

Gathering and Pulling (dǎoyǐn 導引)

Ancient Chinese Energy Cultivation Exercises

A silk tapestry found at an archaeological site located in Changsha, China was dated to 168 BCE (Han era China). The Gathering and Pulling Diagram (*Daoyintu*) depicts 44 exercises that laid the foundation for vital-energy cultivation exercise (*qìgōng* 氣功). *Dǎoyǐn* can mean gathering and pulling, or stretching and guiding.

Nice explanation of “The Daoyintu and the Mawangdui Texts”, from the Gwang Zhou Gung Fu school (Zaragosa, Spain). Available in English and Spanish:

<https://gwongzaukungfu.com/en/daoyintu-and-mawangdui-texts/>

Book about the Daoyintu Tapestry, including interpretations for exercises:

Smith and Carmone, *Shadows of Mawangdui: Animating the Silk Daoyintu*.

<https://threepinespress.com/2022/06/10/shadows-of-mawangdui/>

The 44 Gathering and Pulling (dǎoyǐn 導引) Exercises, in 4 lines

Breathe deeply. Imagine standing in a forest, or open field, or at the beach, surrounded by nature. Let mind and emotions be calm and comfortable. Guide stale energy away from the body, pull in fresh energy.

First Line

- 1. Opening Heaven and Earth.** Inhale raising arms above head, gathering life-energy (*qì* 氣) from the heavens. Slowly lower, bending forward, gathering life-energy from the Earth. Nurture at abdomen.
- 2. Pulling Stale Essence.** Tilt head back. Massage kidneys. Tap and massage back muscles. Reach hands back, palms up. Expel air and stale energy with one of the 4 traditional healing sounds: ‘Haaaah!’, ‘Shoooo!’, ‘Hoooooh!’, or ‘Shwaaay!’. Breathe in, directing refreshed vital energy to areas that need it.
- 3. Twisting the Torso**, also called **Ring the Temple Bell**. Align perineum (pelvic floor), spine, and top of head. Rotate left and right from the torso, letting arms swing freely. Guide stale energy away from internal organs, inviting in fresh essence everywhere, from the head to the toes.
- 4. Shooting the Arrow.** Bow stance. Cross arms, step left. Make bow posture with left hand, draw bowstring with right. Relax. Cross. Repeat to the right. Collect fresh *qì* when releasing the string.
- 5. Tapping the Middle Palace and Cloud Gate.** Form beak hands. Relax elbows. Tap ‘Central Treasury’ acupressure points (Lung 1, just below clavicle) with both hands. Then tap across left hand to right shoulder, alternatingly right hand to left shoulder to ‘Cloud Gate’ (Lung 2, just above clavicle). Breathe in joy.
- 6. Snapping Yin.** From *wuji* posture, raise right palm and left leg. Release stale essence through hand and foot. Pull fresh *qì* into lower elixir field (*dantian*), below navel, above perineum. Repeat left palm, right leg.

7. **Swirl Qi from Earth to Sky.** From *wuji* posture, with eyes following hands, sweep left, all the way down, to the right and back. Release stale energy from lower elixir field, pulling in/gathering fresh vitality.

8. **Praying Mantis.** Fingers touch thumbs, elbows in. Thrust up, out diagonally to left with a step, and arching the back. Extend fingers to release turgid *qi*. Bring fingers back to center, pulling in *élan vital*.

9. **Thrusting Palms.** Hands, elbows at side, palms facing up. Bend at waist, thrusting palms forward. Make one of the 4 healing sounds, releasing stiffness and tension. Draw back and up, cooling the mind, opening the heart, warming the belly, nurturing vital life-energy (*qi* in Mandarin, *ki* in Japanese, *gi* in Korean).

10. **Limbs Dropping.** Lift right arm up over shoulder while letting knees bend naturally and left arm swing back, down slightly. Pause briefly, releasing stale energy. Draw in fresh energy when bringing arm down. Repeat with left arm up, right arm back.

11. **Expanding into the Cosmos.** Embrace a ‘ball of *qi*’ in front of you, right hand on top. Rotate right, letting arms flow, one up and right, the other down and left. Release any remaining tension. Recover, gather, nurture with left hand on top. Repeat to the left.

Second Line

12. **Giant Step.** Raise both hands while taking a long step forward with left foot. Bring arms down, rest foot at 45 degrees. Repeat right. Turn 90 degrees left, repeat. Repeat in the 4 cardinal directions.

13. **Slowly Extend Limbs.** Lift arms slowly, palms down, wrists relaxed. Lift left leg at knee, then slowly straighten it. Balance while drawing in fresh energy. Repeat lifting right leg.

14. **Gather Qi from Front and Back.** Circle arms from behind, palms down, leaning forward to embrace ball of *qi* with slightly bent knees, slightly arched back. Turn palms up, lower ball of *qi* to lower elixir field while straightening back and knees.

15. **Bounce the Elixir Field.** Spin the elixir field down and up internally by lifting, dropping shoulders and bending knees. Up the back, down the front, like a wave.

16. **Swinging Arms.** Swing both arms up to the left side, turning torso, turning head, following flow with your eyes. Bend, bounce in the knees as arms swing down and then up to the right. Repeat.

17. **Pole Rock.** Grasping a long exercise wand or staff, or with hands against a wall, lean forward while pushing buttocks back and lifting toes, with weight on the heels. Straighten up, onto toes, lifting the spine.

18. **Inside the Abdomen.** Arms extended to side in a long line, palms up. Roll left and imagine ball of *qi* rolling down from one hand to the other, upper hand with palm up, lower hand with palm down. Reverse.

