

Moving in Awareness

Eight Pieces of Brocade



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Introduction

Qi, often translated as *energy*, is more of a verb than a noun -- it means *relating*. It's the result of yin and yang coming into being. When a being arises, yin and yang arise and interact, and *qi* is formed. *Gong* is the circulation of energy produced by the relationship of *yin* and *yang*.

So the practice of *qigong* is cultivating a relationship with energy -- becoming aware of the energy that circulates and flows through your being.

Perhaps originating in shaman dances based on animal movements, *qigong* is a modern term that encompasses more than 1,500 different styles of spiritual, martial and health exercises.

Qigong evolved to encompass frameworks such as yin-yang (the two primal complementary polar energies); qi (breath, vital substance or energy), the upper, middle and lower fields of elixir in the body, the channels and meridians, and acupuncture, herbal and mineral medicine.

Qigong is practiced in different ways as a spiritual discipline, in martial arts, and for health and longevity. There are many forms of *qigong*; perhaps the best known form is *tai chi chuan*.

The *qigong* described here is designed to raise and balance energy for the cultivation of awareness. What's the connection between awareness and energy? The habituated physical, emotional, and cognitive patterns that cause suffering are dismantled by attention. Attention is intentional energy. Raising and balancing energy through qigong is an effective support for the practice of meditation.

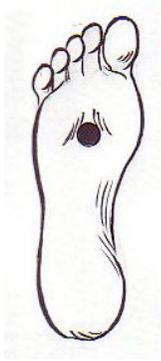
Daoist *qigong* is a spiritual discipline that cultivates body and mind simultaneously.

Originally called *daoyin*, which means "guiding the flow of internal energy (*qi*)", it has been practiced for over two thousand years in China.

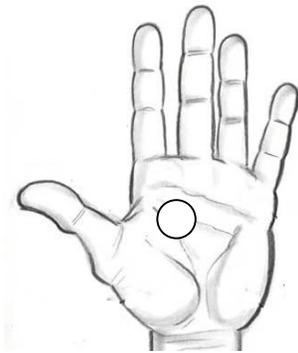
Laozi, the founder of Daoism, was said to have been the first to practice techniques of conserving, gathering, cultivating, nourishing, and transforming energies that are the source of a healthy body and a clear mind.

~ Eva Wong

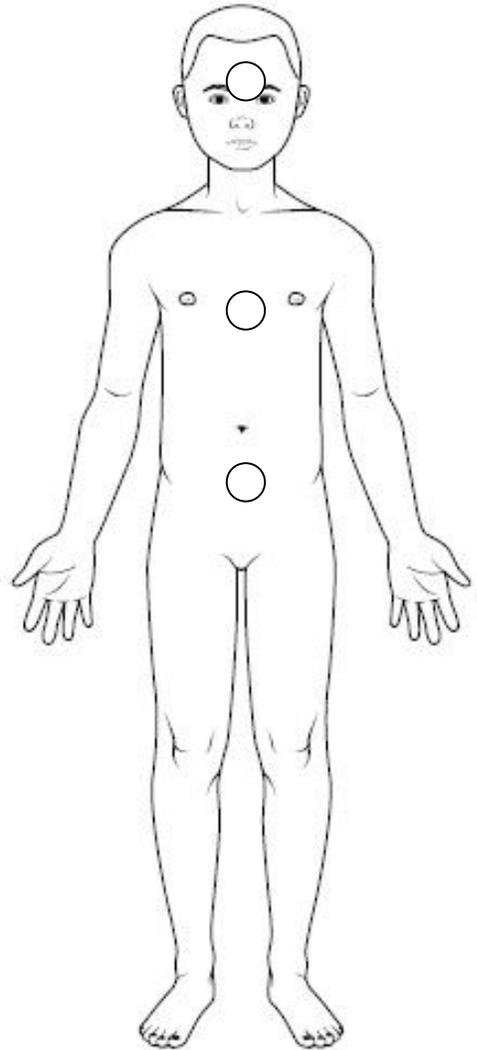
Energy fields



Bubbling wells (yongquan):
in the soft hollow of the foot



Energy points in hands (laogong):
in the hollow of the palm, between
the bones of the 2nd and 3rd fingers



Three fields of energy (dantien):
upper field: center of the head, at eyebrow level
middle field: center of chest , just above xiphoid process
lower field: between navel & pubic bone, in center of body

Keys to Qigong

Awareness of the movement of energy in the bodymind

- Qi is always moving, not just when you do qigong. So the basis of the practice is feeling energy move, and moving in ways that don't block energy or awareness.
- Rest in the experience of what's happening in your body. Qigong is the practice of exploring how energy is in your body.
- Don't try to move "correctly"; the external movements are done to enhance the internal movement of energy.

