

# Teaching the Dragon Dance

## A Dynamic Indian/Daoist Fusion Flow

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## Acknowledgement

The Dragon drawing is by LadyofHats, Mariana Ruiz Villarreal, offered on Wikipedia:  
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## Intention of the Dragon Dance

The Dragon Dance is a blend of Indian and Daoist yoga, designed to stimulate and remove blockages to the flow of energy (prana or chi) through directed awareness, the breath and vigorous movements. It is great for people who want a vigorous workout and who want to experience this mystical thing called “energy.” It is a whole body workout, and will even challenge your ego. Flexibility is not just a physical quality; we also need flexible minds. Learning the dance, will challenge you mentally and will hopefully build neural plasticity in the brain. At some point you may experience the dragon’s fire: you will know you have reached this stage when you begin to sweat. After that, the dance will enter the yin phase, holding each position for a few breaths, to strengthen and open the joints. The final relaxation will allow the body to marinate in the juicy energies that you stimulated, which will enhance the healing and strengthening process within you.

## History of the Dragon Dance

The flow is inspired by the fertile teachings of Paul and Suzee Grilley. They offered three yang-like flows they call the Dragon Sequence on Paul’s DVD called *Yin Yoga: The Foundations of a Quiet Practice* (released in 2008). It is quite valuable to check out these original movements so you know the genesis of the Dragon Dance. You can also see these in various incarnations on YouTube clips, like Paul guiding Suzee through the Flying Dragon and the Golden Seed in the following videos:



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfZfj5Njm\\_A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfZfj5Njm_A)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bR-cMT1PBQU>

My contribution was to arrange many of these movements into a full flow that can be taught in a classroom setting, but the original inspiration is from Paul and Suzee. You will notice, since the Dragon Dance as I have arranged it, is different from Paul's version in that we always are facing the front of the room every time we add a new cycle. This is deliberate: it allows the students to be able to see you, the teacher, demoing the new movements.

## Energy and Yoga

### The Kosha Model

In the ancient Taittiriya Upanishad a model of the self is given. Each layer of our being is described as a sheath, or a bag, called a *kosha*. Five such sheaths exist, each one being more subtle than the previous. They are like layers of an onion, or a child's toy of nested dolls stacked one inside the other.

The layers are

1. The *annamaya* kosha ... the physical sheath
2. The *pranamaya* kosha ... the energy sheath
3. The *manomaya* kosha ... the lower mind sheath
4. The *vijnanamaya* kosha ... the higher mind sheath
5. The *anandamaya* kosha ... the bliss sheath



Inside the final sheath is our true being, which cannot be described in words, only experienced.

Man does not live by bread alone and our food sheath, the *annamaya* kosha, is not all there is. Beneath the outermost sheath is the *pranamaya* kosha: the energy body. The Dragon Dance takes us beneath our physical manifestation so we can investigate the vital energies of the body and learn how yoga affects these energies.

In the East we find many metaphors and concepts concerning energy. Many yoga texts teach us about prana in its various forms. Many scholars believe that the knowledge of yoga and prana filtered into China over 2,500 years ago. Once there, the Chinese built upon the spiritual uses of these sciences and developed a more complete physiological understanding. In the Daoist explorations, prana became known as Chi and it has many different manifestations. In the West, scientists and doctors had little time for the metaphysical aspects of Eastern energy. But even in the West, there are various interpretations of the word "energy." Some of these are described in the following article.

## The Mystery of Energy

### What are we doing energetically in our yoga practice?

There are 3 ways we use energy in our bodies: for transportation, for transformation and for communication. Communication is the most subtle of these uses of energy, and is the energy responsible for the more mysterious benefits of our yoga practice.

<b>The three uses of energy</b>
Transportation
Transformation
Communication



Energy for transportation is obvious: we use energy to move things around the body: blood is moved by the pumping of the heart—that takes energy; cells swim or crawl through our tissues; our muscles contract to move our limbs—all these use transportation energy. Transformation changes things into other things: our saliva begins to transform starch into simpler sugars; our stomach heats, churns and burns our food into easier to absorb nutrients; our liver is a transformation factory producing glycogen, breaking down worn out blood cells, detoxifying unhealthy substances—all of which uses transformation energy.

Communication is subtler than transportation or transformation. It requires less energy, but without it the other two will not happen. Consider this analogy: you want to cook a Thanksgiving turkey dinner, but do not know how high to set your oven's temperature. (Being a yogi, this will obviously be a tofu turkey!) So, you call your mother on your cell phone and she tells you to set the oven to 350F. Now, your oven will use thousands of watts of power, but your cell phone used only milliwatts of power<sup>1</sup>: the oven is a million times more powerful than your phone, but without

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<sup>1</sup> Power is the rate at which energy is consumed: the greater the power the more energy is consumed and/or the faster the energy is consumed.

your phone's tiny bit of communication energy, the transformation power of the oven is dormant. It is easy to notice the large sources and uses of transformation and transportation energy in the body, but it is far more challenging to notice when communication is happening, or isn't happening when it should be.

Communication happens in a variety of ways: consider several examples of how we communicate with each other. The spoken word uses sound energy; the written word uses light energy; the light touch of a hand or a hearty hug uses pressure energy; a woman's perfume uses chemical energy—all these forms of energy send messages or signals. So too, within the body, there are many ways that communication occurs. The Indian yogis detected 10 kinds of energy called *prana* (figure 1), which they defined as life energy; the Daoist sages in China intuitively mapped out 32 forms of *chi* (figure 2), which they consider universal energy, including but also beyond life energy. In the West, through the medical science of cellular signaling, we have enumerated hundreds of ways that communication occurs inside the body. These are grouped into 3 broad classes: mechanical, biochemical and electromagnetic.<sup>2</sup>

Energetically, we do two things in our yoga practice: we turn on the tap to stimulate energy to flow, and we remove blockages to the flow<sup>3</sup>. Yoga can stimulate ("turn on the tap") the flow of all three forms of energy: transportation (our heart rate increases); transformation (glycogen is converted to glucose to feed our muscles and brain); and communication (electrical signals are created via the nervous system, but also within the fascial system through pressure signals; chemical messages are sent out in the form of hormones and other growth factors;

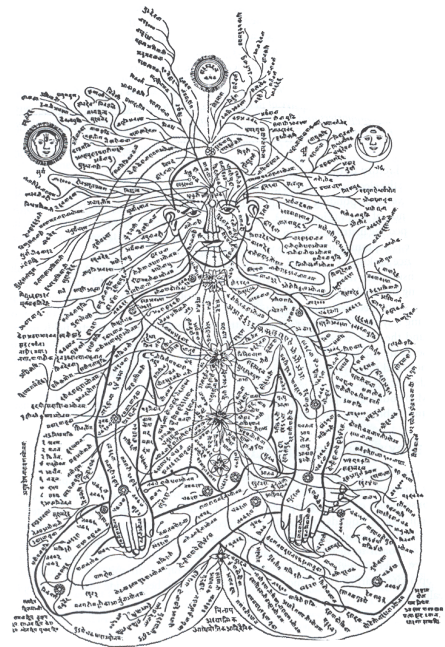


Figure 1 The Indian yogic map of nadis



Figure 2 The Daoist map of meridians

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<sup>2</sup> This is not a complete categorization; there are more ways to communicate than these 3 broad categories. The interested reader can check out James Oschman's book *Energy Medicine* for reports on how light, sound, pressure and magnetic energy is used for communication inside the body. He even speculates that other forms of energy may be used, such as infrared and microwaves.

