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LOCKING THE MONKEY

鎖心猿 - suo xin yuan - locking the heart monkey

Introduction:

The locking the monkey meditation is a basic meditation technique that perfectly sets the first foundation for all sitting or standing meditations. As a fundamental focus technique, as well as a method of experiencing emptiness, it holds the potential to be a basic, everyday meditation and, simultaneously, become the most advanced technique in every student's practice. Being very simple in its style of practice, it gives beginners a good way to get into a meditation habit, while, later on down the road, the same simplicity makes it possible to find the most secret and highest states of practice. Together with the Hui Chun Standing Qi Gong Set, the locking the monkey meditation sets the beginning and ending point of a lifetime of practice. Therefore, the locking the monkey meditation should be a continuous part of a student's training routine, or at least for a substantial period.

The technique:

The locking the monkey meditation consists of three methods of practice:

1. Locking the monkey - counting your breath up to 100.
2. Taming the horse - counting without a breath connection up to 1,000.
3. Dismounting the horse - setting intention into daily life.

In the first circle of practice for the locking the monkey meditation, the practitioner follows three specific phases of practice to set the first foundation. Later, the practice is continued in a more open way with some possible variations of the same techniques.

Phase one - locking the monkey I - counting the breath up to 100 for 100 days:

In the first phase, we simply observe how the breath is streaming through the nose into the lower belly area, filling and expanding this area, and leaving the body in the same way while the lower belly collapses in a releasing way. With every breath circle, we count the breath. One in and exhale is counted as one count until the practitioner reaches 100 counts of breath. Whenever we lose count, not being sure which number comes next, we restart from zero. The meditation ends when the practitioner is able to count up to 100 without losing track. In this exercise, we start to practice a certain kind of honesty with ourselves. It is important to stay precise and honest whenever we lose track, or we are unsure of the next number. In these cases, it is important to reset the count, even though it might be painful. In that way, the mind will automatically build up an urge and interest to stay with the breath and the counting exercise.

The counting should not be made easier by, for example, counting 10 times to 10, but it should always be counted from 1 to 100 without fast-tracking tricks.

This way of practice is performed for 100 days without a break. It should be done every day without skipping a single day. If one day the practice is forgotten or the practitioner is unable to reach the 100 counts in one session, the practice restarts from day one. Also here stay honest with yourself. Even after 100 days of practice, the practice is just in the beginning stages. That means it is no shame to restart several times since the locking the monkey meditation should, later on, become part of your regular practice anyway. The duration of each meditation can change according to the speed of one's breathing rhythm. Take care that your breath is not getting faster in order to reach the 100 counts faster but try to find your most relaxed and natural breath in every session.

After the first 100 days, the practice is continuing seamlessly for the next 49-day period.

Phase one - locking the monkey II - counting without a breath connection up to 1,000 for 49 days:

In the next 49 days, the practice changes from breath counting work to a simple mind stream counting work. This means, while for the first 100 days the practitioner was observing and counting the breath, a simple mind stream of counting without any physical connection is now established. Keeping a constant counting rhythm, which is not slower than the breath and not faster than the heartbeat, we count, without an anchor point, up to 1,000. In this step of the meditation, losing track means the practitioner must reset to the

beginning of the 1,000 counts. If the meditation is not done one day during the 49-day practice period, the practitioner must restart his work on day one of the first 100 days.

Phase two - taming the horse - counting without breath connection up to 1,000 for 120 days.

Before starting the next practice period of 120 days, the practice can be paused if so desired. The training continues with a 120-day period of the same practice of counting with constant mind stream up to 1,000. If the practice is interrupted in this period, the practitioner can start from the first day of the 120 days again, without having to restart from the very beginning.

Phase three - dismounting the horse - transferring meditation principles into everyday life.

