

Bathing the Marrow

North

Winter
Night
Passing
Seed
Re-Design

West

Autumn
Evening
Maturity
Fruit Harvest
Market



East

Spring
Morning
Birth
Sprout
Invent

South

Summer
Noon
Growth
Leaf-Bloom
Build

Historical Reflection

Bathing the Marrow practice has both ancient and historic roots. Long before any written record of Qigong, this simple yet deeply profound method was used in ancient China as well as other prehistoric cultures.

Qigong historians believe Bodhidharma developed Bathing the Marrow at the Shaolin Temple. However, other Daoist schools have also used Bathing the Marrow for many centuries. We know that one of the most famous Daoist observatories was located in the Song Mountains near the Shaolin Temple, so it is very likely true that the method has a Daoist and even pre-Daoist shamanic origin.

There are numerous versions or forms of the Bathing the Marrow method depending on whether it is a Buddhist version, a Daoist version, or a version modified for healing or building martial power. My favorite is called the *Four Seasons Method of Absorbing and Storing the World*.

It is similar to the Native American Medicine Wheel; it draws on the four directions plus Heaven and Earth and stores the powers of forces of the seasons, and all of the natural qualities of plants—seed, sprout, fruit, and harvest—in the marrow of the bones. In this version, you do the Bathing the Marrow practice to the four directions.

In contemporary science we now know that the marrow produces all blood cells and immune cells. The only exception is T-cells, which are produced in the thymus gland. The ancient Chinese did not know this. But they knew that the marrow was so important they developed an entire Qigong methodology to enhance and refine it.

Why? How? The earliest Chinese physicians were in awe of the deepest, most hidden, most mysterious part of the human system, the marrow, which is buried in and protected by bone. In Chinese tradition, Mystery is the source of everything. The mysterious hidden marrow was understood as an important inner source.

When you face each of the directions and gather these qualities, store them in the bones, organs, and Dan Tian to be used as medicine – extra resource that you can call bones, organs, and Dan Tian to be used as medicine--extra resource that you can call upon to prevent disease and be more vital in times when you need extra inner strength.

Marrow Bathing Instruction

From the Opening posture, open your arms, reach out into the universe; this is a good time to take a deep breath. Gather from the resources that surround us – air, water, mountains, plant life, space, influences of stars and planets, the prayers of loved ones, the best wishes of departed philosophers and saints, and universal love. Bathe yourself in those influences as your hands pass your head, your face, and your torso. Send these essences to be stored in the marrow of your bones. Do this as many times as seems reasonable.

Many people use this as a meditation for gratitude. Of course the point is always to relax deeply. With each gathering you acknowledge and celebrate an item on your gratitude list. As your hands are passing the body you are sending these positive influences in through the surface of the body to the channels of the Qi Matrix, the Elixir Fields, the organs, and, most importantly, into the marrow of the bones. To conclude the movement, bring your hands to rest over the Earth Elixir Field and just drift there for a few moments.

To do the *Four Seasons Method of Absorbing and Storing the World* continue with this practice facing the four directions. As you face the East focus on the sunrise, the powerful energy of the beginning of a relationship or a project, the strength of the sprout as it breaks out of the seed reaching up into Heaven and down into Earth. Send these energies and influences into the bones to be stored.

As you face the South focus on the immense force of the sun and what it causes in nature. The sweet juice pours into the fruit as it ripens, work gets done; the world is bright and full of light. This is

the season of vigilance and accomplishment. Send that energy to be stored in the bones.

Face the West and relax as the heat of midday cools off, the harvest is assured, the fruit is ripe. This is the time of reward. Imagine relaxing after a hard day of work. This is where you get paid, where you recognize and celebrate your accomplishments; it is the season of the harvest and thanksgiving. Send these energies to be stored in the marrow of the bones.

To the North is the most profound season. It is the time of rest, redesign, and rebirth. What is going on in the seed that waits in the ground during winter? It seems like nothing, stillness. The seed is busy, quietly absorbing celestial influences. This is the season when we make tea and write poems, the season when we stop and take some time out to get the bigger picture before the next beginning. Store these forces and influences in the marrow.

Notice that you are now ready to face the East again. Are you the same person who faced the East moments ago? The implication in Qigong is that these seasons are turning at every moment throughout the days, months, seasons, years, and eras. The intention is to celebrate transition and change at the same time you gather the radical resources of nature and life and store them internally as ingredients for making the ultimate inner medicine.

The ancients declared that you could reverse time and access your eternal nature by reversing the direction. Instead of turning from East to South (spring to summer) go the other direction, from East to North (spring to winter). In a deep state of meditation this turns time backward and gives you access to your prebirth self, when your body was flexible and your HeartMind clear and innocent.

Mind Focus Affirmation

Storing Qi, I create, maximize, and sustain an inner reserve of potential to optimize my health, life, and being.