<sup>3</sup> The Indian yogis call these blockages "*granthis*".

bioelectromagnetic impulses travel through the water of our body, stimulating cells to activate.)

<b>Two ways Yoga affects energy</b>
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1) Stimulates the flow
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2) Removes blockages
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The heart, far from being merely a pump, is the center of a communication system: with each beat it is transmitting electromagnetic fields and signals through the wet conduits of the body (the cardiovascular system and the fascial system); it is also creating and sending sound waves and pressure waves, which are also communication signals. This is not new news: we have known about the heart's electromagnetic fields for a long time: that is the basis of



electrocardiograms (ECGs); and doctors have listened to the heart (sound energy) and felt the pulse (pressure energy) for millennia. What was not known until recently is that these diagnostic energies are actually therapeutic energies. We have cells in our bodies that respond to the heart's electromagnetic messages, and to the pressure and sounds generated by the heart as well.<sup>4</sup> If the heart was simply a pump, why then do people die instantly when they suffer a heart attack?<sup>5</sup> The brain can survive for several minutes without oxygen, but death is immediate when the heart shuts down: when the heart's communication ceases, the body instantly dies.

Subtle energies can turn on a massive device like an oven, organs like the liver, and activate our muscles and the immune system. Being subtle, however, these energies and their importance were missed for a long time by Western researchers: they were too tiny (too subtle) for our instruments to notice. Through our yoga practice, we use three techniques to initiate and enhance this subtle energy: physical postures or movements (known as acupressure), breath, and awareness. Postures and movements create pressure which is an important signaling mechanism called mechanotransduction; breath is movement, but it is also a source of oxygen, obviously a very important fuel for all cells, but beyond that, our breath is connected to our nervous system in a way that can turn on or off our stress or rest reactions; awareness directed to particular areas also enhances energy flow. As an experiment, try concentrating on the tip of your thumb for one minute and notice how much warmer it becomes. Awareness dilates the blood vessels and allows more energy to

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<sup>4</sup> See James L. Oschman's book, *Energy Medicine: The Scientific Bases*

<sup>5</sup> Thanks to Daniel Keown for noting this. See his book, *The Spark in the Machine*.

reach that area. In our yoga practice, we create pressure and tension in our tissues through our postures, we pay attention to the stresses generated, and we direct our breath into the sensations. This practice opens the communication channels, called *nadis* by yogis and *meridians* by the Daoists<sup>6</sup>.

<b>Three ways to stimulate energy</b>
Acupressure from postures & movements
Breath
Directed awareness

While the energy of communication is challenging to detect, with practice any yoga student can start to tune inward and sense its flow. Sensing it can enhance it. Our physical yoga practice combined with breath may stimulate and remove blockages to communication, and we can make our yoga more effective by combining all that with inner awareness.

Move, breath, pay attention...that is a simple recipe for a yoga practice.

## Beginning the dance & lunge salutations

Start the dance with a few moments of mindfulness directed at the hands. Stand in the Horse pose (feet as wide as the mat, knees slightly bent, grounded, solid.) The hands are in sankalpa mudra (right hand over left, fingers curved around the hands). Take a few breaths and arrive.

Then, for an easy meditation on energy, draw awareness to the palms and feel what's there. Imagine you have a tiny ball of energy between the palms and start to roll it around, like rolling dough before you bake some cookies. This is your chi ball. If you can't feel anything, imagine what it would be like to have a ball of energy in your hands. As you roll it, let it grow bigger. Your hands may move further away from each other. The ball gets as big as a baseball, or a volleyball; maybe even as big as a beach ball. Roll it around; for some people their arms will move, their whole body may sway. That's okay.

The Daoists intuitively mapped out 32 different forms of Chi energy: you may feel a tingling sensation in your hands, or heat, or magnetic pushes and pulls. No need to create anything; just notice what is there.

After a couple of minutes, draw the hands in front of the heart, compact the ball, making it more dense and concentrated, then draw the hands to the heart bringing the energy inside. Feel or imagine the energy flowing through you.

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<sup>6</sup> The Chinese term is *jing luo*, which is grossly translated into English as meridians, but a better translation would be *channels* or *canals*.



## The opening lunge salutations

These 12 stage Sun Salutations are simply meant to warm us up a little and get the legs ready for the full Dragon Dance. Any Sun Salutations can work, but I like the lunge version because of how it wakes up the legs. Start movement #1 with an inhale; #2 with an exhale; then alternate inhales and exhales with each movement. Each breath is one movement. Surf the breath and let the energy move you.

1. Arms up overhead
2. Forward fold
3. Right leg steps back to low lunge, back knee on the floor and hands stay on the floor, look up as you complete the in breath
4. Down dog. For the first couple of cycles, keep the knees a little bit bent, making these happy puppies
5. Upper plank position (push-up position)
6. Slowly lower to the floor. By cycle #4, for more challenge, only come down halfway to the floor (Chaturanga)
7. Mini-Cobras. By cycle #4 do Upward Facing Dog
8. Down dog
9. Right foot steps forward to low lung. Don't lift the back leg up and backwards before stepping it forward, as that requires another breath and throws the timing off
10. Forward fold: float the back foot to the front foot, bend the knees and fold deeply
11. Coming up to standing, arms reaching overhead, spread your arms/wings, spread your toes/fingers, and spread the corners of your lips (it is called, in Sanskrit, a "smile".)
12. Lower hands to the heart, feeling chi in your heart as you exhale.