The last training phase is the lifetime challenge of finding the way of meditation in every moment of our lives. Here, the student is encouraged to transfer the principles of the locking the monkey and taming the horse meditations into everyday life. It should not be misunderstood that this high goal can simply be accomplished by finishing the first two phases of the first training period of the locking the monkey meditation. Phase three - dismounting the horse - can be seen as the phase that is part of every step of our practice. In the locking the monkey meditation, we seek to enter the moment with our awareness finding the true voice of our heart. We learn how to observe these voices and emotions in our minds instead of following them blindly. In our sitting practice, we build up the awareness and skills of these concepts while, later on, it is about bringing these into every situation of our lives. This is a process that only can be accomplished through continued practice while at the same time, building the intention of doing likewise in our lives. The dismounting the horse phase stands for this intention. Therefore, the practitioner should, after accomplishing the first practice circle of 269 days, not stop practicing, thinking to be ready to find these high concepts in everyday life. The dismounting the horse phases should more be seen as the step of building up a real interest in using the locking the monkey practice to find the higher aims of meditation. The first 269 days are just the first step on the journey of opening and building up a consistent training routine and understanding a way that can be walked for life.

Summary of the first practice circle

Locking the monkey:

100 days - 100 breath circles - no interruptions / if interrupted restart from day 1/100

49 days - 1,000 counts without breath connection - if interrupted restart with day 1 of 100.

Taming the horse:

120 days - 1,000 counts without breath connection - if interrupted restart with day 1 of 120

Dismounting the horse:

The constant intention of bringing meditation into everyday life.

How to sit:

Before introducing the specific way of holding your body during the locking the monkey meditation, it needs to be clarified that the sitting pose should not become the primary focus of this meditation. Generally, the meditation can be performed in any position as long as the inner intention is brought into that position. Anyway, the practitioner should learn over time to take the principles into every position and situation of life. So, whenever the optimal sitting situation cannot be arranged, the practitioner can welcome these different situations and positions as a great and important part of the practicing process.

The space:

After reflecting that the way of sitting is just secondary, the meditation still can be supported by the most efficient approach according to the old Taoist teachings.

First, the practitioner should take care that, especially at the beginning of practice, a quiet and clean space for the meditation is prepared; a place where outside distractions are limited, there is access to fresh air, and, in general, we have a feeling of comfort and calmness.

Become still:

During the whole meditation, the practitioner should take care to minimize any kind of movement as much as possible. It is an important part of the meditation method to learn to sit completely still during the practice. Scratching or even less obvious motions should be avoided. Naturally, in the beginning, the urge to move will be very strong, especially when we try not to move. But that is also a significant part of the locking the monkey meditation. We need, with time, to learn to calm these urges and sometimes even painful sensations that appear during our sitting session.

The calmer we sit, the calmer our mind will get. Sitting in stillness will slowly influence the stillness in our minds.

Fear pain circle:

In the later levels of practice, when the duration of the sessions increases, strong pain can appear caused by the long immobility and stagnation in our body. Here, it can also become an interesting part of our practice to observe how our mind can stay calm and relaxed in these very uncomfortable situations. These painful sensations are mostly not dangerous. We are able to hold our bodies in the exact same position over many hours without needing to fear any physical damage. Even the phenomenon of one's arm or leg going to sleep

through an inefficient blood supply is harmless and can happen for a long period. Mostly, these kinds of painful experiences increase through our mind when it is falling into a circle of fear. Pain is the fear our body experiences when it tries to warn us about possible damage, but in this case, there is no real danger. Still, as long as the mind is in fear of the experienced pain, it will increase the pain. The pain will increase the fear, and we are caught in an interesting circle of pain and fear that amplifies itself. The only way to break this circle is to sit calmly and observe. To focus on the exercise and to relax into the experienced pain. With the decrease of fear, the pain will not increase significantly, and after a while, it may even disappear again.

Body Posture:

As in every internal martial art exercise, the body posture also holds an important role in the locking the monkey meditation. To learn how to hold the spine correctly is easiest in a sitting position and can later be transmitted from there into all standing and moving exercises. It is easiest in a sitting position since the pelvis is more relaxed through the folded legs and can be placed more easily as in a standing or moving situation. Depending on the flexibility of the practitioner, the size of the sitting cushion can be adjusted. It is important to find a height at which the pelvis can be held effortlessly in an upright position, as if there were water in our pelvis, and no water can be spilled to the front or to the back. In that way, the hip joints can relax, and the weight of our upper body can be spread equally to both of our sitting bones, from where it then travels effortlessly onto the floor.

