle in the form. In your meditation imagine that the hexagrams make up your external world and at the same time purify your perception of the external world making it a pure realm. When the internal world of your body has been purified and the external world has become unified as a pure vision then dissolves the external world which is earth which dissolves into fire and that into wood and that into water and that into air. Dissolve your body into space and the external world with it. Rest in the state beyond elements and thought, rest in pure naked awareness. When you are ready to come out of the meditation recreate the elements starting with air all the way up to earth in the reverse order presented here.