For the second cycle step the left foot back. Keep alternating which foot goes back in each cycle. By the 4<sup>th</sup> cycle, you can add Chaturanga instead of lowering to the floor, and substitute Up Dog for the low Cobras. Beginning students may want to keep doing the mini-Cobras, however. For the last 2 cycles, you can step back to high lunges instead of low lunges, but in these high lunges, keep the hands either on the floor, or just one inch off the floor (which is more challenging.)

The point here is just to loosen up a bit, not to become exhausted. Go easy. When finished, return to the Horse Posture and the Chi ball meditation.

## The Dragon Dance – Yang portion

This part of the dance entails a lot of movement and a sticky mat can actually interfere with the free flow of the feet. You may suggest to your students that they fold up their mats for this segment. (Tell them that part of being a yogi is to be mentally flexible enough to not need a yoga mat! People love their mats, because they demarcate their space and territory; but that's ok --- they will get the mat back for the yin cycle.)

### The movements

1. Chi ball (at the beginning and end of each cycle)
2. Karate Kid
3. The Hero Advances
4. Dragon Twist
5. Dragon Wings
6. Diving Dragon
7. Dragon swings its tail
8. Stepping under the belly of the beast
9. Spiralling Dragon
10. Flying Dragon

### The Cycles

For the first cycle we only do the Hero advances, but for each cycle after that we add another movement. Each cycle consists of alternating 3 turns to the back of the room and 3 turns to the front. [NOTE: if you are teaching a longer class or more experienced yoga students, you could opt to have 4 cycles! If you have less time available, do only 2 turns.] And there are two sides to each cycle! We start with the right foot stepping back for the first half cycle, then after completing that side with 3 movements to the front and back, we then start again on the left side.

For all cycles, the first time we turn to the back of the room we only do the Hero Advances; then, when we turn to the front of the room we do all the movements we have already done and we add the new movement for that cycle. After that peak movement, we go backwards through this list until we are back at the Dragon Twist. We end every cycle with the Flying Dragon. Here are some examples of what I mean:

**First cycle** is Chi Ball, Karate Kid, Hero advances (3x), then exit with the Flying dragon;

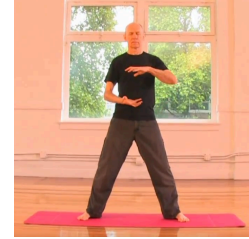
**Second cycle** is Chi Ball, Karate Kid, Hero advances to the back, turn to the front for Dragon Twist, repeat Dragon Twist to the back of the room, repeat it to the front, last time to the back, last time to the front, exit with Flying dragon;

**Final (7<sup>th</sup>) cycle** is Chi Ball, Karate Kid, Hero advances to the back, turn to the front coming into the Dragon Twist, Dragon Wings, Diving dragon, Dragon swings its tail, Stepping under the belly of the beast, Swing the tail, Spiralling Dragon, Swing the

tail, Step foot forward to Dragon Wings, Dragon Twist, repeat to the back of the room, repeat to the front, last time to the back, last time to the front, Flying Dragon.

### Individual cycles—each new cycle adds one of these positions

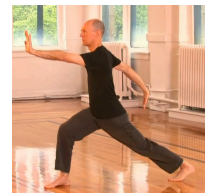
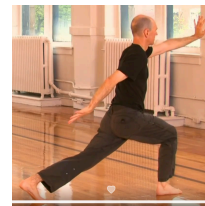
**1) Chi Ball:** Stand with feet about 3 feet apart, toes pointed slightly outward, arms at your side or hold your chi ball in front of you. For the initial cycle, spend a couple of minutes exploring the chi ball, rolling it around, and finish by drawing it into your heart, sensing the energy flowing within. In between cycles, briefly form the chi ball on an inhale and draw it into the heart as you exhale.



**2) Karate Kid:** stand on the left leg, lifting the right knee up towards the chest, hands also lifted (as in the movie.) Inhale here and then step the lifted leg to the back of the room. (Always start with the right leg lifting, just to make it easier to be consistent with your directions. If you are mirroring your students, you would lift your left leg.)



**3) The Hero advances:** This position is a bit like Warrior 2, but the student is on their back toes (which will challenge their balance...that can be fun!) The key here is that the arm that is reaching towards the back of the room is the opposite arm from the foot that is pointing there. In the first round, the right foot stepped back so the left hand is extended to the back of the room. (For the very first time you lead the class, pause here to make sure everyone has the left hand extended: point out to them that it is the opposite hand to the foot.) The back (right) hand pushes to the front of the room. On an inhale turn and face the side of the room, and on the exhale the hero advances to the front of the room. Now the left foot is facing forward and the right hand pushes forward, the left hand pushes to the back of the room. Keep switching sides 2 more times, ending facing forward to the front of the room, then Flying Dragon. Remember, the hands always pushes out on exhales when the Hero advances.



**4) Dragon Twist:** Following the Hero Advances, the dragon turns to look back at the hero. As always, the first round has the Hero Advancing to the back of the room, then flows to the front and immediately comes into the Dragon Twist. Twist over the front leg (which will be the left leg when facing the front of the room), turning the torso to look at the back of the room; both hands also point to the back. There is no need to lean into this posture; the torso can be perpendicular to the floor, the arms straight and the palms facing inward to each other. As you inhale straighten the legs and ride the exhale into the twist to the back of the room, looking over the right leg. This time the hands will



point to the front of the room. Keep switching sides 2 more times, ending facing forward to the front of the room, then Flying Dragon. The twists always occur on exhales.

**5) Dragon Wings:** After the dragon turned to see the hero advancing, it spreads its wings to fly away. After the Dragon Twist, inhale and raise both arms high, elbows bent, wide apart. Feel the nice stretch in the front of the chest. This can be a backbend too, and will challenge the balance if the student looks up. Remember to stay on the back toes for more challenge, but beginners may choose to keep the foot flat and slightly turned out. On the exhale, return to the Dragon Twist.



**6) Diving Dragon:** After the Dragon Wings, which was an inhale, dive with the exhale. Let the upper body dip forward and down while bringing the wings (arms) up behind the back (fingers can be interlaced or not). Very flexible dragons may be able to bring their heads almost to the floor. Use the inhale to come back up to Dragon Wings.



Note: this version of the Diving Dragon only is used for the first cycle, which is the first time it appears. After that, in all other cycles, the Diving Dragon will bring the hands to the floor in preparation for a Down Dog/Dragon swings its tail move. (See the bottom picture here.)



**7) Dragon swings its tail:** it is time for the dragon to swing its tail at the Hero. After the Diving Dragon comes to Down Dog, the foot that was in front now goes up and back. This can be confusing for students who easily confuse left and right, which is why we first ask them to come to Down Dog as part of the Diving Dragon after the initial cycle. If the left foot was the forward foot, ask the students to “Plant your front paws in Down Dog and lift your left foot up as you inhale”. As they exhale the left foot steps forward between the palm and then ride the inhale to Dragon Wings. It is from this stage onward that we start to stress the hands and wrists, so encourage the students to keep their wrists and fingers firm: stiffness is stabilizing!