The head at the other end should be light with the feeling of floating away from the spine. To place the head that way, we pull slightly from the highest point of our head, the crown of the head, the Bai Hui (point of a hundred gatherings) upwards, while the chin slightly shifts downwards towards the chest bone and the back of the head pulls backward in a comfortable way. In this way, the neck should get aligned, and the bigger curve neutralized. A feeling of soft stretching in the neck is felt mostly, while the head's lightness should not get lost in that sensation.

With the upward floating head and the relaxed, heavy pelvis, the rest of the spine hangs upright and relaxed between the two. Therefore, the chest bone drops softly downwards towards the belly and backward towards the back. This creates an upright but also slightly rounded position that connects the lower back and the neck. Learning to hold this position in a relaxed way, with breathing space at the lower belly, creates the feeling of embracing the breathing space and using the whole body.

A free and relaxed breath to the lower belly can therefore become good feedback as to whether the spine is held correctly or not.

Eyes and tongue:

The eyes can be closed or remain half-open. Usually, when trying to totally relax, the eyelids naturally open half-way into the described position. If the eyes stay open, or if we want to close them, can be defined according to the mind's state. When feeling tired, it is recommended to keep the eyes open to stay alert in the meditation and not drift into a

state of dreaming. If we feel nervous, the closed eye position can help us to calm down faster and find entry into our meditation.

If the head position is correct, the view of the eyes will go to the front with a minimal downwards angle.

When practicing with open eyes, make sure the view stays empty and is not focusing nor jumping around.

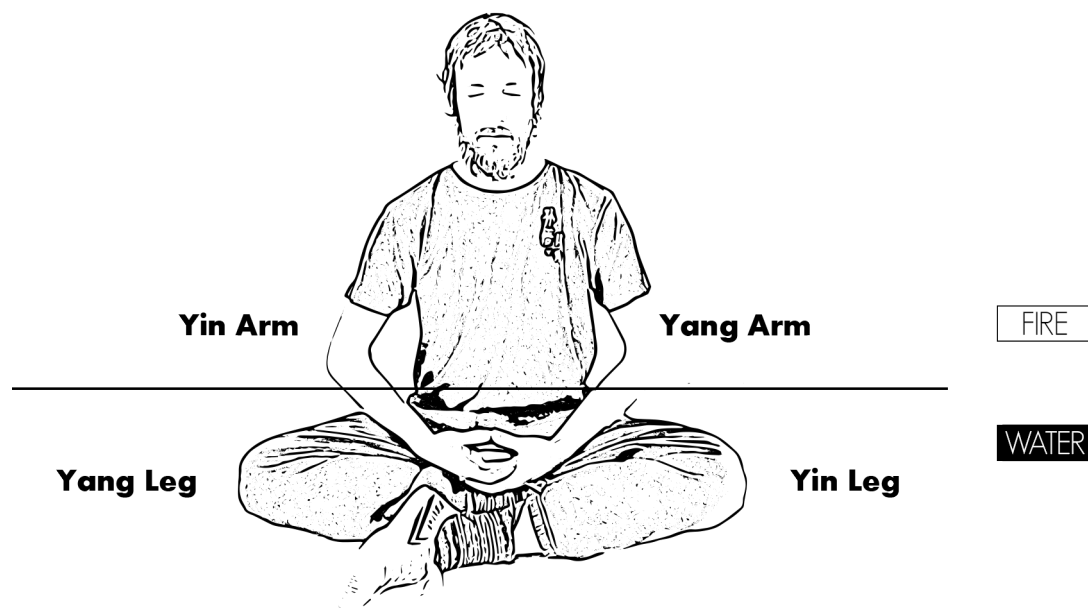
The tongue is placed softly with the tip of the tongue on the upper palate. Here, the practitioner can place the tongue either directly behind the teeth in the middle of the upper palate (the deepest point in the upper mouth), or alternatively at the point closest to the throat (the softer area)—the placement of the tongue influences saliva production and reflux. Holding the tongue correctly will help to let the saliva reflux naturally without needing extra motions. Additionally, the tongue position plays a role in the Taoist theory of the small cosmic circle. By placing the tongue on the upper palate, the cosmic circle is connecting, and circular Qi flow can increase from the lower spine up to the head and from there through the tongue down into the lower belly, Dan Tien, center area.

