



Heaven—This pure *yang*, all-male **energy** moves upward and outward while being effortless, endless, and emotionless. It is the creative foundation of the other **energy-change patterns** and is often compared to the **energy** of adolescent male sexuality. This **energy-change pattern** corresponds to the physical **patterns** of the various single palm changes in ba gua zhang.



Earth—This pure *yin*, all-female **energy** sinks downward, soft and heavy, while drawing inward. It is a receptive **energy**, which nurtures the **energy** of Heaven and brings manifestation from the creative potential of pure *yang*. This **energy-change pattern** can be compared to the sexuality of an ancient **earth-mother** symbol, such as the Venus of Willendorf. The **Earth energy-change pattern** corresponds to the physicality of the various double palm changes within the vast variety of ba gua zhang styles.

The other six **energy-change patterns** are combinations of Heaven and **Earth** energies. It is therefore imperative that ba gua zhang practitioners understand the first two **energy-change patterns** before attempting to comprehend the other six **patterns**.



Wind Trigram

Wind—Like its namesake, the Wind energy-change pattern constantly changes from amorphous to solid and back to amorphous. You can't touch the wind, but it can knock you down. When manifested physically, this energy-change pattern allows a ba gua boxer to seem to disappear and then suddenly crash into their opponent with the power of a tornado. Wind energy makes one seem to be everywhere at once, but nowhere that they can be touched. With Wind energy, one turns around their central core.



Thunder Trigram

Thunder—This is the energy of a shock wave. It is a yang explosion followed by a series of yin reverberations. The energy-change pattern of Thunder is the sudden shock that comes out of nowhere. When applied martially, Thunder energy is the quick, multiple-striking technique that drives reverberating energy deep into an opponent's organs. When used therapeutically, Thunder energy is the vibrating massage that relieves tension and congestion within a patient.



Fire Trigram

Fire—This energy-change pattern clings, coils, and spirals. It is yang and firm on the edges, but soft and yin at its center. This is the energy of a flame that coils around your Christmas tree, clings to your curtains as it spirals up them, and then circles into your ceiling. In all of its applications, martial and otherwise, this is the energy that sticks to another person and coils around him.



Water Trigram

Water—This is the pattern of a pounding wave. This pattern is soft and yin on the edges, but at its center is a solid yang mass, much like how the cap and undertow of a wave can be frothy, but at its center is a solid mass of heavy water. The Water energy-change pattern is considered to be the dark and destructive aspects of the water element. It is manifested physically by using the yin aspects of the body's opening and closing movements.



Mountain Trigram

Mountain—Mountains radiate stillness, but the Mountain change pattern is a compressed stillness in the center that has the potential to explode outward, emitting light energy in every direction simultaneously. This is akin to the internal pressures of a volcano, which give it its explosive abilities. In this change, one coils his or her energy inward to a momentarily still place and then allows it to explode outward. When doing this, one's body seems to shrink and then grow.

The primary practice of awakening the nervous system is often called “What’s Alive and What’s Dead?” A practitioner begins by directing his consciousness to the top of his head or to the top of his qi field (if he can feel this area). One’s qi field projects outward from all around his or her body and often is referred to as one’s “aura.” Qi is a person’s life-force **energy**. When a person is feeling strong and healthy, her qi field may project a couple of feet around her body. On the other hand, when a person is feeling weak and unwell, her **energy** or qi field may only rise a few inches from her skin.

Students must learn to feel their bodies by awakening their nervous systems. At the same time, they must do their best to shut off visualizations of their bodies. Once the nervous system has been awakened, a practitioner can simultaneously visualize his body and still be able to feel it, but if he engages in visualization during the first few months of this practice, his mind will only make mental pictures of his body and he will never learn to really feel it.

