

# UNLOCK YOUR POTENTIAL!

# MEDITATION

# Holds the Key

The power of the mind, coupled with disciplined training, can bring one to the threshold of the impossible. Meditation shows the path.

By Drs. Alex and Annellen Simpkins, Ph.D.

*If you take muddy water and still it, it gradually becomes clear. If you bring something to rest in order to move it, it gradually comes alive.*

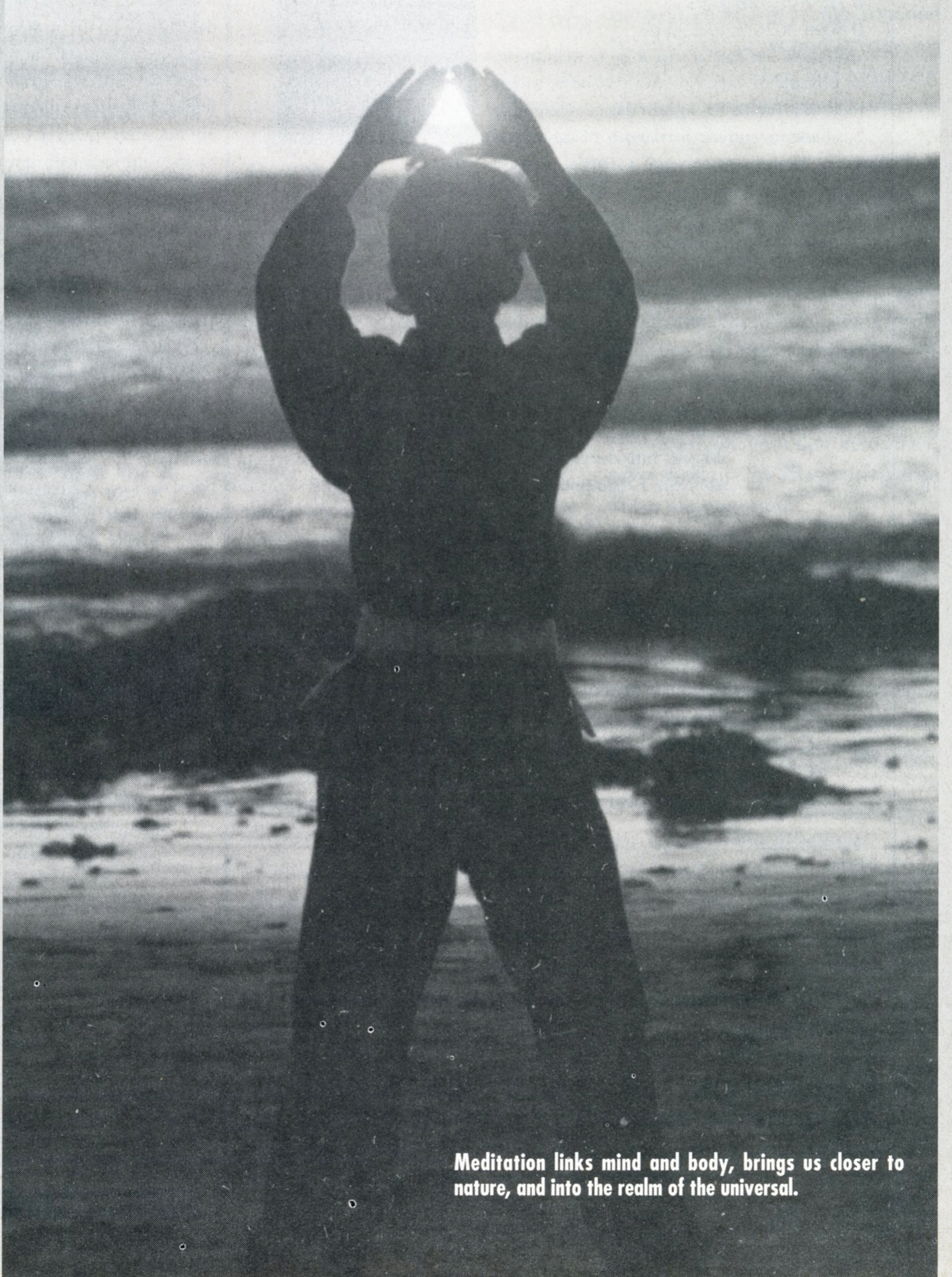
—Tao Te Ching

**M**editation is a deep pool of timeless, ancient wisdom for practitioners of all arts. Just as kung-fu has specific techniques to discipline the body, meditation has techniques to discipline the mind.