Leg and arm position:

The leg and arm positions alternate for women and men. Women hold the leg and arm position opposite to men. This is connected to the theory that the Yin and Yang polarization of the body is opposite in the man's body to the woman's body. The left arm and the right leg are considered as Yang for a man, while Yin for a woman. The right arm and left leg are considered as Yin for a man, while Yang for a woman.

Taoist meditation techniques are often also defined as inner alchemistic techniques. Like the old Taoists tried to create the elixir of immortality through alchemistic processes, these principles of creation are also applied in inner alchemy. By placing the body into different positions, different Yin and Yang combinations can be created that influence our meditation in different ways. If, for example, the Yang leg is folded over the Yin leg, the lower body is in a Yang position. If the Yin hand is, at the same time, embracing the Yang hand, the upper body is held in a Yin position. The lower body in Yang with the upper body in Yin is like placing fire under a bowl of water. The fire will heat the water, and an upwards moving heat is created in the body.

In the locking the monkey meditation, the opposite posture is needed. A posture that is not heating and creating more thoughts and feelings, but a position that is supporting the calming process. Therefore, a position with water, Yin at the lower body, and fire, Yang at the upper body are used.



That means:

Men place their left leg in front of the right, while the left-hand embraces the right hand.

Women place their right leg in front of the left, while the right-hand embraces the left hand.

The specific hand and leg positions play a secondary role here.

Good positions for the hands can be the "Bao Yuan Shou Yi" or the "Yi Shou Dan Tian" positions.

The legs can be placed in a normal crossed leg position, half-lotus, or full lotus.

Bao Yuan Shou Yi - Handposition



Most important:

With all these details in consideration, it remains most important to find a comfortable and relaxed position that can be held quietly over time. Stay aware that all these principles of sitting are meant to help you to find an effortless sitting pose that enables you to not hold against gravity but to let gravity find its effortless way through your body. We become a pillar between heaven and earth that guides gravity through our relaxed joints while

opening a welcoming space in the lower belly for our breath to enter and nourish our whole body with energy. The better we get into our sitting posture, the easier and longer we can hold our body, breathe, and relax throughout the whole meditation. Especially in long sitting sessions, our body will give us clear feedback on whether our positioning is good or not. Start every new sitting aware of how you place your body and try to improve continuously in that. To balance the body between heaven and earth is not a static work that ends with the discovery of a specific position; rather it is continuing and needs to stay alive during every exercise, no matter how advanced we get as practitioners. Life is a dynamic process, and therefore, our physical observation and balancing work of the body also need to stay dynamic and alive.

Before every meditation, start with positioning your body. Question this positioning every session and try to find more efficiency in it each time. After positioning your body, start your meditation and try to stay in the same position during the whole sitting session.

How to breathe:

Through the right body posture and intention, the breath is guided softly from the nose into the lower belly area. The belly expands in all directions with the inhale and collapses with every exhale. The motions of the breath massage the belly, hip, and lower back area with each breath circle. Try neither to inhale more than you need to hold the breath nor to push the breath out too fast. Let it flow in and flow out as effortlessly as possible.

In the beginning, this way of breathing has to be built as a new habit for our body with the guidance of specific intention. Later on, it becomes important to gradually take the intention out to let the breath find its way truly naturally.