After feeling whatever they can of the top of the qi field, the practitioner’s awareness drops to the top of her head, where she tries to feel the hair, scalp, skull, the plates of the skull, and the sutures of the skull where the plates come together. Students must simply list what they can feel and what they can’t feel. They must also recognize the simple fact that there are no perfect human beings. We are so far from perfect that if there ever are any perfect humans, we probably won’t recognize each other as the same species. Trying to be perfect can lead to insanity, and striving for perfection in **energy** work and meditation can render a practitioner crazier than a bedbug. In meditation and **energy** work practices, it is essential to recognize when you’re doing your best and simply be satisfied with that. Perfection is not an option. This is reflected in most practitioners’ first experience in feeling the top of their heads—they usually only feel the scalp out of all the parts listed above. This is quite normal for beginners. After taking inventory of the top of the head, the practitioner then simply moves down his or her body a bit and feels along a cross section, trying to sense skin, bone, connective tissue, organs and/or glands in the region, fluids moving through their various fluid systems, and the empty spaces or cavities of the

body. They simply list what they can feel (What's Alive) and what they can't feel (What's Dead).

With this focus, the practitioner continues down his or her body in consecutive cross sections, like visiting fifteen or twenty floors of a building. At each level, he or she simply lists what is alive and what is dead and continues downward to the bottom of the qi field below the feet. In the first stage of this exercise, and in the following practice of blockage detection and removal, it usually takes a minimum of twenty minutes to actually feel one's way completely through the body. As your practice hours build up, and more body parts move from the Dead column to the Alive column, your nervous system will awaken and become sensitive. At this point, you can allow your visualization skills to return and join with the feeling of your now-awakened nervous system. What's Alive and What's Dead practice allows you to monitor your own body and adjust your health practices and lifestyle accordingly. It is also a great help in manipulating small muscle groups and connective tissue for greater movement and power in martial arts practice.

When in the course of his or her regular What's Alive and What's Dead practice the practitioner finds sensations of congestion and constriction arising and impeding the ability to feel the body, he or she has found an **energy** blockage. This is the starting point of feeling the body's **energy**. The practitioner then focuses in on the sensation of the blockage until it seems to form a solid shape. She applies her intent to this shape and begins the dissolving process in which

the edges of the shape transform from a solid to a liquid and finally to a vapor, which floats outward to the edges of the practitioner's qi field. The feeling of this process is somewhat akin to squeezing your fist tightly until the knuckles turn white, then

the edges of the shape transform from a solid to a liquid and finally to a vapor, which floats outward to the edges of the practitioner's qi field. The feeling of this process is somewhat akin to squeezing your fist tightly until the knuckles turn white, then relaxing the muscles of the hand—without actually moving the fingers or releasing the position of the fist—and feeling the relaxation radiate from the center of your fist to the edges. Few blockages are dissolved away in one sitting. Many of the blockages you'll encounter took a long time to form, and it will take a long time to make them dissolve. It is essential that the practitioner recognize when she has dissolved

all that she can of a particular blockage and then moves on accordingly, continuing to feel her way down her body and pausing to work on dissolving any other blockages that might arise.

Energy blockages are caused by shocks to a person's **energy** fields; the blockage consists of the congealed **energy** of a particular field. Most of the blockages that you detect early on are in the body and the qi field. When the vapor that dissolves off of these blockages reaches the edges of the qi field, it reenters the qi system as usable qi and helps to energize the practitioner. This process is like breaking up a logjam and then using the logs. At the center of each blockage resides the shock that created the blockage. This shock is manifested as either a physical or emotional sensation, which will be released when the blockage is finally dissolved completely. Anything that shocks a person—jolts them inside and freezes their nervous system—will create an **energy** blockage. Any overwhelming physical or emotional sensation received at a critical time can create such a blockage. Physical shocks can come from either pain or pleasure; emotional shocks can arise from joy or from fear, sorrow, and anger. A surprise party could create a blockage of joy as large as one caused by the pain of a surprise slap in the face. An equal amount of effort is needed to dissolve away both types of blockages.