**8) Stepping under the belly of the beast:** The hero ducks away from the dragon's tail by stepping underneath the dragon. As you exhale, the foot comes down, in front of the standing leg and out to the side away from it. (If the left foot has been raised, tell the students to *"bring the left foot down, in front and under the right leg, out to the side, feet apart"*.) Both feet twist so the soles are flat on the floor as you inhale and lift your arm up to the sky. (If you stepped the left foot under and to the *right*, say *"Lift your right hand up to the sky"* NOTE – the hand to raise is the same direction you just told students to move: the foot moved to the right, so lift the right hand up.) Stiffen the bottom wrist and shoulder for protection by actively pushing down into the floor as you lift up the free arm. Exhale—brings the hand back to the floor, and inhale—swing the tail again. Exhale—step the foot forward between the hands and inhale to Dragon Wings.

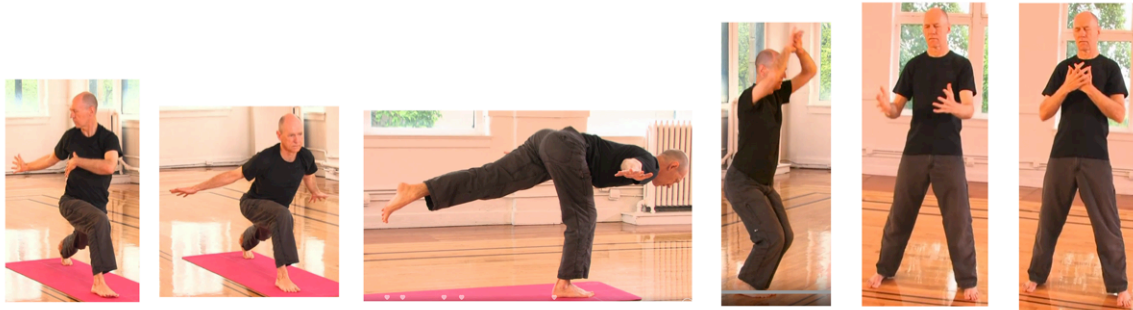


**9) Spiralling dragon:** The hero spirals under the dragon's belly and lands on top, riding its back. After coming back to "Stepping under the belly" and "Swing the tail" (which was an inhale) use the next exhale to bring the raised foot to the floor behind the standing foot. Inhale and raise the same hand as the foot that was moved. (So, if the student had lifted the left foot up, say *"bring the left foot down behind your back to the floor: as you inhale lift your left hand up by pushing your bottom hand firmly down"*.) Coming out, use the inhale to swing the tail again, and with an exhale, step the raised foot between the feet. Inhale to the Dragon Wings; exhale to the Dragon Twist.



**10) Flying dragon:** After coming all the way back to the Dragon Twist for the final time, it is time for the hero and dragon to fly together. For the Flying Dragon from the Dragon Twist, inhale and bring both arms backwards, leaning your chest over the front thigh. Exhale, lift the back leg off the floor, but keep the standing leg bent. Inhale, bring both feet together at the front of the "mat" while sitting down into a Chair Pose. Exhale, step the feet wider apart as the legs straighten. Inhale find your chi ball. Exhale, draw the chi ball into the heart. You are ready for the other side or the next cycle.





### **Finishing the Cycle**

After the last round of all the cycles, linger with the Chi ball for a while. This will allow the breath a chance to calm down. Feet should be a couple of feet apart, with the knees slightly bent (this is called the Horse position.) Spend 3 minutes or so here. Let the students really feel the chi in their hands, allowing the ball to grow bigger. As they roll the ball over, their arms may also move; their whole body might start to sway with the energy. Some students can sense colours, ribbons of energy flowing between the hands. Then have them bring their hands over their heads and let the energy cascade down over the body. It is like an energy shower. If there is one part of the body that is injured or needs extra loving-care, let the hands linger there giving themselves an energy massage.

### **Feeling energy during the Yang cycle**

In time, once the students know the choreography of the dance and don't have to worry about what to do, direct them to continually bring awareness to their hands. Ask them to attend to the sensations of energy arising and flowing there. They may start to feel energy being drawn up from the ground, or pushed forwards, backwards, skywards. In Hero advancing, the hands push energy away; as the students transition to the other side of the room, the hands come together briefly and draw energy inward, but when the Hero steps again the hands push away that energy. In the Dragon Twist they can throw the energy behind them. In Dragon Wings, they can grab energy from the sky, then throw it into the ground as they come into the Diving Dragon. Come back up to Dragon Wing, draw energy up from the earth, and in the Dragon Twist throw it behind you. Be creative, open and curious.

When the Yang cycle is finished, let the students replace their mats and ask them to stand at the front left of the mat in preparation for the Yin cycle.

## The Dragon Dance – Yin portion

While the Yang portion of the dance stimulates energy to flow, the Yin portion of the dance helps to remove impediments to the flow. (In Sanskrit, these blockages are called *granthis*.) In this segment, we hold for 4 ~ 8 breaths several of the main postures we flowed through in the Yang portion. Before you begin, if the students have removed their yoga mats, have them replace it and stand in the front left corner of the mat.

### The main postures to be held

1. Karate Kid
2. The Hero Advances
3. Dragon Twist
4. Dragon Wings—pulsating
5. Diving Dragon
6. Thigh burn asana
7. Thank God asana
8. Low lunge, with twist and Winged Dragon
9. Crocodile
10. Sphinx
11. Downward facing Cat to Down Dog
12. Dragon swings its tail
13. Stepping under the belly of the beast
14. Spiralling Dragon
15. Flying Dragon in two stages
16. Chi ball

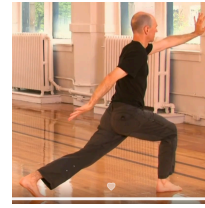
### The individual postures

For each pose, hold for an appropriate amount of time depending upon the level of your students. Advanced students can stay in the postures for 8 breaths, or 1 minute, but for beginners you may want to stay only 4 breaths (30 seconds.) Move through the full list of postures on one side, then pause and repeat all of this on the other side. For the first cycle, lift the right knee first in Karate Kid, and for the second time through, lift the left knee. Remind the experienced students to keep returning awareness to the feeling of energy in their hands.

