Learning and Practice of "Deer Exercise" of Health Qigong · Wu Qin Xi

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The Deer Exercise is the second exercise of Health Qigong · Wu Qin Xi. Through movements of two routines, namely "Lu Di(colliding with the antlers)" and "Lu Ben(running like a deer)", such as rotating and laterally bending waist, raising one leg and moving one foot forward, and stretching back, exercisers imitate deer’s habits of enjoying springing into a run, and suddenly standing still and alert for long periods of time, wagging their tails, butting antlers with each other, and stretching feet and walking; in this manner, exercisers show lightsome and stretched postures as well as comfortable and calm spirit of deers. By incorporating these movements, practicing the Deer Exercise can activate the Dumai(governor vessel) and Renmai (conception vessel) meridians, strengthen sinews, bones and waist, tonify kidneys, correct spine, and enhance the strength of waist and back muscles. My experience in teaching and practice of the Deer Exercise includes the following four points.

I. Imitating deer’s postures, and accomplishing the movements of “swinging sinews and bones, and moving trunk and limbs”.

The movements of the “Deer Exercise” include “Lu Di(colliding with the antlers)” and “Lu Ben(running like a deer)”. Relatively speaking, the exercise routes of these two movements are comparatively complicated, and the key points of movements are also difficult to master. In order to better learn and practise the Deer Exercise, I adopt a decomposition teaching method, and try to transform difficult and complicated movements into easy and simply ones, in order for gradually grasping the key and difficulty points thereof. Now I take the left routine (i.e. “Lu Di”) of the Deer Exercise for example to give instructions on the decomposition teaching method. The “Lu Di” routine can be divided into 4 substeps for learning and practice. Substep 1: Both legs are slightly bent, with the body weight resting on the right leg. Step the left foot forward past the inside of the right foot to the left front, with the heel touching the ground. At the same time, the body is slightly turned to the right. After both palms are changed to hollow fists, they are moved to
the level of the right shoulder with the bottom of the fists facing down and the eyes following the right fist. Substep 2: The left leg is flexed, with the body weight shifted forward, and left foot is placed firmly on the ground and turned outward, while right leg stretches straight and right foot is placed firmly on the ground. At the same time, both hands form the “deer horn” posture, the palms face outward, and both hands, along with waist movement, turn leftward to the front of body, and then move leftward and backward in horizontal circle; sight follows hand movement. Substep 3: The waist laterally flexes and twist leftward; the left elbow touches the left waist side; the right arm is raised to the level of the forehead, and then extended backward to the left side, with the palm facing outward and the fingers pointing backward, which results in squeezing the left waist side and stretching the right waist side; the eyes should be fixed on the right heel. Substep 4: The body is turned to the right side, and the left foot is withdrawn to stand with feet apart; at the same time, the hands are moved upward and then downward to the right in an arc and changed to hollow fists. Finally, they are dropped to hand at the sides, with the eyes looking straight ahead and downward. Similarly, the “Lu Ben” routine also can be divided into 4 substeps for learning and practice. Substep 1: The left leg is extended forward, with the knee flexed; the right leg straightens with bow stance; at the same time, after both hands are changed to hollow fists, they are moved upward and forward along an arc to shoulder level; the flexed wrists are shoulder-width apart, with the bottom of the fists facing down; look straight ahead. Substep 2: Shift the body weight onto the back foot (the right in this case), and flex the right knee; stretch straight the left knee, keeping the sole of both feet flat on the ground; the neck and back are bent forward, with the abdomen contracted and the head facing down; at the same time, both arms are medially rotated and both hands are extended forward with their dorsa face to face to assume a “deer antler” posture; look down. Substep 3: The upper body is made erect, and the weight is shifted forward onto the left leg, with the left knee flexed and the right leg straightened to form a left bow stance; the shoulders are relaxed, the elbows down, the arms are laterally rotated, and the “deer antler” hands are changed to hollow fists with the dorsa of the hands uppermost and the eyes looking straight ahead. Substep 4: The left foot is withdrawn, to assume an open stance; fists are changed to palms and hang loosely at the sides; look straight ahead. The
“Four Substeps” of the two routines “Lu Di” and “Lu Ben”, can be learned and practised independently or wholly, and can also be divided into two sections (section for upper limbs and section for lower limbs) for learning and practising independently or wholly. Only in this way could exerzisers meticulously manage to conduct posture imitating practice of “swinging sinews and bones as well as moving trunk and limbs”.

