

Instructions for the *Tsa Lung*

Clearing Obstacles with the *Tsa Lung* Exercises

The five *tsa lung* exercises promote the release of physical, energetic, and mental obstacles. In Tibetan, *tsa* means channel and *lung* means vital breath or wind. Through bringing the focus of the mind, the breath, and the physical movements together, in each exercise we seek to open particular chakras or energetic centers in the body and clear the obstacles that disturb and obscure us from recognizing the pure and open space of being. Recognizing this pure and open space of being is the union of space and awareness, the source of all positive qualities.

The Three Main Channels

When working to clear obstacles through the *tsa lung* exercises, imagine the three main channels of the body: the central channel and two secondary channels. These channels are made of light. The central channel begins four finger widths below your navel, rises straight up through the center of your body, and opens at the crown of your head. It is a channel of light, blue like a deep autumn sky. In diameter, you imagine it to be about the size of your thumb. There are two side channels, one red and one white. They have diameters slightly smaller than the central channel, more like the pinky finger in diameter. On your left side is the red channel, on your right, the white channel. The three channels form a junction four finger-widths below the navel. The side channels rise straight up the body on either side of the central channel. However, as they approach the crown, they curve forward under the skull, pass behind the eyes, and open, one at each nostril. The right white channel represents male energy and method or skillful means and opens at the right nostril; the left red channel represents female energy and wisdom and opens at the left nostril.

There are chakras along the central channel that are like energy centers, having different qualities and characteristics and presenting different opportunities for the practitioner. The central channel is the clear and open expression of the totality of your being. In experience it is hard to define the central channel. There is no ordinary terminology for it. The simple expression would be to say it is some deep sense of settling in oneself, completely resting with full awareness rather than resting by sleeping. We all know how to rest by sleeping deeply, but to rest with full awareness is not something everyone knows how to do. The *tsa lung* exercises are useful to remove the blocks and obstacles to resting deeply with full awareness.

The Four Stages of Breath

In each of the five exercises there are four stages to the breath: **inhaling, holding, re-inhaling, and exhaling**. In each exercise you inhale through the nose and imagine the breath follows the pathway of the side channels until reaching the junction as described earlier. When the air reaches the junction just below the navel, the energies of the two side channels, male and female, unite and move up the central channel. Imagine the central channel fills with positive energy which rises to the chakra where you are working in the particular exercise. The breath is held throughout this process, and the focus is held at the particular chakra.

While holding the breath at the chakra specified in each exercise, the positive quality of the prana is held as vessel holds nectar. Then, without exhaling, you inhale again, taking in a bit more pure air, and continue to hold the breath throughout the movement. This re-inhalation increases the heat and energy, which supports the spreading of the prana like nectar throughout the body. The main concentration of this spreading prana is at the chakra specified in each exercise. At the end of the movement, the exhalation descends the central channel and moves out through the side channels and nostrils. Think that this exhalation exhausts, expels, and clears the blocks and obstacles that would obscure your natural awareness. Imagine that the chakra itself opens and clears and supports the experience of open awareness at that chakra. At this point the breath returns to whatever breath is normal for you as you rest in open awareness.

NOTE: The instructions are to hold the breath throughout each exercise and exhale only at the end. However, if you feel you need more air before the movement is completed, do a short re-inhalation. If that is not enough air, repeat a movement only three instead of five times, building up your stamina over time until you are able to do five.

When performing the *tsa lung*, it is recommended that you repeat each exercise at least three times. These exercises can clear gross obstacles such as those that cause disease or strong negative emotions; clear or exhaust the momentum that drives obscuring thoughts; and can clear subtle obstacles that disturb your ability to recognize and rest in your own natural mind.

Abiding or resting with clear attention in what has become clearer

At the end of the set of three exercises, bring clear attention to the chakra you have been working with and rest the mind there, allowing the physical and then energetic energies to settle. Rest your mind in what has become clearer; rest in open awareness as long as the experience remains fresh and uncontrived. This is the best medicine. Abide with your eyes open. However, if you find you become too distracted, you may close your eyes.

The Actual Practice

Assume the five-point posture

Sit cross-legged, with your spine straight, chest open, and your hands in equipoise position resting about four finger widths below your navel. (With your palms facing up, keep the fingers together and bring the left fingers to rest on the right fingers, thumbs brought to touch the base of the ring finger of the same hand.) The chin is brought in slightly allowing the back of the neck to lengthen. If you are seated in a chair, cross your legs comfortably at the ankles. Keep your spine upright, free of the support of the back of the chair. (All else is as described above.)

Reflect upon what is to be cleared

Before each exercise, connect with stillness of your body, silence of your speech, and the spaciousness of your mind. Then bring to mind a situation or behavior in your life that is problematic or occupies or worries you. Without judging, feel how you experience this disturbance in your body, your breath, your mind. Look directly without analyzing. In this way you are selecting what is to be deleted or released with the exercise.

The five exercises

1. The **upward-moving *tsa lung* exercise** opens the throat, forehead, and crown chakras. Inhale through the side channels and imagine that pure air enters and fills the central channel up to the throat chakra. Hold the breath, concentrating the focus at that chakra. Re-inhale and continue to hold and maintain the focus. Feel that the subtle breath spreads upward internally, nurturing all the sense organs located in the head. Bring to mind the obstacles you seek to clear or exhaust. Slowly start rotating the head five times counterclockwise. Feel that the subtle *lung* is moving upward through your head in a spiral movement. Then reverse directions and rotate the head five times clockwise, continuing the same feeling of the nectar spreading upward in a spiral movement, as if washing and cleansing all that it touches. At the end of the movement, exhale the air. Imagine that the breath descends the central channel and obstacles leaves the body through the nostrils via the side channels. Your attention is directed upward as you exhale, as you imagine that the obstacles carried by the subtle lung are expelled through the crown chakra. Repeat the exercise for a total of three times. With each repetition, the exhalation releases and clears obstacles. After the third repetition, rest your mind in open awareness feeling the throat, forehead, and crown chakras open and clear. With your eyes open, rest in open awareness as long as the experience remains fresh and uncontrived.