19. **Centered Breathing.** *Wújí* posture. Inhale 5 seconds, exhale 5 seconds, bending knees while exhaling, using healing sounds if desired. Repeat for 10 seconds. Repeat for 15 seconds.

20. **Bear Drops.** Wider stance. Reach up with both hands as if grasping for a branch. Alternate wide hands and hands together at top. Pull down while bending knees, with a healing sound.

21. **Picking up an Apple.** Wider stance. Bend forward, right hand in front of left foot, left hand swinging up. Lift both arms while still bent forward. 'Pick up an apple' with left hand in front of right foot. Continue to alternate. Lift up slowly.

22. **Connect with the Heavens.** Wider stance. Lift right arm in a circular fashion over head, with palm down. Turn left and exhale, with healing sound. Lower right, lift left, with palm up, looking right, exhaling. Lower arms, look straight. Repeat.

Third Line

23. **Hip and Knee Bend.** Either stand or kneel. Massage kidneys while bending back and forward at waist, knees slightly bent if standing.

24. **Carry Money.** Like 'taiji walking', but with eyes closed. Interlace fingers and hold below belly, palms up. Let chin drop like looking at hands. Step heel first, exhaling, shifting weight, then other foot. Forward, circles, back. When going back, put toe first.

25. **Crane Call.** Lift right arm up in front, left arm up in back, bouncing at the knees. Exhale as 'wings' come down. Switch sides.

26. **Slanted Flying.** Embrace ball of qi at abdomen, right palm facing left palm. Extend right hand 45 degrees up, left 45 degrees down, to sides. Return to embrace with hands reversed. Extend opposite.

27. **Dragon Ascending.** Arms wide akimbo, palms down. Reach down, squatting, arms crossed. Lift up to chest level, collecting. Reach up wide, palms up. Gather back to chest level. Open, reach down, repeating.

28. **Tiger Backs Into Cave.** All-fours, 'table' posture, or as close to it as possible without discomfort. Move arms and legs to take 10 short steps backward. Slowly straighten all the way up. Pause, repeat.

29. **Looking Back.** Bouncing from the knees on each rotation, raise arms palms up, left in front, right in back, twisting to look at back hand. Bouncing, reverse. Repeat.

30. **Penetrating Yin and Yang.** With a pole, staff, or by a wall or other support, reach right hand down, left hand up, bending and twisting, just beyond 'nice' but well short of discomfort. Return to center, still bending down, reach/twist to the other side. This can be challenging; don't overdo it.

31. **Swinging Upper Arms.** Somewhat wider stance. Lift arms relaxing wrists, fingers in 'piano player' mode. Swing arms back, palms up, while bending at waist and a slight bend, bounce at knees. Relax, hands at side. Repeat after pause.

32. **Bird Stretch.** Starting with hands at sides, lift 'wings' to sides. Drop all the way down to toes or as far as can do without discomfort. Bend forward while lifting 'wings' to side, straighten up with 'wings' still extended. Repeat.

33. **Big Bird.** Hands at sides. Pull elbows back and then push down to right at 45 degrees. Vibrate relaxed fingers. Retract elbows. Push down to left at 45 degrees. Repeat. Try going very slow. Try going faster with more force. Try using healing sounds.

Fourth Line

34. **Look Up and Shout.** Arms forward, palms facing each other. Exhaling, drop arms to side and raise them behind, palms down. Look up. Shout or voice a healing sound.

35. **Monkey Bawling.** Wider stance. Loose fists, loose arms. Bounce, keeping feet flat. Make healing or other sounds.

36. **Pulling the Warm Ailment.** Feet shoulder width. Bend forward at waist, crossing arms at ankles, exhaling. Swing arms above head, crossing at wrists. Let arms fall naturally, swinging with healing sound.

37. **Sowing Seeds.** Close stance, hands nurturing qi at abdomen. Swing left, as if throwing seeds while right hand reaches gently down, back to other side. Repeat with right hand sowing seeds.

38. **Praying Palms, Thrusting Elbows.** Feet shoulder-width. Palms facing but not touching at heart level. Separate palms, pushing down, then raising elbows. Exhale, drop elbows, back to prayer position. Repeat slowly or quickly.

39. **Rocking and Rolling.** Sit on floor grasping shins. Turn trunk side to side massaging gluteus muscles. Place hands behind back, rocking knees together left and right.

40. **Gibbon Jump.** Feet shoulder-width. Reach up with right hand as though picking fruit from a tree. Bring to your mouth, then thrust down, away, with healing sound. Repeat to the left. Add a small jump as if only high-hanging fruit is available.

41. **Bear Amble.** Wide stance. Stomp feet if it feels safe, else just take steps. Arms out to side like a large bear. Move left arm, left leg together, carefully raising, planting the foot. Swinging arms horizontally, repeat right.

42. **Turtle Move.** Feet shoulder-width or wider. Arms out at shoulder height. Right hand on top, carry a small ball of qi to right as far as comfortable. Rotate, placing left hand on top, turning to the left. Meditate while moving slowly, placing the heart-mind focus on the lower elixir field.

43. **Turning the Wheel.** Feet shoulder-width or wider. Palms just above shoulders, facing forward. Reach forward and up. At full extension, swing arms down while bouncing the knees, swing arms back gently. Repeat in reverse order. Gather qi from all directions.

44. **Falcon.** (Similar to “Warrior 2” in yoga, but with movement.) Wide stance, feet parallel. Spread arms like wings. Step 45 degrees to left with left foot, which is now the front foot. Bend down towards left foot (like in “low single whip” in taijiquan). Straighten back right leg and reach forward to left, fingers at eye level (like “Warrior 2”). Recover to central stance. Then repeat with right foot forward.