II. Paying close attention to details, in order to “move the waist and flex the joints”.

After basically mastering the posture movements, exercisers should pay close attention to the details of every movement, understand the connotations of movements, and enjoy the lingering charm of the “Deer Exercise”. As for the movements of the “Lu Di” routine: In Substep 1, the angle of the left foot turning outward and planting firmly after taking a step should vary from person to person; if such angle is too small, the twist of waist will be incomplete; if such angle is too large, knee-joint will be liable to injury. In Substep 2, exercisers should pay attention to relaxing the waist and relaxing the coccygeal end while twisting the trunk with the waist as the axle, meanwhile pay attention to turning of the coccygeal end. Turning the coccygeal end can stimulate the Mingmen (Life Gate) acupoint and play the roles of strengthening kidneys. In Substep 3, attention should be paid to the following requirements: the waist should laterally flex as far as an exerciser can; the fingers of the upper hand should point backward and try the best to surpass the lower hand; the two arms should laterally stretch backward, and the eyes should look at the right heel. Lateral flexion and twist of waist enables the entire spine to rotate sufficiently, which is good for enhancing the muscle strength of waist and preventing lumbar vertebral diseases. As for the movements of the “Lu Ben” routine: In Substep 1, the route of extending leg and taking a step should be completed in a manner of drawing a vertical circle, and an exerciser should pay attention to managing to lift foot in big stride but fall foot in small step. The route of hands-extending movements is just like rotating a windlass. In Substep 2, an exerciser should pay attention to lowering his head, contracting his abdomen, causing the upper energizer to touch the lower energizer, and managing to squeeze the triple energizers, bend the back, pull the spine backward, contract the coccygeal end, protrude Mingmen (Life Gate), so as to make the entire trunk to present a vertical bow shape; after that, exerciser should relax the shoulders first, then
sink the shoulders, open the scapulas to both sides and then shift forward, let both elbows meet together, so as to make the back to present a horizontal bow shape. The appearance of vertical and horizontal bows enables the sinews and muscles of the shoulders and the back as well as all the joints of the spine to be stretched and pulled sufficiently, which further exercises the sinews, muscles and joints of the neck, the shoulders and the back, enhances the strength of the sinews and muscles of the waist and the back, meanwhile helps dredge meridian qi of the governor vessel and vitalize the yang qi of the whole body. In Substep 3, attention should be paid to sinking shoulders, relaxing arms and relaxing waist. In Substep 4, upon practice of small step change, an exerciser need to realize slight lift and slight fall of toe and heel, and maintain a steady center of body weight. After an exerciser has mastered the external postures, through paying close attention to movement details, he will be thoroughly clear about the route, angle, height, deficiency and excess as well as action and effects of each movement. Repeated practice will result in that movements are not stiff and not stagnant, but gentle and flexible, so as to reach the skilled degree of “moving the waist and flexing the joints”.

III. Doing exercise in a coordinated manner, in order to achieve the state of “relaxing and contracting freely, and breathing naturally”.

Free relaxation and contraction runs through the whole process of practice of Health Qigong · Wu Qin Xi. So called “relaxation” includes relaxation of body and relaxation of spirit. Upon practising the “Deer Exercise”, “relaxation” is embodied in different movement links. For instance, in Substep 1 of the “Lu Di” routine, when both hands move to the right side and raise up laterally, attention should be paid to relaxation of the crown of the head, shoulders and elbows. In Substep 2, upon twist of waist, attention should be paid to relaxation of chest and back as well as relaxation of waist and hips. In Substep 2 of the “Lu Ben” routine, when the trunk presents a “vertical bow” shape, attention should be paid to relaxation of chest, back and internal organs; when the shoulders and elbows present a “horizontal bow” shape, attention should be paid to relaxation of chest, back, shoulders, elbows, fingers and palms. In Substep 4, upon small step change, attention should be paid to relaxation of the crown of the head, knees and feet. Upon practising the “Deer Exercise”, after an exerciser has understood the gist for "relaxation" at every movement
link, there is also a simple method, namely, while doing any movement, meditating “relax, relax……”, in order to achieve the goal of relaxation through psychological hint. Mastering of “relaxation” need to be understood in practice step by step; relaxation of body is the key of movement drill, while relaxation of spirit is the embodiment of movement connotation. So called “contraction” is relative to “relaxation”. “Contraction” occurs only at some instant moments during the whole process of movement practice, and cannot be emphasized excessively, otherwise it will make movements to become stiff and stagnant. “Relaxation” and “contraction” of movements echo each other; only relaxation of spirit and muscles can result in coordinated movements and natural breathing. Only after mastery of “relaxation” and “contraction” of movements, a coordinated state of “being relaxed but not lax, and contracted but not stiff” during movement drill, which will make body, breathing and ideation relaxed and comfortable without feeling nervous. In this way practice can attain the state of “relaxing and contracting freely, and breathing naturally”.

IV. External guidance and internal leading, in order to attain “body and mind combination, and external and internal unity”.

Health Qigong · Wu Qin Xi is a kind of biomimetic conduction method integrating the movements, spiritual charm and natural disposition of “five animals”. Upon practice, in addition to proficient mastery of skill movements, exercisers also need to master the bearing of “five animals”, and enter the artistic conception of play and game. Deer is a kind of animal symbolizing auspiciousness and longevity, and deers feature loving cleanness, liking peace and quiet, and being good at running. Therefore, upon practising the “Deer Exercise”, an exerciser should image himself to be a deer standing still in a grassland and alert for certain periods of time, butting antlers with other deers now and then, stretching feet and running in a rapid and elegant manner, showing lightsome and stretched postures as well as comfortable and calm spirit of deers; meanwhile, upon practice, an exerciser should also pay attention to the movement routes of arms, and all the movements of the hands and the lower limbs, ranging from hand form changes of “deer antlers” and cocking wrist, to raising leg, striding step and flexible step change, should be completed in a manner of no stiffness and no stagnation but relaxation in body and sufficiency in ideation, in order to embody the benign, joyful, lightsome and agile
spiritual charm of deers, so as to attain the practice state of ideation following body movement, "body and mind combination, and external and internal unity".

Exercisers of Health Qigong · Wu Qin Xi need to persist on practice with unremitting efforts, only in this way could the “posture, spirit, ideation and qi” of movements be embodied step by step.