2. The **life-force *tsa lung* exercise** opens the heart chakra. Inhale through the nostrils following the pathway of the side channels, imagining that the breath enters the central channel at the junction and rises up to the heart. Hold the air at the chest level, concentrating at the heart chakra. Re-inhale, holding and maintaining the focus at the heart chakra while feeling the *lung* spread internally through your chest, nurturing the area of your heart. You might feel or sense the obstacles you are seeking to exhaust and clear. Extend your right arm straight out from your body and rotate the arm five times overhead in a counterclockwise direction, making a motion like a lasso. Feel that the vital air is expanding your chest and your life force is being strengthened. Then rotate the left arm five times clockwise with the same lasso motion. Still maintaining the breath retention and the focus, place your hands on the sides of your hips and rotate the upper torso five times towards the right and then five times towards the left. At the end, exhale the breath imagining that it descends through the central channel and ascends through the side channels, releasing through the nostrils. Feel that obstacles are released and exhausted with the exhalation. Imagine the heart chakra opening and releasing as well. Repeat this exercise a total of three times. At the end, with eyes open, rest in open awareness with your focus supported by the opening at the heart chakra. Remain for as long as the experience is fresh and uncontrived.

3. The **fire-like *tsa lung* exercise** opens the navel chakra. Inhale the pure air through nostrils following the pathway of the side channels and bring the *lung*, or prana, to the junction where it enters the central channel and moves up to the navel. Hold the air with the vase retention (Tibetan: *bar lung*; Sanskrit: *kumbhaka*). Vase retention refers to the act of pulling up the muscles of the anus, perineum, and pelvic platform, creating a basket, while the diaphragm pushes down to create a lid. Take care not to hold with too much pressure or tension. Concentrate your mind at the navel chakra within the "vase." Re-inhale, maintaining the focus and the vase retention. Feel that the lung spreads, filling the vase and nurturing the navel area. Rotate the abdomen five times counterclockwise, maintaining the concentration and the vase retention as well as bringing to mind of any obstacles you are clearing. Then rotate five times in a clockwise direction. At the end of the movement, the

exhalation moves down through the central channel and out the side channels through both nostrils. Feel that the obstacles are releasing through your breath and dissolving into space. Feel the opening and release at the navel chakra. Repeat the exercise for a total of three times. With eyes open, rest in open awareness with your focus hosted by the navel chakra. Rest as long as the experience remains fresh and uncontrived.

4. The focus of the **pervasive *tsa lung* exercise** begins at the junction of the three channels, moves throughout the central channel, pervades the entire body, and then spreads beyond the bounds of the body. Inhale pure air through the side channels to the junction, bringing the lung into the central channel and holding the focus and breath there. Imagine the lung begins to spread throughout the entire body. Re-inhale, imagining or feeling the vital breath spreading, and particularly pervading those places where the energy seems blocked. As you feel the spread of the vital breath throughout your body, raise your hands above your head. Clap them together sharply above the top of your head and rub your hands together, generating a sense of heat and energy. Continuing to hold the breath, massage your whole body, particularly those areas where you experience any injuries or blockages. Feel these areas come alive, as if every cell of your body were vibrating with vital breath. Still holding the breath, perform a movement similar to shooting an arrow, opening the upper torso. Do this five times to the right and then five to the left. At the end, as you exhale, *lung* descends the central channel and the obstacles are expelled through the nostrils via the side channels. Experience release through all the pores of your body. Let your breath return to normal, and then repeat the exercise for a total of three times. At the conclusion, rest in open awareness with eyes open. Your focus is pervasive. Rest as long as the experience remains fresh and uncontrived.

5. The **downward-clearing *tsa lung* exercise** opens the secret chakra. With the right leg in front of the left and the hands holding the knees, inhale through nostrils and follow the pathway of the side channels, bringing the lung, or prana, to the junction. At the base of the central channel is the secret chakra. Create the “basket hold” by pulling up on the muscles of the anus, perineum, and pelvic floor. Concentrate the attention and the vital breath at the secret chakra supported by this basket hold. Re-inhale and continue to maintain the focus and hold while letting the lung spread, feeling that you are nurturing this area. Bring to mind and particular blockages you are clearing. Hold your right knee with both hands and turn towards it. Rotate your lower abdomen five times counterclockwise. Next, hold the left leg at the knee and turn towards it. Rotate in a clockwise direction five times. Hold both knees and rotate the abdomen five times counterclockwise. Throughout the movement, the breath is held, you are pulling up on the muscles that create the basket hold, and the focus is maintained at the secret chakra as you work to exhaust and clear obstacles. At the end, exhale through the nostrils as the obstacles which are carried on the prana move through the side channels and out with the breath to dissolve into space. Imagine that the secret chakra releases and opens and that subtle energy moves in a downward direction through the secret chakra. Repeat the exercise a total of three times. After your final repetition, bring clear attention to the secret chakra, experiencing any changes at the level of the body, energy, and mind. With eyes open, rest with clear attention in what has been cleared.

Now feel the openness in each chakra and allow this sense of openness at the chakras to expand pervasively. Abide without planning the future, dwelling on the past, or changing the present. Let everything be as it is.

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