Relaxed, soft, no strain, no pain

- Relax throughout; relax while standing and while moving.
- Minimize muscular tension up. Let your skeleton hold you up. Let the earth support you.
- Feel and use energy from your belly to move your torso and limbs.
- Let your whole body participate in moving. When you turn, turn from your hips and pelvis, and let your head, shoulders, collarbones and ribcage participate.
- Don't lock your elbows, knees, finger or toe joints; keep them flexible and slightly bent.
- Don't strain your knees, your ankles, your back, or your neck.
- The knees should not extend beyond the toes.
- Let your eyes gaze softly at your entire field of vision.

Grounded and centered

- When standing, relax and sink into the ground. Feel the bubbling wells in the soles of your feet resting on the ground. Feel your center of gravity in the area below your navel.
- When moving, lead with the field of elixir below your navel (lower *dantien*), letting your torso and limbs follow. Pivot from the dantien below your navel while staying grounded on both feet.
- When extending or leaning, only go about two-thirds as far in any direction as you could go.

Energy follows intention

- Use intention rather than muscle. "*Qi follows yi*" -- energy follows mind/intention.
- Much of the benefit of qigong is intentional; the movement of the body is done to enhance your intention.

Cautions

Practicing *qigong* is deeply helpful to mind and body, but there are a few points to remember:

- Avoid doing *qigong* on a full stomach.
- Because *qigong* generates energy, you may have difficulty sleeping if you practice after dark.
- Starting and stopping energy practices suddenly is not good for the body. Build up gradually over several weeks in repetitions of three. If you decide to stop practicing at some point, taper off gradually over a couple of weeks rather than stopping suddenly.

Ride the Breathing Body

Inhale naturally through your nostrils. Exhale naturally through your mouth.

Let your breathing lead the movements. Don't manipulate the breath to maintain a certain rhythm of movement. Let your body move as it rides the breath.

The martial arts style often extends movement away from the body while exhaling. Some softer qigong styles reverse that, to extend while inhaling. The deeper principle is to move in tandem with natural breathing, letting your natural breathing lead the body into movement. So you extend (or return) as you exhale, rather than exhaling (or inhaling) as you extend.

Stand loosely, with your weight resting on the ground, and feel the breathing body. At some point during an exhale or inhale, your body will want to move into the eight pieces. Let the movement be initiated in the belly; let the torso and limbs be moved by the energy that comes from the belly. When you finish one piece of brocade, stand again for a few breaths, and then begin the next piece in synch with how the breathing body wants to do that piece. Don't get locked into a rhythm or speed or a particular way of moving the arms or legs. Let the body ride the breath, with the body going slower or faster as the breath changes.

This requires being aware. What relaxes the body and lets energy move internally? What seems to be the way your body wants to move naturally? Your "correct" form will come out of awareness. Your form will vary from day to day, and even from repetition to repetition within a single session. There is an external form that's right for you -- but it is found by moving in awareness, and letting the movements of the body ride upon the breath.

Sitting meditation has some of the same dynamics. On the surface it looks like everyone is sitting still, and sitting in more or less the same posture. But everyone finds their true posture by trial and error and by being aware from within the body. And everyone's posture changes over time, in tune with what the energetic and physical changes of the body -- either that or they become rigid, and eventually unaware.

Preparatory Exercises

The following exercises can be done as warm-ups to the eight pieces of brocade, or as practices in themselves.

Feeling the bubbling wells

Sit on floor or chair and massage your bubbling wells with your thumbs for a few minutes.

As you practice the preparatory exercises and the eight pieces of brocade, feel your weight resting on the bubbling wells and sinking into the ground. As you go about your day, feel the bubbling wells contacting the ground.

Standing

Stand for a few moments with relaxed alignment, letting your skeleton hold you up and letting the earth support your skeleton. Raise your arms to the level of your chest, with palms facing your heart. Let the hands be a few inches apart. Feel the energy flowing between your hands. Stand this way for 5 to 10 minutes. Relax as much as possible. Feel your weight being supported by the earth. Notice tension or strain as it arises, and adjust how you stand to minimize tension, strain, and muscular effort.