**1) Karate Kid:** stand on the left leg, lifting the right knee up towards the chest, hands also lifted—a little more challenging is to point the toes of the raised foot. Even more challenging is to close the eyes. (Always start with the right leg lifting, just to make it easier to be consistent with your directions.) After 4~8 breaths, inhale bring the hands together and then on the exhale step the lifted leg to the back of the room.



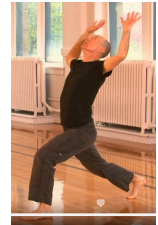
**2) The Hero advances:** Hold the Hero facing the back of the room for 4~8 breaths. The key here is that the arm that is reaching towards the back of the room (the left hand for the first cycle) is the opposite arm from the foot that is pointing there. The back (right) hand pushes to the front of the room. After the final breath, use an inhale to turn and face the side of the room, hands together, and on the exhale come into the Dragon Twist.



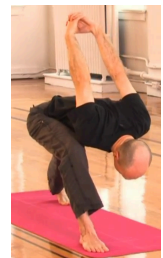
**3) Dragon Twist:** Twist over the front leg (which will be the left leg when facing the front of the room), turning the torso to look at the back of the room; the hands also point to the back. There is no need to lean into this posture; the torso can be perpendicular to the floor, the arms straight and the palms facing inward to each other. After 4~8 breaths, come into Dragon Wings.



**4) Dragon Wings—pulsating:** Inhale and raise both arms, elbows bent, wide apart. Feel the nice stretch in the front of the chest. We make this into a small flow by pulsing with the arms: on an inhale straighten the arms up, and turn the palms to the back of the room. On an exhale, draw the elbows back, down and wide apart, palms facing the front of the room. Do this 4 times. On the final cycle, raise the arms on the inhale and exhale into Diving Dragon.



**5) Diving Dragon:** After the Dragon Wings' arms reached straight up, which was an inhale, dive with the exhale. Let the upper body dip forward and down while bringing the wings (arms) up behind the back (fingers can be interlaced or not). Very flexible dragons may be able to bring their heads almost to the floor. Stay for 4~8 breaths. Use an inhale to come back up into Dragon Wings again, but with the arms remaining up in the air.



**6) Thigh burn asana:** Keep the hands up, arms straight, but lower the back knee almost to the ground. This should create a lovely sensation in the front of the thigh (the quads). An easier version is to lower the knee to the floor. Stay with the “burn” for 4~8 breaths, then lower the knee and enter Thank God asana.

**7) Thank God asana:** Drop the knee to the floor from Thigh burn asana, and come into a half split—straighten the front leg and bow down over it. Linger here a while longer than normal: maybe 8 ~ 12 breaths or up to 2 minutes. Let the students feel the edge of the pose, and play with it. They can work with the breath to subtly come out of the pose on the inhale, and go to the edge again with the exhale.



**8) Low lunge, with twist and Winged Dragon:** Come forward into a low lunge, with hands on either side of the front foot. Try to feel a stretch in the quads. After a few breaths here, bring the outside hand onto the front thigh and add a twist: turn the chest and look up. After a couple of breaths here, add the wing: let the front knee move up and down, rolling onto the outside edge of that front foot. Then, stay with the knee as low as it can go. You can stay in the twist here, or bring both elbows to the floor inside the front foot. More advanced students may want to try the “Fire Breathing Dragon”—lift the back knee off the floor. This whole sequence may take 2~3 minutes.



**9) Crocodile:** Without hurting the front hip, step the front foot back to a plank on forearms (grunting is optional, but it should sound like “om”.) Stay here for exactly 1 minute. Offer an easy option for beginners: let them lower their knees to the floor, but make sure they don’t lower their hips. (This ensures that their lower back is in a neutral shape.) For everyone, the hips should be the same height as the shoulders, the heels pulling backwards and the crown of the head pushing forward. Stiffen the core and the shoulders by pushing the arms into the floor. To keep the cervical spine (neck) also neutral, advise students to direct their gaze to the floor right beneath the nose.



When you do this pose a second time (during the second cycle on the other side), you can offer a more challenging option for advanced students: have them lift one foot just off the floor. (If they lift too high, they may lose the neutral position of the spine.) Even more challenging is to put opposite hand behind the back. Have them switch feet (and hands) halfway through the pose.



**10) Sphinx:** After the crocodile, lower the hips to the floor for an easy Cobra or Sphinx pose: with elbows under the shoulders. Stay here for a minute. For more challenge, you can have the students lift one or both hands/arms off the floor.



**11) Downward facing Cat to Down Dog:** As a counterpose for the Sphinx, let the students come into a downward Cat, rounding the back up. Then come into Down Dog for the rest of the flow.



**12) Dragon swings its tail:** From Down Dog, lift the **left** leg up. (In the second cycle, lift the right leg up.) To make the following postures easier, suggest moving the hands a bit closer to the back foot. To protect the wrists and shoulders, ask the students to firmly press the floor away. Stiffness is stabilizing!



**13) Stepping under the belly of the beast:** On an exhale, the raised foot comes down, in front of the standing leg and out to the side away from it. (When the left foot has been raised, tell the students to “*bring the left foot down, in front and under to the right, feet apart*”.) Both feet twist so the soles are flat on the floor as you inhale and lift your arm up to the sky. (If you stepped the left foot under to the *right*, say “*Lift your right hand up to the sky*”.) Stiffen the bottom wrist and shoulder for protection by actively pushing down into the floor as you lift up the free arm. Tell them about the famous yogi named James Brown who sang, “You gotta get down ... to get up”. Stay for 4~8 breaths then bring the hand back to the floor, and inhale—swing the tail again.



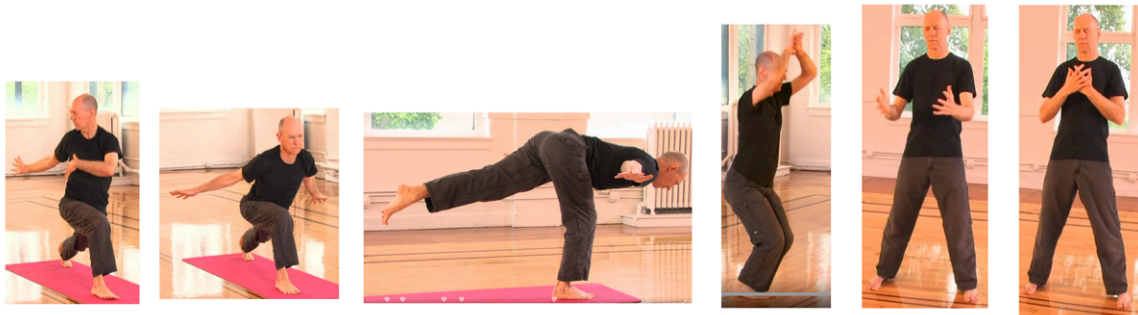
**14) Spiralling dragon:** Before coming into the full spiralling dragon, allow the students time to pulse with the raised leg. Bending the knee (Boy Dog pose); open the hip. The students can extend and bend the knee repeatedly to feel the hip opening. Then, advise the students to keep **BOTH** hands on the floor and lower the raised foot behind them to the floor: remind them that both hands are on the floor right now. Stay in this twisted Down Dog position for a couple of breaths to feel the lovely stretch in the side body.

