

Sensations During Meditation

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There is probably no way to prove when meditation practice started in our human history. In ancient times people meditated to purify themselves, to embrace their belief and to communicate with their god. People were convinced that meditation would help them create an inner elixir of longevity or produce an inner potion that immunized them against all sickness. In short meditation would transform them into immortals. They saw it as a path to grasp the magical power of divination, traveling in their minds between the past and the future.

Today meditation is purely a mind game no matter what style of meditation you exercise. For reasons we still do not fully understand scientifically there are phenomena that we encounter at different meditation skill levels. Some of them will appear and repeat for a while. As your meditation skills improve, they will disappear and may never show up again. Some of the phenomena will stay with you as long as you practice meditation. We need to know how to deal with them. There are things you should pay attention to and things you should absolutely not do. These are the Natural Laws you have to obey.

Touches

As your meditation progresses, many sensations and feelings will come to you. These feelings are known as "Touches." The classical term in meditation is "Eight Touches" (Ba Chu) or "Sixteen Sensations" (Shi Liu Jing), which is the extension of the eight. The number simply means many in general and is not a specific count.

Movement, itching, lightness, heaviness, cold, warmth, rough and slippery are common feelings you may sense.

- **Movement:** You may feel something inside of your arm or body is moving like a worm. It is the Chi inside you moving along your channels. Your meditation activates the Chi's movement.
- **Itching:** Chi is moving through smaller channels and makes you feel itchy on your skin or somewhere on your body. The feeling is like a small insect crawling on your skin. Or you may feel some very light pain.
- **Lightness:** You may feel yourself becoming lighter, very small in size, or floating in the air.
- **Heaviness:** You may feel yourself getting bigger and bigger, becoming a giant. Your weight is very heavy.

- Cold: A cold feeling occupies your body.
- Warmth: A warm feeling and sweatiness suddenly comes to you.
- Roughness: You may feel your skin turn rough like a tree bark.
- Slippery: You may feel your skin become slippery like a fish in your hands.

Other sensations you may encounter:

- Happiness.
- Sadness.
- Scared.
- Seeing the “other side.”
- Seeing the past or the future.

You should not pay attention to any of these sensations or the images you may see. Do not scratch the itchy areas, rub the painful places, twist your body or try to make yourself more comfortable. Your Chi is trying to open small channels on your body.

Do not slide your mind to them. You should continue to be engrossed on your Dan Tian and keep your meditation. Let your breathing become attuned with your mind's focus. Continue to observe the "field for the cows" in the visual field of your closed eyes; do not be influenced by the touches. These feelings will fade away. If you think the “touch” is too much for you to handle, gently end your meditation. You can tell yourself “I am done. Everything go back to its original place.” Gradually release your focus from your Dan Tian area. Give yourself some time to allow the concentrated Chi to return to its original place.

Normally these sensations will not stay long. They are not some kind of sign or omen. Do not try to conjure the touch or be afraid that they may emerge before you even start to meditate. When your meditation skills have been elevated to higher levels, these feelings will not return.

Old cultures believe that these sensations are experienced as your mind crosses to the other side. Meditation is a self-purification process. The Yin and Yang inside you are re-balancing. You have to keep your course and not let yourself be distracted by the forces beyond your focus. When the inner forces regain their balance, everything will quiet down.

Touches are the interactions between your body and the Chi. It is the beginning of the transformation process of your inner physical and spiritual aspect. Meditation practices of different religions have their own spiritual interpretations of these sensations.

The Pure Water of Life

When you meditate or play Tai Chi, without letting your teeth touch, let the tip of your tongue touch the roof of your mouth. This is called "Building the bridge" (Da Qiao). The bridge connects the major channels inside your body (Ren and Du channels/meridians.)

After you have learned how to concentrate your mind and meditate, you will feel your mouth getting very watery. The water that is produced under the meditative state is believed to be the most pure. It is called the Sweet Dew (Gan Lu), Golden Juice (Jin Zhi) or Jade Fluid (Yu Ye). There are many beautiful names for it in different religious-based meditation styles. It is the liquid that helps you produce the elixir inside of you. You should slowly swallow the liquid and use your mind to send it to the Lower Dan Tian area. Do not seek this condition. Do not let your own mind override your meditation. Different styles of meditation also have their ways to take care of the Pure Water of the Life.

The Light of the Spirit

When you meditate, you will see lights with your closed eyes. It may take over your full eyesight or appear like a blanket of stars, or it may appear as a single spot in your vision. The light could appear in different colors, white, white with light blue and gold are the common colors. This is called the "Light of the Spirit" (Xing Guang). When the light appears, you should keep meditating. Send a portion of your mind to the light to keep it there. Do not look at it directly or you may lose your meditation. When you feel that you cannot keep it any longer, try to gently "grab" the light and send it down slowly to your Lower Dan Tian area. Again, do not seek this condition. Do not let your own mind override your meditation. Different styles of meditation, like Taoist or Buddhist, also have their ways of taking care of and interpreting the Light of the Spirit.