One of the main breathing principles of our basic meditation and Qi Gong techniques is that the breath should come and go naturally. The problem with this guideline is that the modern adult human has lost, through the course of life, the connection of what really is natural. Breathing habits that can even be harmful can feel more natural and nourishing than the lower belly breath. A way of breathing that we still knew as newborn babies becomes lost through our education and stressful lives. We build breathing methods that create tension high in the chest and shoulders instead of using the natural motions of the diaphragm and the negative pressure of the lungs. Therefore, it is vital to first reestablish what was once natural for us by guiding our breath, through a clear intention, into the lower belly area. Later on, this intention should then be gradually decreased to let the breath become truly free. The contradiction here is that the breath will never be free and natural as long as our mind tries to control it. On the contrary, we will never change our breath into a healthy and nourishing one if we never observe it and try to correct it. The middle way here is also the gold way. While trying to reestablish a new habit of breathing, it is equally crucial not to force anything. Across a long process, the breath will find its way into the lower belly with less and less guidance, letting us release more and more from our intention until the point where we can truly watch the breath without influencing it with our thoughts. At the beginning of the locking the monkey practice, the count will influence the breath. Every number that we count can make our breath longer or shorter. Observe how to

reduce this manipulation of your own breath and how you can learn to not breathe for the count, but to count for the breath.

The difference between the monkey and the horse:

Generally, all techniques described in the locking the monkey meditation are summarized as the locking the monkey meditation. With or without the connection of the breath, all techniques aim to help us to lock and learn to know our own monkey-mind. That means that whenever this text mentions the locking the monkey meditation it is equally referring to the counting technique up to 100, and the count technique up to 1,000. More specifically written, the work of counting up to 1,000 is named the taming the horse technique, while counting up to 100 is named the locking the monkey technique. To avoid confusion, this text either refers to "meditation" -meaning both techniques summarized or "techniques"- in which case it is talking about the specific techniques of the monkey (breath to 100) and the horse (mind to 1,000).

After clarifying the terminology, we want to take a look at the differences between both techniques to understand their principles better.

In the locking the monkey technique we build a connection of body and breath. Observing the breath and counting it mindfully, gives us the possibility to harmonize our body and mind through the breath. The breath takes over the role of the bridge that connects our attention to our physical world. In the beginning, the mind will influence the breath naturally, making us breathe faster or slower. Even so, this sometimes more settle and sometimes less settle manipulation of the breath through the observing eye is just hard to avoid, with time the mind and breath will find a more harmonic rhythm together. A rhythm that gives the body space for nourishing breathing and the mind time for closer observation.

Having built up this connection of breath and count, body and mind, we start to practice separating both of these in the taming the horse meditation. What represents the biggest difference between the monkey and the horse techniques is, therefore, not the number of counts from 100 to 1,000, but rather how we anchor the mind through the breath into our body. While in the monkey we connect clearly with our body, the horse observes how to do the same work of counting without any orientation point in our body. We learn to simply create a constant mind stream that is able to flow without help or interruption through our minds. On one hand, it becomes easier since the counting is becoming faster, while on the other hand, it becomes harder to stay with the count since we have no body orientation helping. The count should, therefore, not be as slow as the breath and not faster than the heartbeat, so to avoid accidentally connecting our counting with one of our body sensations.

Also, rhythmic influences from the outside should be avoided, like a ticking clock noise. These two methods of 1. harmonizing the mind with the body and 2. separating the mind from the body, develop over time. different skills. Skills that are needed later to progress on to the next level of practice, in which we learn how to observe the breath without connecting the count to it. Usually, every thought influences our breath. The high art of this meditation is to

learn to observe and count the breath without influencing it; observe the thoughts without actively joining them. In both cases, we learn how to separate our awareness from body and mind. This means that, ultimately, the breath and the count become the feedback method that guide us slowly, more and more, into a sensation of emptiness. The emptier we become, the more natural our awareness becomes able to passively observe the breath, counts, and thoughts. We become not the breathing, counting, or thinking person, but simply the awareness that is able to observe everything. Only in this emptiness can the breath become truly free and we can enter the so-called state of Wu Wei - a state of no intention.

So, who is that monkey?