Finally, allow them to raise the **same** hand as the foot that was moved. (So, for the first cycle with the left foot up, say “*lift your left hand up by pushing your bottom hand firmly down*”.) Stay for 4~8 breaths. Coming out, use the inhale to swing the tail again, and with an exhale, step the raised foot between the feet. Inhale to the Dragon Wings; exhale into Dragon Twist. Prepare to fly.





**15) Flying dragon:** Lean your chest over the front thigh: imagine you are the bow spirit at the front of a boat. Stay here for 4~8 breaths in this high lunge position. Then, lean the chest over the thigh, and stay as low as you can, lift the back leg off the floor, keeping the standing leg bent. Stay for a couple of breaths. Inhale, bring both feet together to the front while sitting down into a Chair Pose. Exhale, step the feet wider apart as the legs straighten. Inhale find your chi ball. Exhale, draw the chi ball into the heart.



### **Finishing the Cycle**

Do this whole cycle twice: once on both sides. At the end of the first cycle, pause briefly with the Chi ball, but then do the other side. Don't lose the momentum. At the end of the second cycle, as at the end of the yang cycle, allow some time to play with the Chi ball, perhaps repeating the energy shower.

### **Option: Paired energy massage**

If you have time, before the Golden Seed and final shavasana, you can ask the students to pair up and give each other an energy massage. This can be an interesting experiment. Have one student stand behind her partner, develop her Chi ball, and then bring her hands close to one area of her partner's back. The partner is standing quietly with eyes closed: ask the partner to determine where the Chi ball is—can she feel the energy?

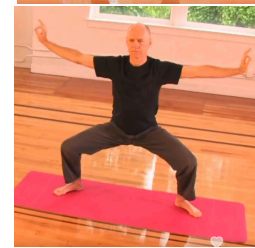
When ready, do a cooling, closing movement, such as the Golden Seed or Cloud Salutation.

## The Golden Seed

The Golden Seed is inspired by the fertile teachings of Paul and Suzee Grilley. It is a Daoist yoga flow that allows us to wake up the energy body as well as cool down from a more vigorous yang practice. It is a nice short practice to stimulate energy flow that can be used on its own, or in place of the more traditional sun salutations often used as a warm-up for yoga, or as a cool down before shavasana, as we used it in the full Dragon Dance. Each breath is one movement. Move with awareness of the energy flowing through you (feel your palms all the time.) Feel free to modify it and add your own nuances and movements.

**Begin the cycle:** Stand with feet about 3 feet apart, toes pointed slightly outward, arms at your side or hold your chi ball in front of you.

1. **Inhale** as you circle the arms up over your head
2. **Exhale** as you push your palms to the sides of the room, arms strong and straight, turning your feet out and draw the knees back so that they point over the toes
3. **Inhale** as you hold this Goddess position, but draw your fingertips to your shoulders
4. **Exhale** as you straighten your legs and square up your feet and fold, bringing hands to the floor. (This is called the "elephant lays his trunk on the ground.") Place your right palm on the floor so that the fingers face the left foot, and turn your right foot out at a 45 degree angle
5. **Inhale** as you twist to the left and raise your left hand up to the sky
6. **Exhale** as you switch sides: place your left palm on the floor so that the fingers face the right foot, and turn your left foot out at a 45 degree angle



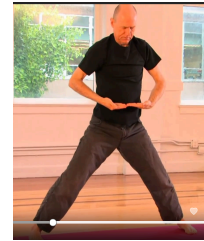
7. **Inhale** as you twist to the right and raise your right hand up to the sky



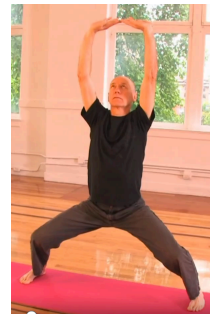
8. **Exhale** as you bring both hands to the earth, turns the palms up, finger tips touching, and squat down so that your hips are the same height off the floor as your shoulders



9. **Inhale** as you stand up, straighten the legs and draw your hands up to the heart level, keeping the palms facing up and fingertips touching



10. **Exhale** as you squat down, keeping fingertips together turn the palms to face the sky, and push your hands high above you, arms straightening



11. **Inhale** straighten your legs standing tall with the arms still over your head



12. **Exhale** as you fold into the Dipping Bird: head down to the earth but arms up in the air behind your back like wings.



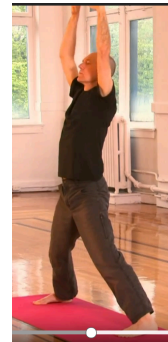
13. **Inhale** to the Rocking Horse: squat down but bring your arms up in front of you, elbows bent, wrists relaxed, as if you were holding the reins of a horse



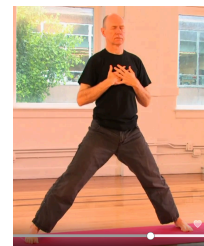
14. **Exhale** as you fold back into the Dipping Bird: head down to the earth but arms up in the air behind your back like wings.



15. **Inhale** as you stand up, knees soft (bent a little), arms rising up in front of you, also soft, wrists relaxed, until the legs are straight and arms over your head



16. **Exhale** as you fold your wings: bring your hands to the heart centre



**Optional ending:** feel the chi in your hands and play with your chi ball.

At the end of each cycle, pause for one full breath and begin the next cycle. On the 4<sup>th</sup> or last cycle, feel free to hold the major postures for 5~8 breaths. For a video view of this flow, visit [www.gaia.com/video/dragon-dance-golden-seed](http://www.gaia.com/video/dragon-dance-golden-seed). Even if you are not a member of Gaia, you can learn the flow by watching the free, short preview.

## The Cloud Salutation

Any movement of the body releases energy. On some days, the world is shrouded in a damp fog of yin energy: vigorous movement just isn't in the cards. On some days you just want to be a cloud and float. Floating is still moving, and even while floating you can practice awareness. The Cloud Salutation is a wonderful way to move with the flow of life when it is quiet, or when you need to build some quiet into your life. It is also a lovely complement to the full Dragon Dance and a segue into shavasana.

