

Posture Instructions

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Since the online publication of Issho Fujita's marvellous collection of essays, 'Polishing A Tile', it seems impertinent for others to give instructions about sitting posture except in one respect, the breath, which Fujita doesn't seem, to refer to in detail.

Breathing is quite problematic as a topic. We don't want to get into a mentality of trying to build up power in the dan tien in order to achieve something. So instead, we tend not to talk about it at all, saying only that we should breathe naturally, and that our breath will naturally settle down if we take up the correct posture. However, there's a difference between awareness and intention. Between awareness and technique.

When we try to breathe abdominally, there's a tendency to use muscular effort to push our belly out, but not notice that we do. Just as people who try to stretch the back of their neck by tucking their chin in, rather than allowing the natural uncompressing of the spine when the weight is dropping correctly through the sit bones, willing our posture to be a particular way is liable to create tension, tension we're unlikely to notice.

I think also, if we imagine our breath coming in through our nose, going down through our chest and into our belly, there's a tendency too to inhibit movement in our chest and back.

For me, it's very helpful to be able to feel the whole pelvic area, not, as it were, as an object, but from the inside. If we can, we'll notice the willed-ness of our abdominal breathing, but we'll also notice what doesn't move. Our lower back. Our pelvic floor. And once we get that awareness, there's a number of things we can do. We can, for example, picture a golden ball at the centre of our pelvis. When we breathe in, the ball gets bigger, pushing the belly forward, pushing back against the bones of the spine and pelvis, pushing down to the pelvic floor. When our body moves in accordance with this, it's different from willed movement. Once you regain your sense of movement, you won't need the image any more.

An alternative, and one which I prefer, is to breathe from the perineum. This is the first chakra and where our weight drops down, between the genitalia and the anus. That is, you feel the in breathe coming in through your perineum, filling your pelvic bowl, pushing the belly gently forward, the lower back gently back, animating and enlivening the whole area, then passing upwards to the chest, the upper back, the neck, the head and all the while, no tension.