

Give and Take



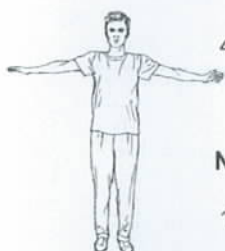
By Kate



The Shaolin monks who practice Kung Fu, Tai Chi and meditation in China do this breathing exercise as preparation for any difficult task.

First of all gathering in your energies:

1. Stand with the feet hip width apart, feet in parallel. Let the knees be slightly bent, and the tailbone coming down. Arms relax at the sides.
2. As you breathe in, let the arms lift out to the sides and come up to form a circle, and just over your head...
3. Now as you exhale, bring the hands, palms down, in front of the body, so that they are just below the navel...
4. And repeat this five times, breathing in and floating the arms up, exhaling and hands coming down in front of you, pausing just below the navel.



Now you can open and connect to the world:

1. Begin standing as above, except with the hands palm down, in front of the body, just below the navel...arms soft...
2. As you breathe in, let the hands float up in front of you, separating above the head.
3. As you breathe out, the arms come out wide to the sides, until the hands rest again at the starting point, in front of the body.
4. And repeat five times, letting the breath lead the movement of the arms.
5. When you finish, just stand and take three breaths, resting in the stillness of the body.



How Kind of You

The person who dished up your supper, the friend who gave you a tea bag, the officer who took you to your workshop, the starling who visited your windowsill for a while, the smell of fresh laundered clothes, the taste of your own newly cleaned teeth – the world provides many small things that often pass unnoticed. In turn, you act in various ways to support the world - listening to a mate's troubles (even when you don't want to), letting someone get in front of you in the queue, putting your waste (rubbish and human) where it should go, turning off the tap because you don't want to waste the earth's resources.

It is useful to remind yourself – and with real evidence! – that all of us are interdependent with other people and the natural world. We cannot exist as the separate 'me island' it sometimes feels like. It helps to remember that other people need us for their existence and well-being too, and to remember that *everything* has the desire to connect.

Taking five minutes before you sleep and reviewing the day is one way to bring these truths home. As you replay the day, reflect on the various ways you've been supported since you woke up - and then on anything you have done for others. Never mind what kind of day it was, or if it seemed there wasn't



much human kindness out there. There will have been some. Did anyone feed you today? Did the lights come on? Did someone smile at you? (It sounds corny, but there is power in a smile - in *your* smile.) It's impossible not to realise that even if we regard ourselves or others as the meanest people in the world, there is no escape from being filled to the brim with kindness as everything goes on interconnecting: eating, showering, looking, listening, reflecting...



Every day
I see or hear
Something
That more or less
Kills me
With delight,
That leaves me
Like a needle
In the haystack
Of light.

It was what I was born for –
To look, to listen,
To lose myself
Inside this soft world –
To instruct myself
Over and over
In joy,
And acclamation.

Nor am I talking
About the exceptional,
The fearful, the dreadful,
The very extravagant –
But of the ordinary,
The common, the very drab,
The daily presentations.

Oh, good scholar,
I say to myself,
How can you help
But grow wise
With such teachings
As these –
The untrimmable light
Of the world,
The ocean's shine,
The prayers that are made
Out of grass?

- Mary Oliver