1. **Beginning:** Come into mountain pose (Tadasana). Bring your feet comfortably close together and root them into the earth. Hug your thighs together and lift your crown to the sky. Press palms together at elbow level in Anjali mudra (prayer) or feel your chi ball. To help with your balance throughout the flow, focus your eyes at eye level far in front of you on one spot that isn't moving, or at a spot on the floor. Exhale completely, and smile.
2. **First Movement:** Begin to inhale, and then spread your arms wide like wings, raising them high over your head. Bring your palms together, and reaching as high as you can, complete the inhalation, pause ... and smile again.
3. **Second Movement:** Begin to exhale, and then slowly lower your palms down the center of your body, while at the same time lifting your right knee up to your chest. Empty your lungs as you pause briefly, with your palms just above your knee. Remember to lift the corners of your lips: it is called a smile.
4. **Third Movement:** Begin the next inhalation, and again spread your arms wide and up to the sky, while you lower your right foot slowly to the floor. Be aware that your foot will want to descend faster than your arms will lift: synchronize the movements so that the hands touch at the same instant your foot touches the floor. Complete the inhalation, and pause slightly.
5. **Fourth Movement:** The other side now: begin to exhale, and then slowly draw your palms down the center of your body, while at the same time lifting your left knee up to your chest. Empty your lungs as you pause briefly with your palms just above your knee. This is challenging so keep smiling.
6. **Fifth Movement:** Begin the next inhalation, and then again spread your arms wide and up to the sky, while you lower your left foot slowly to the floor. Again, be aware that this foot will also want to descend faster than your arms will lift. Keep the movements equal. Complete the inhalation, and pause slightly.

That's all there is to this lovely salutation. Keep repeating the flow, alternating sides, and when you are done, return to your mountain; close your eyes, and feel the flow still moving inside you.





When you flow in the Cloud Salutation, move slowly, gracefully, like a cloud floating upon the wind of your breath. Once you have learned the graceful movements of the clouds, you can challenge yourself even more: move like the clouds move, with their eyes closed. Clouds don't look where they are going: they don't even care where they are going – they just go! Keep your breath calm, even if you begin to wobble. If the wobbling becomes too dramatic, open your eyes; come back to the original flow for a few cycles. This flow can become addicting. Enjoy it.

## Closing meditation on energy

Recall that we do two things energetically during our yoga practice: we turn on the tap to stimulate the flow of energy, and we remove blockages to that flow. In our final shavasana we do not need to stimulate any more energy flow, but we can remove more impediments to that flow. One possible impediment to energy flow are metal circles: you can suggest that your students practice their yoga and relax into shavasana without wearing metallic circles: take off rings and bracelets that are metallic and that make a complete circle and see if you notice any differences.

The Daoist observed that most blockages to the flow of chi through the meridians occurs in the joints, so as we relax into a deep shavasana, we can help the flow of healing energy by consciously relaxing our joints. As the teacher, guide your student's awareness to their joints, helping them to relax and open these areas. You may wish to start at the bottom and work up:

- Begin by becoming aware of the toes, and relax the toes.
- Slowly work your way through the arches of the feet to the ankles. Relax the ankles
- Draw your awareness along the shins to the knees. Feel your knees relaxing
- Allow your awareness to move through the thighs to the hip sockets and release your hip joints
- Feel your sacrum release into the earth
- Relax your lower back, the lumbar spine releasing
- Feel each vertebra coming into alignment with its neighbour, as you relax your middle and upper spine.
- Relax your shoulders. Do that again. Relax your shoulders and your arms.
- Release tension in your elbows and wrists
- Relax the thumbs, fingers and palms. Your hands are fully relaxed
- Bring your awareness to the neck and release tension all along the neck, right up to the base of the skull
- Finally, release your jaw, allowing your teeth to part slightly, softening all your facial muscles.

Explain how the Dragon Dance stimulated energy to flow and now, at a deep unconscious level, the body is healing, becoming younger, stronger, healthier. This

healing will continue throughout the days to come, but consciously notice the deep stillness growing within you. Enjoy this. Enjoy being relaxed ... and for the days to come, enjoy being.

## A Suggested Playlist

For the opening mediation/Chi ball (something grounding and mellow)

- *Returning to now* by Karunesh

For the warm up:

- 12 Sun Salutations off Shiva Rea *Yoga Chant* CD

For the Yang Portion: (something with a beat to it)

- *Sunrise at the Ganges* by Karunesh
- *Alibaba* by Karunesh
- *Shavasana wave* from Shiva Rea *Yoga Wave* CD
- *Joi* from Shiva Rea *Shakti Rhythm* CD

For the Yin portion (something quieter, more mellow)

- *Zensual* by Karunesh
- *For the joy of it all* by Karunesh

For Golden Seed – (something smooth with a bit of flow to it)

- *Mount Kailash* by Karunesh

For Shavasana (something grounding and mellow)

- *Calling Wisdom* by Karunesh
- Silence...no music

## Dragon Dance Teaching Tips

- a. How to make the dance longer (90 minutes instead of 75)
  - i. Do 4 or 5 turns to the front and back instead of 3
  - ii. Use longer holds in the postures during the Yin cycle
  - iii. Spend more time experiencing the Chi ball and integrating the energy
  - iv. Offer a longer shavasana
- b. How to make the dance shorter (60 minutes or less)
  - i. Skip the opening Sun Salutations
  - ii. Skip the Spiraling dragon
  - iii. Do only do 2 turns to the front/back instead of 3
  - iv. Skip the Diving Dragon and Low flying dragon in the Yin cycle
  - v. Hold the Yin cycle's postures shorter
- c. What to do when, as the teacher, you get lost or forget something
  - i. Know that you will screw up every now and then: that's okay! It takes a while to "train your dragon". I still get mixed up from time to time. No big deal.
  - ii. Make it fun: life is not perfect and neither are dragons
  - iii. When lost, ask the students, "What's next?" "Did we do the other side yet?"
  - iv. Advise the students, "Do what I mean, not what I say..."
  - v. Remind the students that these are friendly, Eastern dragons! Pete's Dragon; Darcy the Dragon; Puff the magic dragon ... not Smaug.
- d. If someone can't do it the dance
  - i. Explain up front, it is okay to stop; this might get confusing—that's intentional; and, you will sweat! That's good too!
  - ii. Tell them to take a break when they need to
  - iii. Let them know that this is a fast, flowing practice; you won't have time to give specific directions and guidance...warn the students in advance!
  - iv. Not everyone will like this, but many will love it—do it for the students who love dragons! Some students may walk out...don't worry about it (although you can check to make sure they are not injured or suffering from some ailment that needs attention). Not everyone loves dragons. Others will stay and love it.
- e. The sweat speech: explain how good sweat is!
  - i. Don't wipe it off, rub it in.
- f. The breath will be faster than normal; that's okay

## The Mythology of the Dragon Dance

[This article is from [http://www.yinyoga.com/newsletter9\\_the\\_dragon\\_dance.php](http://www.yinyoga.com/newsletter9_the_dragon_dance.php)]

Many students who have participated in the Dragon Dance either live, or via Gaia Yoga have heard about the energetic benefits of this exuberant practice, but few have heard of the mythic symbolism of the dance, which is quite entrancing.