To obtain the ability to see the light is a very important achievement in your meditation practice no matter the style. Again, do not seek it. It will come when the time comes.

Trance

The trance state happens when you are in a deep meditation. You are in a kind of dazed condition where sensations are vague. Your awareness of your surroundings is different than your normal waking consciousness. You feel like you are in a cocoon or an egg shell. This is the normal meditation state we want to achieve, but you have to learn that you are in control. Although you have tuned out all other thoughts and are with an empty mind, you should still have one thought, "I am meditating" that always exists when you exhale. It is the only

thread that connects you to the real world, like the string holding a flying kite in your hand. You never want to let go of the line that is attached to your kite. If you fall further and further into deep meditation, you might have no way to return. The trance state may be a very pleasant condition but you have to learn to control it at a level of intensity that you desire, as well as to hold onto it for the duration of your meditation. When you wish to exit your meditation, you should tell yourself it is time to finish. Gradually and gently depart from your meditation mode back to normal. Give it some time and never rush.

After you exit from your trance mode and end your meditation, you may be surprised to realize that a very long time has passed or that you have just performed a very short meditation. In either case it was normal.

Most of the touches or sensations happen while you are trying to learn the meditation techniques. You are getting better at tuning out all other harsh thoughts and can briefly have an empty mind. As your skills advance, touches will hardly return to bother you. If you advance to the skill level where all the sealed Gates are re-opened, you will never experience these touches again.

The Pure Water of the Life and the Light of the Spirit will continue to be part of your meditation.

Feelings while playing Tai Chi

The feelings while playing Tai Chi as moving meditation are not always the same as those you experience during the calm meditation sitting or lying down. Tai Chi's meditation concepts are different. In calm meditation you close your eyes and focus on your Dan Tian. When playing Tai Chi you keep your eyes open and focus on your martial arts movements. If you close your eyes then you cannot see your "opponent" and your movements become meaningless. If you focus on your Dan Tian, then very quickly you will become dizzy and lose your orientation because your motion and mind are out of synch.

A very important thing that we should follow during our Tai Chi practice is to let your Chi become anchored to your Dan Tian. This does not mean that you should focus or think about your Dan Tian like you would do when practicing calm meditation. When you play Tai Chi as a moving meditation, your brain (mind) determines your every move, attack or defense, but your Dan Tian is the command center. The Dan Tian (your waist) executes the strategy created by your mind and commands your body to move. Your Chi originates from your Dan Tian and reaches the places on your body as a result of your changing posture. It is a dynamic way of focusing.

Since you do not close your eyes while playing Tai Chi, you will not have the same image sensations or see the Light of the Spirit that appears in calm meditation. You will not feel the Eight Touches or Sixteen Sensation since your movement helps to open your channels or meridians of your Chi.

However, while playing Tai Chi, you do receive the Water of Life when you enter the meditation state. This sensation is proof that you have the ability to meditate while playing Tai Chi. But, just as with calm meditation, do not set up your goal or expectation to achieve this touch.

When you are in the meditative state you are in the trance state, but the feeling may be different than calm meditation since you are moving. You do not need to remind yourself that you are meditating since your motion prevents your mind from falling into the same kind of deep trance state as in calm meditation. If for some reason you need to stop in the middle of your session or you forget your next move, try to continue playing a few more movements and gently move to the ending posture. Do not rush and jump out from your practice. The moving Chi and the trance mind need time to return to their normal state.

During the trance, the only thing you focus on is your Tai Chi movement. All the other thoughts are tuned out. This is also called the empty state (Kong). If you follow your dazed feeling, you may slide into a state in which you are no longer practicing your Tai Chi. You may be doing some strange moves or doing the wrong sequence of Tai Chi. Although you may feel pleasant and enjoyment, you are not in control. You are following your trance. When you eventually stop you will have no recollection of what you did. You must learn that you are always in control. If you keep your focus on your meaningful movements then you will never fall into an uncontrolled situation.

*When it is peaceful, it is easy to hold,
When it is not yet begun, it is easy to plan.
When it is fragile, it is easy to break,
When it is minute, it is easy to scatter.
Act when it has not yet emerged,
Treat when it is not yet chaotic.
A tree as big as one's embrace grows from a tiny sprout,
A tower of nine levels is built from a pile of earth.
A journey of a thousand miles begins with a footstep.*

---Tao Den Jing, Lao Zi

Today, there have been many studies on the health benefits of meditation and Tai Chi. Most people hope their practice will cure medical issues or help them to achieve better health for prevention. It is not hard to learn meditation or Tai Chi and they require little financial investment. Yet there is no way for you to master them in a short time. The most important thing is to invest and dedicate your time and effort. Restore your self-responsibility. Take care of your own health before you end up needing to see a doctor. Plant the seed of meditation inside

you and keep nursing it. It is a lifelong process. After you have taken your first step, do not think about quitting.

Visit hsvtaichi.com for more information about the author and his Tai Chi class.