In the very famous Chinese novel "Journey to the West," a monk travels to the west accompanied by a wild, but very strong, monkey and some other fellows. The monkey, called Sun Wu Kong, is an old demon that achieved immortality, rebelled against the highest lords in heaven, and was then punished by the Buddha himself, being imprisoned under the Mountain of the Five Elements. After 500 years, another chance to redress the monkeys' sins is offered by the bodhisattva, Kuan Yin. The bodhisattva promises him freedom if he joins a simple monk on his dangerous route from China to the west (India) to collect the holy scriptures of Buddha. Being uncontrollable for the monk at the beginning, Kuan Yin shares a sacred recitation that whenever the monkey goes wild by his own naughty will, the monk, by reciting it, can control the monkey and put him back in his place. Not being friends at the beginning, the long journey forms good friends out of the two, so that the monk, in the end, fulfills his task in collaboration with the strong monkey.

This novel, 100 chapters long just briefly summarized here, describes all our journeys with our own monkey on the way to self-realization.

The monkey is the Chinese image of our own uncontrollable thoughts. Like a monkey, our mind also tends to jump from one thought to the next, not listening to what we really want. We can lose ourselves and disconnect from reality by overthinking. We can get so confused by thoughts, that we lose all connection to what really is written in our hearts. The monkey-mind can be our biggest demon, destroying our own heaven in the thought of being the greatest and only one. On the other hand, he can become the strongest companion on our journey of finding the true self.

The locking the monkey meditation becomes, like in the story, our secret recitation. It can help us to control the monkey first, to make him our best friend later, which will help us to realize and fulfill our true intentions. The moment we stop identifying with these incessant voices and thoughts in our head, we can start to make these thoughts a very strong tool and the monkey-mind one of our strongest allies. The possibility to think is, without question, one of the biggest trademarks of human nature. It is a gift that makes us different from all other animals. Still, it can create a lot of trouble when it is not used right. Most people don't even realize that they have a non-stop conversation in their minds that makes it hard for them to really react from an efficient and central standpoint. The locking the monkey meditation helps us to start to realize and to observe our monkey. Using the tool of counting to first simply observe and see our monkey, the same tool later becomes a tool to control

that same monkey.

Who is that horse?

As the monkey stands, in Chinese mythology, for our wild stream of thoughts, the horse stands for the willpower in us. An untamed horse can be very dangerous for its rider. It will not walk wherever we want but will eventually shake us off violently. This matter is similar to our will. If our will is not able to listen to what our heart says, we will be unable to accomplish in life what we really seek. Therefore, it becomes more and more important with the control and clearing of our thoughts to also learn to strengthen our willpower; the horse in us. While the taming the horse technique focuses more on this process than the locking the monkey technique, the work with our inner horse is part of every step of the locking the monkey meditation method; not connected if we count to 100 or 1000. Our willpower will grow with every attempt to stay focused on our counting. The stronger our will, the easier it will become to stay focused. But also, the duration of the sitting will increase with time. First, when we change from the count of 100 breath circles to the 1,000 counts of mind stream, and later when we increase our sitting duration for this number of counts.

The longer we sit, the more we will train our will to stay with the counting and not to follow our sensations and urges to move or to stop our meditation. Also, over time, the daily continuous practices, which are applied in the locking the monkey process, will help to build up our ability to control situations with our will. To daily sit without a break, no matter what our daily life offers, brings a great practice of willpower.

The unification of the mind: The five Spirits - Wu Shen

Ultimately, the observation of our thoughts and our will needs to grow in parallel in our practice to progress on our way of unifying the mind. To understand the unification of the mind more, I want to mention here how in traditional Chinese medicine the mind is parted. The so-called five spirits part our mind into five different levels which connect with the system of the five elements, as below:

The Spirit	Shen	Heart	Fire	Full Yang	Heaven
The Traveling Soul	Hun	Liver	Wood	Half Yang	
The Intention	Yi	Stomach	Earth	Center	Connection
The Body Soul	Po	Lungs	Metal	Half Yin	