When the sensation of the shock that created the blockage is released, it must be recognized and then let go. To either repress the sensation or hang on to it and feel it over and over will immediately recreate the blockage and you'll have to do the work of dissolving it all over again. Some practitioners repress and refuse to feel these sensations, while others mistake the heat, cold, shaking, electric, pressure release, nerve impulse, and emotional sensations for some sort of power and hold on to them. Either of these practices can completely stagnate one's progress in the dissolving practices.

When a practitioner has been dissolving **energy** blockages for a while, he often begins to sense a difference in the texture of some of these blockages. Whereas the average blockage used to feel rough, like a block of sugar or a rock, some of the new blockages begin to feel very smooth, like a ripe grape. Beginning to feel these blockages means that the practitioner's sense of feeling is becoming refined. He also notices that when he dissolves these smooth blockages, instead of wearing away at them unevenly like water wears away sugar cubes and rocks, he is able to wear them down in even layers, like he's peeling onions. These smooth, subtle blockages are attached to a person's **energy** layers, such as the emotional **energy** field and the thinking **energy** field, which extend beyond the range of the qi field. Because these **energy** fields extend way beyond the normal range of a person's consciousness, when the edges of these blockages are dissolved to a vapor, the vapor then implodes into the center of the blockage instead of floating out to the edges of the person's qi field. The shock at the center of these subtle blockages is almost always an emotional sensation. The process of dissolving these subtle blockages, causing the vapor to implode inward is called "inner dissolving," whereas the process of dissolving the rougher, denser blockages and letting the vapor float out to the edges of the qi field is called "outer dissolving." Once a practitioner can begin to sense these subtle, smooth blockages, all of his dissolving practices will use both the inner- and outer-dissolving processes; he can apply whichever process the encountered blockage seems to require.

These initial dissolving processes are usually practiced while either standing or sitting. Standing can be done in the martial posture of one's choice or in a basic double-weighted stance with the feet parallel, the knees slightly bent, and the spine straight and erect. Sitting can be in the classic cross-legged meditation pose or in the Daoist chair-sitting posture, known as the "emperor's posture," because legend states that this was the posture in which the emperors of China conducted court. In this posture, the practitioner sits on the edge of a chair, with the feet parallel and shoulder-width apart, the spine straight, and the hands on the knees. Breathing during these practices is always diaphragmatic and flows unbroken through the nose. Never breathe with your chest or hold your breath.

After about ten months to a year of practicing the outer and inner dissolving processes, the practitioner might notice that she has reached stabilization within the practice. This means that for the past few weeks her practice has been the same. All the little blockages that could be eradicated have been gone for a while, and she seems to remove the same amount from each of the big blockages during each practice session.

Remember that there is no such thing as perfection in this exercise, so stabilization is as good as it gets. If there exists a point of zero **energy** blockages, it is beyond what human life can experience.

When stabilization is achieved, it is time for the practitioner to begin the more advanced dissolving practices. The most common of these is the creation of a continuous dissolving ground wire in one's secondary consciousness. The first step in this process is for the practitioner to speed up her dissolving until she can sweep down her body in five second scans and dissolve everything—blockages that were formerly taking twenty minutes or more to work on. When this is achieved she begins to make a continuous loop of five-second scans by looping her consciousness up the back of her qi field after each downward scan, which in turn sets up the next five-second downward scan. When this continuous loop has been developed, the practitioner begins to practice drawing this loop into her secondary consciousness, thereby freeing her primary consciousness for other thoughts. The secondary consciousness is that part of the brain that allows you to sing along with an advertising jingle in the back of your mind while carrying on a conversation using your primary consciousness. One of the simplest ways to practice dissolving in the secondary consciousness is to occupy the primary consciousness with conversation while practicing dissolving. When the continuous dissolving loop in the secondary consciousness becomes second nature, it provides a dissolving ground wire, which becomes a safety device for all and any **energy** gathering, distribution, and discharge practices in which the primary consciousness might engage.

From the book:

The Whirling Circles of Ba Gua Zhang: The Art and Legends of the Eight Trigram Palm

By Frank Allen, Tina Chunna Zhang