With practice, it comes to have a personally meaningful character. Those practitioners who include meditation in their training find that skills such as calm, sensitivity, and flexibility generalize from their martial art to their lives. Yet, no special equipment is necessary, only one's own mind.

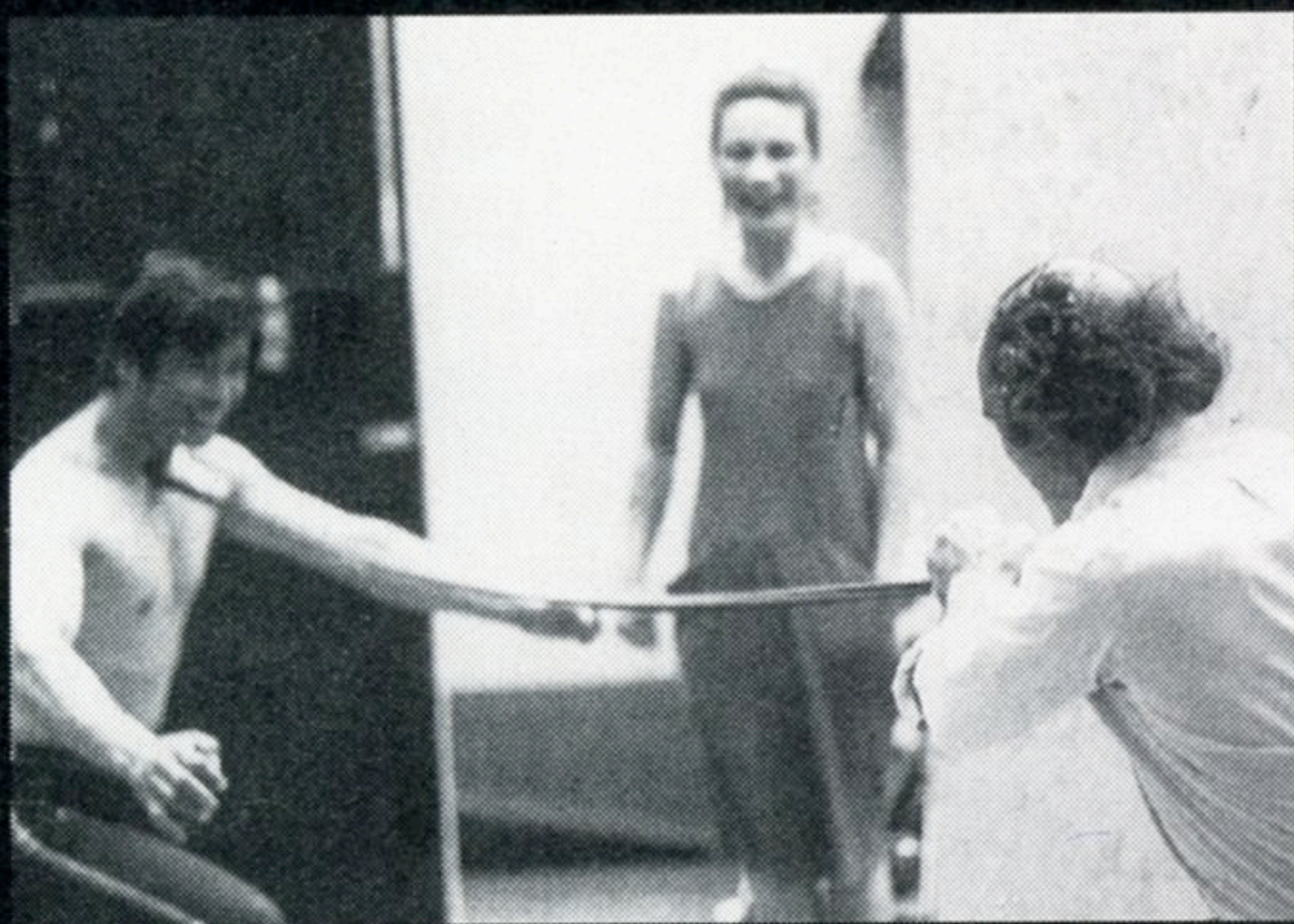
Herbert Benson, M.D., demonstrated in research at Harvard University that meditation brings measurable positive changes in metabolic rate, heart rate, and blood pressure even in hypertensive subjects usually maintained on medication. Subjects gained a greater capacity to tolerate stressors in life.