The Will

Zhi

Kidney

Water

Full Yin

Earth

The five spirits separate our minds into five slices, starting with The Spirit (Shen) and ending with The Will (Zhi). While The Spirit (Shen) and The Traveling Soul (Hun) connect us more with the non-material world, the Body Soul (Po) and The Will (Zhi) connect us with the ability to act and transform our material world. The Spirit stands for our true hidden self. The Spirit is like the Emperor that gives the orders for our lives. The Traveling Soul stands for our dreams in sleep and life in general, as well as for our thoughts in a awake state. The Traveling Soul acts like the ministers that consult with the Emperor and see how to connect the orders to the people that will carry them out. The Yi stands for our intentions that connect our subconscious with the conscious. The intention becomes the messenger that takes care for the communication between the deciding government and the acting forces. The Body Soul is connected with our sensations and emotions. The Body Soul is like the General on the battlefield that knows how to motivate and command the soldiers. The Will is the mind in us which lets us finally move. The Will stands for the soldiers that finally carry out the order which has been sent by the Emperor.

This chain of order, that simplifies our minds, can help us to understand how our non-material self is built and how imbalance between different stages can create problems. The more unbalance we have between these five different levels of Spirit, the less we will be able to really see what is written in our hearts. The locking the monkey meditation has as its aim the observation all of these five Spirits while gradually balancing the connection of Heaven and Earth. By calming the monkey mind (which is connected to The Hun) we can slowly see more of what our heart wants. At the same time, the practice will strengthen our horse (connected to The Zhi). The more we clear our thoughts, the easier it becomes to do what we want and the more we can use our will to practice longer and focus better, the more we will be able to clear our thoughts to see our hearts. It is a circle that nourishes itself, which means that the monkey will never be locked without a tamed horse and vice versa. Both parts play an important role in every part of our journey.

Not connected to the first circle of practice but orientated on the skill we build up in the locking the monkey meditation, we can part our practice into different levels as follows:

First Level - We are not our thoughts - Getting friends with that monkey

The locking the monkey meditation uses simple counting as a tool to enter and embrace emptiness. The mind gets a clear task. This task gives us feedback on whether we are here in the moment or not. Whenever we lose track of the count, we know we have lost the connection to the "here and now," drifting into uncontrolled thoughts. The counting becomes

the anchor that keeps us in an observing mindset. By observing the breath and the body, we create the possibility to stay in the moment while observing whenever thoughts and emotions appear. Sometimes, these thoughts can take all our attention and rip the band of counting. Here, we get clear feedback that we have lost the role of an observer following and identifying with thoughts. After recognizing that we have lost track of the count, we can go back to the exercise and reestablish our observing eye. Later on, we learn to keep track of the counting while still thinking all kinds of other thoughts. Even so, this way of practicing might feel like cheating; but the skill of counting while thinking is a significant ability earned in the first level of the locking the monkey meditation. First, we earn the ability to handle two tasks at the same time in our mind. And second, we build up a subconscious awareness of an important fact: WE ARE NOT OUR THOUGHTS. This realization is not something that can simply be read and understood, but it is a realization that our mind needs to earn and print into our subconsciousness through repeated practice. When we learn that we are not our thoughts, but the thoughts are only a tool of us, we can start to watch the world from another angle. We can truly take the role of the observer watching our thoughts and act in life from a centered and calm standpoint. As long as we identify with our thoughts and emotions, we are unable to truly use them as our tools. We get chased down by these thoughts and feelings that we have while having no choice but to act according to them. We forget that behind all this is something more of us that has the ability to look and to see the whole situation, and not just our own personal view. As long as we are stuck in our thoughts, we will always be stuck in our own personal view and only be able to act for what we think is the best for us at each moment. But, how do we know what is best for us, without really knowing who we are? By identifying with all kinds of confusing thoughts and feelings we have no chance to truly see who we are and act according to that.