Turning

Pivot from the lower dantien below your navel a few times to the left and to the right, your arms hanging loosely at your sides. Let the movement come from the dantien. Let your hips and pelvis rotate side to side. Allow your knees and ankles to flex so there's no strain. Allow your feet to pivot so you don't torque your knees.

Raising and lowering

Raise your hands in front of you, palms up. Then turn your palms down, and let your arms sink back down softly. Feel the difference between rising and sinking.

Rocking the bubbling wells

Stand naturally with your feet more or less parallel and shoulder-width, with knees slightly bent.

Press down onto your bubbling wells for a moment, and then return back down.

Don't rise up onto your toes; don't rock back onto your heels too far.

Rather than trying to stand on your toes, just let your navel move forward an inch or two to press down on the bubbling wells.

Eight Pieces of Brocade

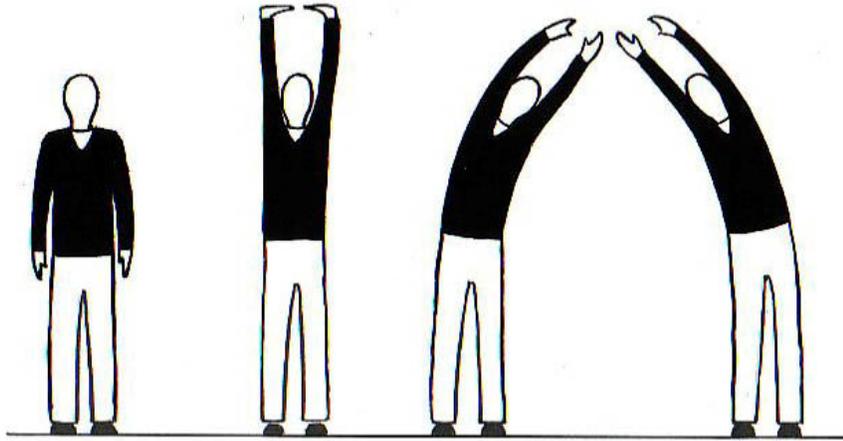
Qigong is an energy practice, not a stretching or calisthenics exercise. The eight pieces of brocade (*ba duan jin*) is a simple set of exercises that cultivate energy, flexibility, health, and awareness. There are various styles of the eight pieces, including sitting and standing forms. The eight pieces as described here are designed to help balance energy for people who are practicing meditation or energy transformation methods.

Most of the eight movements begin with drawing energy up with the movement of the hands and arms, and then pressing it back down. The movements have no beginning or end, so move smoothly... rising... falling... extending... returning.

- Balanced and centered, aware of the whole body.
- Keep the body relaxed. Keep the eyes relaxed, open and soft.
- Keep your elbows and knees and wrists relaxed even when extending your limbs. Don't lock your elbows, knees, wrists, or finger joints.
- Let energy flow through the body and let the body move naturally, like silk.
- Inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth. Breathe naturally and without force. Let your breath lead your movement. The body "rides" the breath.

Ordinarily, one does the set once a day, with six, nine, or twelve repetitions of each movement. In retreat, we do just three repetitions between sitting periods because we are doing *qigong* several times a day.

If you do these movements once a day, you can build up gradually, starting with three repetitions for a couple of weeks, then six, then nine, and eventually twelve.



First Piece: Lifting the Heavens

Stand naturally with feet more or less parallel and shoulder-width apart. Find a way to balance on the bubbling wells so you can release tension in your feet, ankles, knees, hips, and back

Raise your arms above your head, turning the palms upward as if pushing the sky up, and pushing down on the bubbling wells by moving forward an inch or two from the dantien below your navel.