Martial arts have all, explicitly in some, implicitly in others, included meditation. Soft style martial arts, such as tai chi, utilize Taoist principles to inspire their techniques. Many kung-fu styles draw from the teachings of the Shaolin Temple, which were influenced by Bodhidharma's Zen. Even Bruce Lee, who downgraded many aspects of the great traditions, chose a college major in philosophy. His meditations were central in the evolution of his style. He derived techniques from the principles of Zen, Krishnamurti, and Taoism, applied to the practical aspects of kung-fu and his life, which he did not separate.

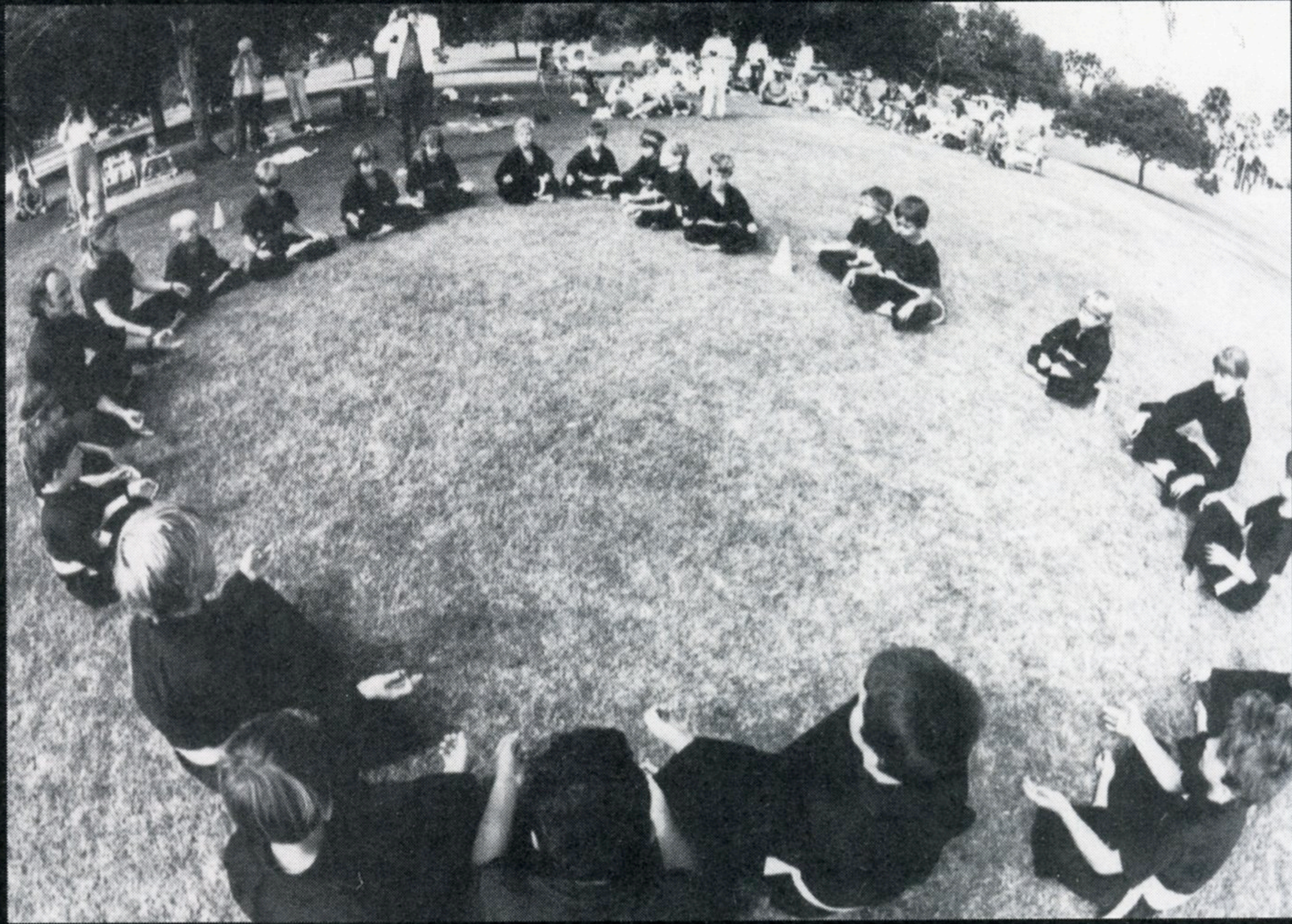


Meditation links mind and body, brings us closer to nature, and into the realm of the universal.





Here the author uses a powerful stance to resist the force generated by the Shaolin practitioner who bends three one-inch steel bars against his trachea.



Meditation can be done alone or with a supportive group.

Most people know that meditation leads to deep calm, self-awareness and higher consciousness. Pain control is a lesser-known skill which meditation develops. Four Yogis were studied by scientists (*Biofeedback*, 1972) to see whether their claims that focused meditative concentration helped them to overcome pain.

They demonstrated a raised pain threshold by their capacity to keep their hands in four-degree centigrade water, barely above freezing

beyond what would be considered possible. This is a genuine art which involves special training along with concentrated meditation on the body. The attention is focused, held calm and steady. In some arts, practitioners visualize that they send a flow of chi to the area to protect it. After a prolonged period of careful, systematic, progressively challenging training, the body becomes hard like iron.

In performance, an advanced Shaolin practi-