So, who are we truly? The Taoists state that every being, along with the whole universe, is born from emptiness. Likewise, they describe that in the center of our heart we find this same emptiness. That means in the core of our being we are emptiness. At the moment we connect to this emptiness we free ourselves from all kind of illusions and chains that want to separate us from the rest of the world. The emptiness in our hearts is our connection point with the universe and all beings. In more simple words we can say that only when we are not disturbed by all kinds of thoughts and emotions can we really see what is going on in each moment and situation and listen to it. It is impossible to listen to the radio while a friend is talking to you and the TV is running at the same time. But don't misunderstand at this point. Even though the way to emptiness can be discovered through the practice of focusing on one point, the art, later on, is to be able to see and observe everything at the same time. To be able to get all the information from the radio, the TV, and your friend talking, and also everything else happening at the same moment. Only by being able to see and observe all of that at the same time, are we able to really see the moment in its true purity and fullness. The point where full emptiness and full wholeness meets is the same point. To be fully empty means to be fully filled. This is why in the Dao De Jing it is written, "The wise man is not doing anything, and this is why everything is already done. For this same reason, it is only possible to truly see who we are when entering this same state of

letting things happen. Emptiness is the nature of our true heart and leads to the fulfillment of our selves. The locking the monkey meditation is ultimately about this high goal of realization. But while the way to true emptiness is a never-ending, lifelong journey, the first step towards this direction is the ability to be able to let two tasks happen at the same time. The ability to count and let the thoughts enter naturally from our monkey mind. It is the ability that opens us to the world of the observer, which in Taoism is also called the state of Wu Wei- letting happen, not acting. The moment of learning to separate and take some distance from our thoughts is the moment we start to become observers of ourselves and the world. We suddenly become not the thinking person, but the person that is watching what we are thinking. The person that can watch the thoughts while also watching the counting at the same time. That means that with time, the counting should not be done as active work but more like something that we let happen, without forcing it with all our intention.

Second Level - getting cleaner - learning to control that monkey (danger of getting used to our common practice)

The first level or state that we experience in the locking the monkey meditation, the work of counting and thinking at the same time, is a state we will usually always work with even when becoming a more experienced practitioner. Nevertheless, our journey with the monkey does not end here in this way of practice. It is vital to stay awake in each practice session and not fall into the trap of the common routine. Here, the daily work becomes the danger. We get so comfortable in the act of counting and thinking at the same time, that we lose the observing eye. For that reason, it is very important to set a clear intention before each and every session. Make yourself aware before every session of why you are sitting. Become aware again and again, that the counting of breath serves the role of connecting you into the moment and turning you into a curious observer.

So, after going through the first circle of practicing the locking the monkey meditation, the practice is not over, but just started. At the moment we start to feel comfortable with all these techniques it becomes even more important to learn to focus on the true purposes of this meditation to continue the journey. Therefore, the focus on quality or quantity should be changed periodically.

Building quantity:

In both techniques (counting the breath to 100 or counting in the mind to 1,000) the number of counts can, and should, be increased after a certain period of practice. This increase in numbers will lead to longer practice times and open the window to deeper experiences with the technique. These longer sitting durations will bring different thoughts into our meditation, giving us the chance to observe ourselves in new scenarios. More pain of sitting

will appear, blank emotions and all kinds of different states of thinking and dreaming can occur.

Start with the monkey technique with 200 counts and later increase up to 1,000 counts, keeping the breath connection. Later, also increase the number of counts in the horse technique.

Building quality:

The intention of deepening the quality of each count becomes, in later practice, another important focus. After learning to count while thinking, it should stay in our intention to clear our mind more over time to fully become the count. To think nothing but the count to enter a state of utter emptiness through this work. The ability to perform this way of practice will increase for longer durations and we will experience a build-up of willpower during our continuous practice of the locking the monkey meditation. Still, specific technique variations can also be applied here as follows:

In order to increase the quality of our counts, we take the necessity of reaching a specific amount of counts out of the practice. Now we just observe the counts and restart the counting as soon as we observe the smallest thought appearing. The more precise you get, the less high you will reach with your count. It is almost impossible, at the beginning, to reach over 10 counts when counting in that way. Practice in this way for at least 20 minutes and aim to reach 100 counts in the cleanest way possible.

Be aware that is important not to mix these variations with the first circle of practice. It is important in the first period of practice to stay clean and clear with your practice, not mix in different variations that entertain the mind. In only the best case can you bring in these variations when suggested by your guiding teacher at this meditation.