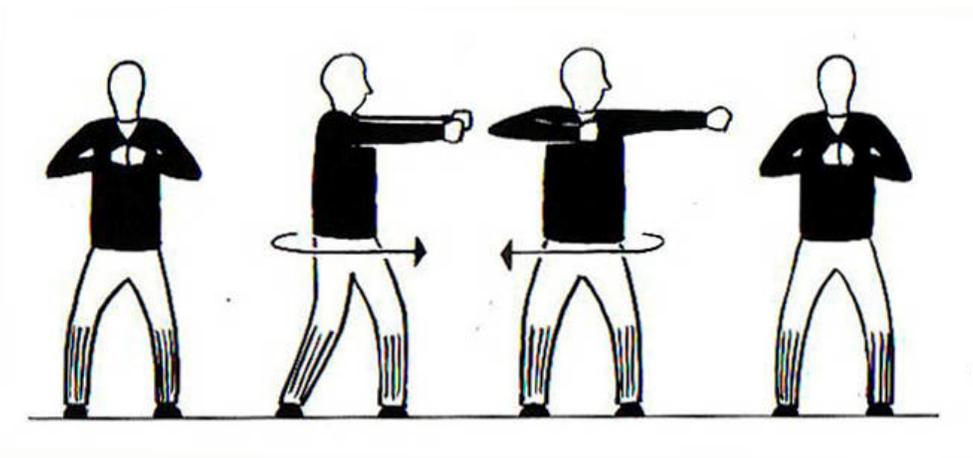
Lower your heels, then let the upper body bend to the left and then to the right. Let the spine relax to the side, vertebra by vertebra, from the base up. Come back up the same way.

Lower your hands down to your sides again.

Enhancements

As your hands rise above your head, press down on the bubbling wells as if your feet were sinking into the earth. Raise the heavens as if they were heavy. As you raise the heavens, press down on the bubbling wells rather than rising up on your toes.

As you lean to the side, let your energy tip to that side, and press down onto the bubbling well on that side. Side-bend gently from the waist, only as far as you are comfortable.



Second Piece: Shooting the Arrow

Widen your stance so that your feet are about three feet apart and more or less parallel. This means you'll be squatting slightly; ease any tension in your back by tucking the tailbone forward slightly.

Bring your hands up to your chest.

Swivel your hips and extend your arms to the left, and then turn back to center as if you were drawing a bow. Return your hands to your chest.

Then turn and shoot the bow to the right.

Enhancements

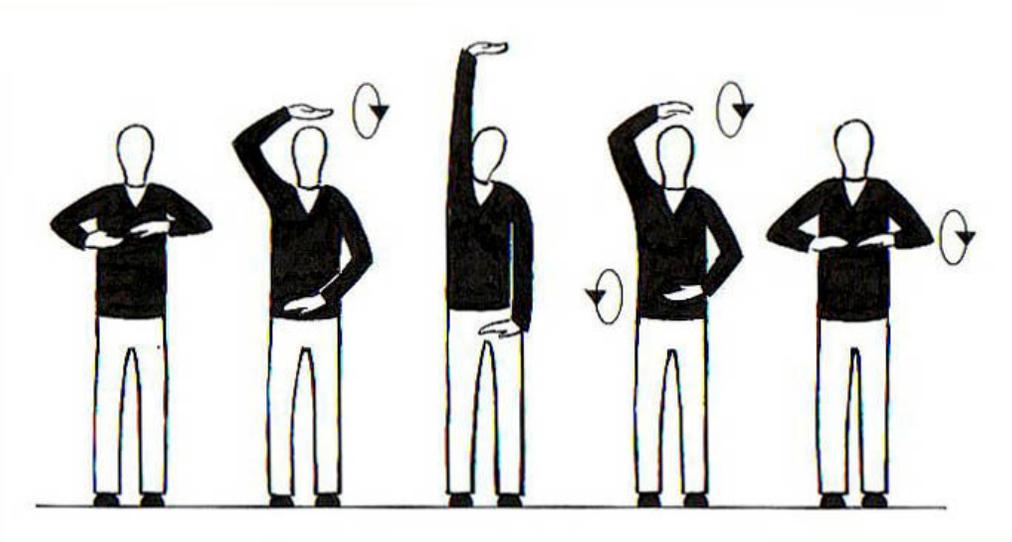
Firm your root by spreading your feet, sinking, and feeling the soles on the ground.

Keep your back easy, not strained.

Keep the weight evenly distributed on both legs.

Most of the movement comes from turning the hips, not from using the arms. Pivot from the lower dantien and hips; feel your sternum (breastbone) and shoulder girdle shift to accommodate the turn.

Feel that you are drawing a strong bow. Keep your eyes on the distant hawk that you are shooting. When the bow is drawn, imagine releasing the arrow, and feel the energy shoot through and beyond your arm.