**“(Yogis) demonstrated a raised pain threshold by their capacity to keep their hands in four-degree centigrade water, barely above freezing for 50 minutes with no discomfort.”**

for 50 minutes with no discomfort and no change in their EEG measurements. The scientists were convinced of what many martial artists have known for centuries: that people can transcend limitations of the body barriers through mind control. Martial artists may confront situations which require that they overcome pain and withstand injury to an extent beyond the ordinary person. Meditation offers a key.

Shaolin arts traditionally toughen the body so that practitioners can withstand pain and potential injury to develop specialized skills

tioner showed his immunity to one-inch thick steel bars pressed forcefully against the trachea. He was easily capable of bending the three, as he leaned into the attempt for the author. It took all the strength from 30 years of the author's training to stay on the ground and withstand the practitioner's forceful forward thrust of his throat into the steel to bend the bars.

His feat would be dangerous for the untrained to imitate. The value to the martial artist of such toughness is obvious. The power of the mind coupled with disciplined training can bring one to the threshold of the impossible. Meditation shows the path.

## HISTORICAL BEGINNINGS

Since the dawn of early civilizations, meditation has been practiced in one form or another. Indian philosophy is one of the oldest forms of meditation and has influenced Eastern meditation philosophies either directly or indirectly. Yoga, in ancient Sanskrit, is variously translated as meaning “union” or “to yoke”. The word wended its way through Anglo-Saxon English as “yeug” to actually become the modern word “yoke”, which in its verb form means to become connected, bound together.