Third Piece: Separating Heaven and Earth

Stand naturally with feet about shoulder-width apart.

Raise your hands, palms up, to the level of the solar plexus.

Raise your left arm, palm up, pushing above your head, and at the same time press down with your right arm, palm down. The hands should move up and down the center of the body.

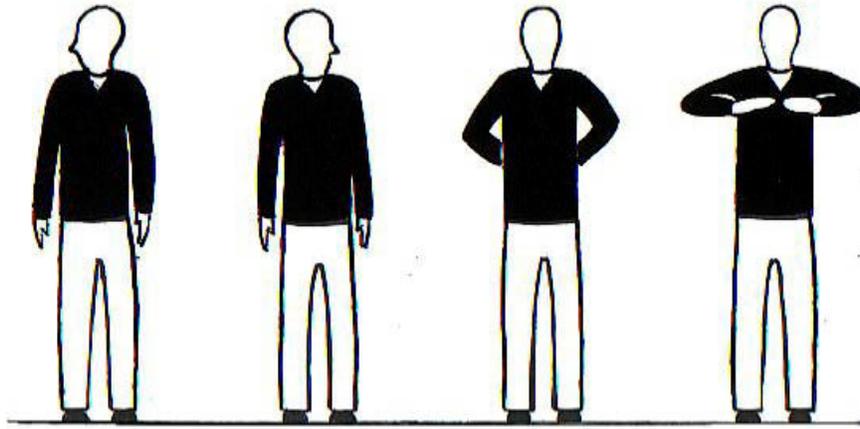
Then change hands so the right hand pushes up while the left hand presses down.

Enhancements

Push heaven up with one hand and press earth down with the other hand. Feel the separation in your chest, with the movement coming from your torso and not just your arms. Feel your sternum, collarbones, and ribcage assisting in the pushing up and pressing down.

Feel your torso, hands, arms, and legs pushing heaven and earth, but do not tense the muscles.

As you stretch one arm upward, press down a little on the bubbling well on the same side as the lifting arm. Then try pressing down on the opposite bubbling well. How do these variations affect the separation in the chest?



Fourth Piece: Looking Behind

Stand naturally with feet parallel and shoulder-width.

As you exhale, turn your head to the left and look backward.

As you inhale, turn your head back to center, and as you exhale again continue on to the right and look backward. Do this three (six, nine, twelve) times.

Then place your palms on the kidneys and do another set, looking left and then right three (six, nine, twelve) times.

Then raise the hands to chest level, with palms up, forming a horizontal circle in front of you, and do a third set, looking left and then right three (six, nine, twelve) times.

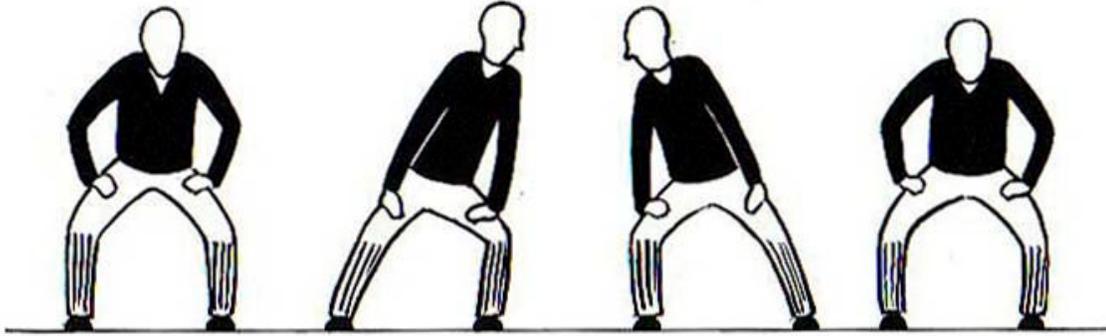
Enhancements

Don't strain your neck by turning too far in either direction.

Feel your sternum (breastbone) and shoulder girdle shift to accommodate the turn.

As you turn, keep a soft open gaze in the eyes

Feel the energy move from the lower *dantien* down through the groin to the bubbling wells as you turn to look behind. Feel the energy move back to your *dantien* as you return to center.



Fifth Piece: Sway the Head and Swing the Tail

Step your right leg to the right to widen your stance to three or four feet. Squat down with tailbone tucked forward slightly so there is no strain in your back.