Yoga is a meditative method by which to withdraw the mind from involvement with externals to focus inward, on tranquil, higher consciousness. This may result in the experience of oneness with the universe. In Hatha Yoga, the form of Yoga we are probably most familiar with, special postures are combined with meditation and breathing. Many of these positions resemble martial arts movements, which has led some historians to believe that our martial arts roots might be found in these ancient practices.

Taoism is an ancient philosophy and form of meditation which began in China close to the same time that the Greek culture flourished in the West. Taoist meditation attempts to empty the mind of all thoughts to find a calm center. In this way, it becomes possible for the mind to perceive the true nature of things and become filled with new insights:

(The Tao)

Take emptiness to the limit

Maintain tranquility in the center.

(Tao Te Ching)

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Many of the concepts in soft style kung-fu of yielding and fluidity are a direct practical expression of Taoism and its meditation. As Lao Tzu, (in Lin Yutang's translation) wrote?

**To yield is to be preserved whole  
To be bent is to become straight**

According to tradition, Bodhidharma is a legendary figure in early history (fifth century) who traveled and founded Zen and martial arts at the Shaolin Temple. Historians are not all positive that he existed, but there is a great deal of evidence that his influence was real.

Bodhidharma taught his disciples to search for their inner nature without reliance on prayers, organized religions, books, or even rules of any kind. He pointed to direct experience within the individual's mind, through sincere discipline. Traditional stories say that he tried to teach this message to the monks at the temple, but they were not able to learn it.

Frustrated with the usual seated methods of meditation, and being a dynamic character, he taught them 18 meditative movement patterns. These were passed along, enhanced and embellished through the centuries, to evolve into the Shaolin kung-fu of today. Meditation need not only be practiced sitting quietly, as Bodhidharma taught us. The quiet calm, once achieved, can resonate throughout all activity or inactivity: all become one.

#### **ENHANCING THE MIND-BODY LINK**

Proficiency in the martial arts depends on both mind and body skills. You can develop your body by doing your martial arts workout, whatever it is. But the mind-body link is enhanced through meditation. You become more present in your experience, which will improve your kung-fu technique. Masters manifest their experience in every movement and gesture.

We live on the earth under the influence of the earth's gravity. When you are aligned with gravity, simple movements like standing and walking become easier. But how can you tell when you are aligned? Simply standing straight upright is not the answer, for you may not be in tune.

Instinctive sensitive balance is more important. For the kung-fu practitioner, minor alterations in balance can make the difference in some of the more elaborate techniques such as butterfly kicks and 360 degree sweeps. Power is also affected by how well-balanced you are at the point of impact. The exercise which follows will help you find your balance.

#### **MEDITATION ON BALANCE**

Stand, legs apart at a comfortable distance for you, feet flat on the ground or floor, hands at sides, head upright, eyes fixed ahead, at ease. Now, rock slowly and gently back and forth, forward and back, to the balls of your feet heels

up, then to the heels of your feet, back and forth, forward and back, to the point of almost losing your balance, each time. Pause to attend to the feeling, then begin to slowly rock the other way. Concentrate on the sensations. Slowly reduce the sway, until you find a point at which you feel centered, at ease, not rocking, but still, without having to resist with a counter-movement.

Next, rock gently in the same way to each side, rock slowly so that the weight shifts first to one foot, then to the other. Gradually reduce the motion until you find that you pause, effortlessly, at a still point in the center. You have sensed your way into an exact balance point, where your body is best aligned with gravity. Take some moments to fix the experience in your mind. If possible, let go of any unnecessary tensions. Enjoy! You have now taken balanced standing into the realm of art. Your mind tends to calm and clear naturally.

#### **HANDWARMING**

Meditation can teach you how to control some seemingly involuntary processes. Buddhist monks can reputedly melt the snow around

**“As you progress with meditation,  
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them by meditating on body-warming. Swami Rama, in research conducted at the famed Menninger Foundation in Kansas, demonstrated that he could use meditation to alter his body temperature by ten degrees contrast in chosen areas several inches apart on his hand. Changes in body temperature can be controlled by the mind. The following exercise in hand-warming offers you a straightforward place to start.