Place your hands on your knees with thumbs pointing outwards and the fingers on the inside of the thighs just above the knees.

Sway your head and swing your tail by drawing your weight with the left leg as you turn the hips to the left. Keep the knee directly over the toes; do not strain your knee by extending it beyond your toes.

Return to center and then continue on to sway your head to the right, drawing with the right leg so the weight is on the right foot. Keep the knee directly over the toes; do not strain your knee by extending it beyond your toes.

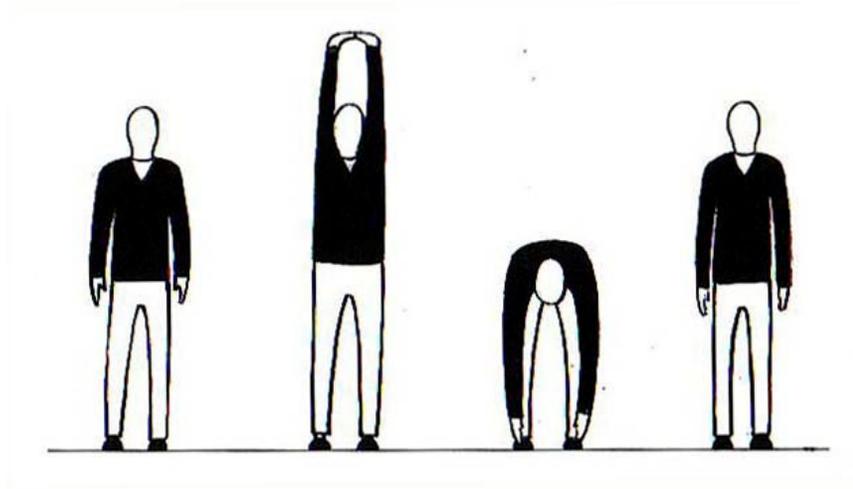
Enhancements

Feel the bubbling wells on the ground. Firm your root by spreading your feet and sinking into the earth.

Keep your back easy, not strained.

Turn the lower dantien to the side, and rotate your hips. Press down on the bubbling well on the side you're turning toward.

Feel your sternum (breastbone) and shoulder girdle shift to accommodate the turn. Let the ribcage move. Don't strain your knees or ankles. Let your feet shift as you turn so you don't torque your knees or ankles. Don't extend your knees beyond your toes.



Sixth Piece: Hands Holding Feet

Stand naturally with feet parallel and shoulder-width.

Push your arms above your head with palms facing up, as if you were lifting something.

Lower chin to chest and slowly bend forward with a flexible back, vertebra by vertebra, like a blade of grass.

Grasp your feet (or your ankles, calves, or knees) and pull them very gently so that you are pushing up into your kidneys for a couple of seconds. Do not strain.

Slowly stand upright again, keeping the spine flexible, keeping your chin to your chest until you are upright with hands above your head.

Bring hands down in front again.

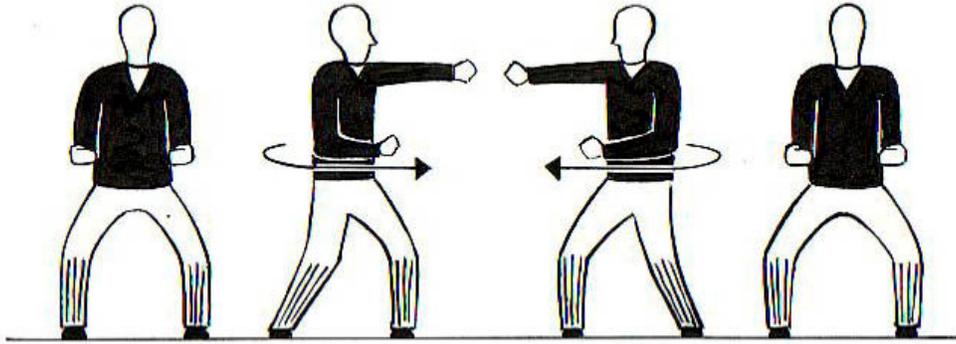
Enhancements

Curl your back slowly and carefully.

Keep your knees bent throughout the movement to ease the strain on your back.

Let your whole body participate in the movement: spine, shoulder blades, ribcage, hips and pelvis, legs, knees, ankles. Use awareness rather than an image of how to move. Let the body ride the breath.