#### **HANDWARMING MEDITATION**

Sit cross-legged on the floor or in a comfortable chair. Before you begin, measure the temperature of your palm by touching it to your upper arm. Notice how warm or cool your hand feels in relation to your arm.

Place your hands together, palm to palm, fingers touching. Close your eyes. Feel the warmth between your palms. Imagine that the warmth grows. Some people like to focus on the feeling of warmth in their hands. Others have imagined placing their hands near a warm fire in the fireplace or have thought of a very hot day with the sun beating down upon their hands.

Search for an image or sensation of warmth which appeals to you. Spend several minutes allowing the warmth to develop. Then, test your palm against your arm again. Note any change in temperature. Return to the position

with palms touching and meditate further. When you are finished, test your hand's temperature again. People are often pleasantly surprised to note a marked warmth in their palms.

More advanced students can hold their hands, palms facing each other, several inches apart. Feel the heat emanating between the palms. Perform the exercise as described above, testing the change in temperature by touching your palm to your upper arm.

#### **EMPTY THE MIND**

One of the great traditions in meditation has been clearing the mind. To learn how to clear your mind is a skill which has many indirect, positive effects. Martial artists experience the importance of this when sparring. If you are distracted by outside thoughts and concerns, your opponent will invariably find a way to score on you. The split-second timing required in a skilled match requires that all your attention be focused in the moment. Another vivid test of a clear mind is breaking. Let your mind wander but for a split second and your body will know the pain of the unbroken boards, bricks, or tiles as the force hits you back!

The novice experiences thoughts as occurring automatically, beyond control. The psychology of meditation teaches that the contents of your mind can be worked with just as readily as a piece of wood can be shaped and smoothed into a useful object of beauty. Through skills with meditation you can learn to guide your mind in the directions you wish to take it.

#### **FOCUS YOUR ATTENTION**

Sit comfortably in a place where you can be left undisturbed for the time you devote to this meditation. Find a comfortable position. The exact placement of hands and feet are not important, within natural common-sense boundaries. Some like to sit cross-legged. Some prefer knees bent, feet flat. Either way is workable. Close your eyes. Focus all your attention on one color, such as a vast whiteness, blackness, or perhaps your favorite color. If you have any thoughts intrude, try to return your mind to the color you have chosen. At first, do this only for 30 seconds. Use the timer on your watch, set for the allotted time. When you hear the beep, open your eyes.

Practice this meditation at several different sittings. Once you can keep your mind focused for 30 seconds, increase to one minute, then two minutes, then up to as long as 30 minutes.

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# Meditation

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## **FOLLOW YOUR THOUGHTS TO STILLNESS**

In this exercise, you will work with your thoughts to still your mind. Sit or lie down comfortably. Close your eyes. Focus your attention as you did in the first meditation. If you notice a thought, observe it; think about it for a moment if you must, then let it go. Return to your attentive focus. When the next thought comes along, do what you did before: notice the thought, think about it briefly, then disengage from it. You can think of your mind as a vast river and your thoughts as small leaves or branches floating along. You stand on the river bank observing. With practice, you will be able to allow the leaves and branches of your thoughts to simply float past and go where they will, without distracting your focus if you do not wish it. Eventually, the water clears as does your mind, and no further thoughts occur. Allow yourself to remain in meditation with a still mind, until you feel ready to stop.

## **CLEAR THE MIND**

Once you have succeeded at focusing your attention on one thing for several minutes, and following your experience to stillness, you are ready to sustain clearing the mind. Let your mind clear of all conscious thought. This means that you think of nothing. Begin with 30 seconds, then increase as you did in focusing the attention until you can sustain the meditation for 30 minutes. If your mind wanders, wait until you can re-establish control. Then return to the experience. Regular daily practice, a few minutes at a time, is all that is required at first. In time, you will find this meditative state quite natural.

## **CONCLUSION**

Stay with your meditation. As you progress, the pool of your mind becomes still. Then higher levels of martial art in your life may appear.

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