Place your attention on your kidneys as you raise your arms, and on your bubbling wells as you grasp your feet.



Seventh Piece: Screwing the Fist with Fiery Eyes

Step your right leg to the right to widen your stance. Squat down with tailbone tucked forward slightly so that your back is not strained. Your feet are about three feet apart and more or less parallel. Raise your fists to your sides.

Turn from the hips to the left and extend your left arm as if punching, rotating the fist 180° clockwise. Your right fist remains at your hip.

Return to center and then continue to the right, extending your right arm, rotating 180° counterclockwise. Your left fist remains at your hip.

Enhancements

Firm your root by spreading your feet, sinking, and feeling the soles on the ground.

Keep your back easy, not strained.

Keep the weight evenly distributed on both legs.

Feel the energy move from the dantien below your navel out through your arm to your fist.

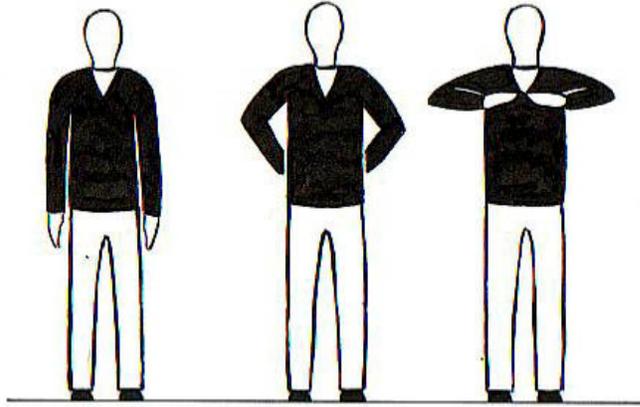
Do not lean into or away from the punch; don't extend your knee beyond your foot. Avoid locking the arm straight.

Swivel from the hips while maintaining your center of gravity and remaining vertical.

As you pivot from the dantien and hips, feel your sternum (breastbone) and shoulder girdle shift to accommodate the turn.

Keep your fist loose, or use an open hand.

Glower with fiery eyes in the direction of the extended arm. Feel your fist and your bubbling wells as you strike the opponent.



Eighth Piece: Rocking the Bubbling Wells

Stand naturally with feet parallel and shoulder-width.

Press down on the bubbling wells by rocking forward an inch or two from the dantien below your navel. Then return. Do this three (six, nine, twelve) times.

Then place your palms above the kidneys and do a second set of repetitions.

Then raise your hands, palms up, into horizontal circle at chest level, and do a third set of repetitions.

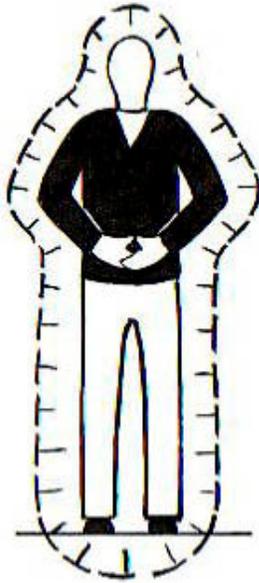
Enhancements

Rock the bubbling wells by pushing them into the ground.

Rather than rising onto your toes, just move forward an inch or two from the dantien below your navel.

Keep your knees relaxed and slightly bent.

Feel the subtle differences between the first variation (arms hanging), second (palms on kidneys), and third (arms in circle in front). How do the three variations affect your balance? How do they affect how you move the dantien forward? How do they affect the movement of energy in the body?



Conclusion: Bringing Awareness to Where the Body Meets the World

Stand naturally with feet parallel and shoulder-width.

Place your palms one on top of the other at the level of your lower *dantien*; your thumbs are at the level of your navel.

Feel energy gathered in the *dantien* radiate slowly out, out through your arms and legs, out through the torso and the head, evenly in all directions.

Feel energy radiate out through all the pores of your skin, out a few inches or more, so that you are enveloped by warm radiant energy.

Rest for a few breaths, feeling energy radiating evenly through and beyond your whole body.

To conclude the eight pieces of brocade, bring the palms together at the level of your heart and bow slightly.

Enhancements

Feel the energy radiate, don't imagine or visualize it.

Stay grounded by feeling the bubbling wells on the ground, and feeling the center of gravity in the field of energy below your navel.