The dance begins with the "Hero Advancing:" he is looking for a dragon to slay. Already we have our two prime characters in the dance, but who are they symbolically? In India, "kama" and "artha" are two of the four aims of life: kama is pleasure, artha is achievement. We find these two primal, animal drives arising as early as the nursery - I want that, I don't want this. Whatever you have, I want too.

Kama is seeking that which pleases us and running away from that which we don't like. This is the same desire and aversion that the Buddha realized was the cause of all our suffering in life. Artha is our competitive drive, the urge to succeed materially in life, the desire for that big promotion, a bigger car, bigger house, and the need to keep up with the Jones. It is the will to power. The hero is driven in his quest by "I Want!"

The third aim in life is "dharma:" this is my personal dharma, my duty. It is what society, in the form of our families, our teachers, our clergy, our media, all demand of us. It is the role in life that we were born to play. It is of dharma that Krisna talks when he urges Arjuna to get in there and join the battle in the great epic The Bhagavad Gita. Go! Do your duty! Don't be concerned with success or failure; just do what you were born to do. We are being told to be the good soldier or good citizen or good consumer and do what society is asking of us. That is dharma.

Dharma is the dragon. Nietzsche once named this dragon, "Thou Shalt!" Each of its scales has a law written upon it; a rule of society, of our culture, that we must follow. "Thou Shalt!" is the dragon that the hero wants to conquer. The dance now begins.

Here we are presented with the quandary of our times - which is more important: my expression of individuality or my submission to the way things are? This is the battle of every teenager who is trying to figure out, "What is my purpose in life?" Do I try to fit in, as society is demanding, or do I seek my own individual path? If I try to fit in, things go smoothly but at a cost of feeling unfulfilled. If I try to express my own unique personality, to follow my own dreams and live the authentic life I want to live, my friends and family become alienated and frightened.

We are caught on the horns of two ancient conventions: the Greek urge to express our unique individual nature captured in modern secular times as our inalienable human rights, and the Levantine commandment to surrender to God and do his will. This conflict is aptly symbolized by Prometheus, the hero who defied god (Zeus), was justly punished and did not repent, and by Job, who was unjustly

punished by God, but repented despite the fact that he had done no wrong.

In the Dragon Dance, the hero first advances: the "I Want" seeks to slay the dragon of "Thou Shalt!" In the second act, the Dragon turns (Dragon Twist) and sees the hero approaching: society is watching you! Do you really think that you can sneak up on your own culture?

In the third act, the dragon rears up and spreads its wings (Dragon Wings), ready to take flight. "Thou Shalt!" is not easily subdued. The fourth act sees the dragon diving back to earth (Diving Dragon), ready to assault the hero and force him back in line. The dragon is above you, larger and stronger than you. How can you hope to defeat it?

Act five: the dragon swings his scaly tale at the hero: retribution is at hand. Act six: the hero ducks under the dragon narrowly avoiding being bludgeoned back into his proper place in society.

At this point in the dance several things could happen. The hero has stepped under the belly of the beast and from here can deliver a killing blow into the dragon's exposed heart, but there is another choice.

The fourth aim of life, beyond kama, artha and dharma, is "moksha." Moksha is release, liberation, ultimate freedom from desire and duty. In India, when a man has completed his worldly tasks, when he has raised his family and the eldest son is ready to take over as head of the household, he heads to the forest to practice yoga. (Women can do this too, but rarely do women choose this path.)

We can choose to slay the dragon "Thou Shalt!" and become a rebel living outside the laws of custom, culture and family, or we can choose to transcend pleasure and duty altogether. Moksha is going beyond the three lesser aims of life. Through our yoga practice we yoke the hero and the dragon together. This is the last act of the dance: the hero spirals around the dragon and mounts it. The dragon is not slain, only tamed. Together the hero and the dragon rise up: now is the time to take to the air, to transcend.

In the West, we have recognized these characters psychologically. Freud has named kama and artha, libido and id. Dharma, our dragon, he calls the superego. This is an old story: "I want" versus "thou shalt." Carl Jung has offered a path to resolution via the process of individuation: a complete sculpting of the Western ego so that is free from the imperatives of desire and duty.

(Ego in the West is not the same as what is meant by ego in the East! In the East, ego is simply libido and id: desire for pleasure and power. In the West ego is much more complicated: it is the psychic interface between all that is unconscious and that which is the "real" world outside ourselves. In the East we are urged to kill the ego, which means we should stop our greed and hatred. In the West are urged



to develop our ego, which means to become whole people, not the part people society would have us to be.)

This myth has been rendered in different terms in the story of the night of the Buddha's enlightenment and his three temptations. As the Buddha sits in the unmovable spot beneath the great tree at the centre of all things, Mara, the great shadow, approaches him. Seeking to prevent the Buddha's enlightenment Mara invokes Kama who sends to the Buddha his three lovely daughters: Lust, Fulfillment and Regret. The beautiful daughters of Kama try to seduce the Buddha but he does not react: he has moved beyond desire and libido. Next Mara summons Yama, the Lord of Death, and Yama hurls his great army at the Buddha in an attempt to frighten the Buddha into moving. The Buddha remains steady: he has moved beyond fear and id. Neither kama nor artha can move the Buddha: the hero remains still.

Next Mara summons the god Dharma who berates the Buddha. "Why are you sitting here? You lazy man! Your place is beside your father. You are born to rule, to be king after your father. Go home and perform your duty!" Dharma, the superego, fails to move the Buddha as well: the Buddha in a simple gesture touches the earth. She speaks in his defense and dismisses the dragon of dharma. As in the Dragon Dance, the Buddha transcends the first three aims of life and finds a new path - a path to freedom.

Freedom does not mean license. This is not freedom to do what you want and not do what you don't want, but a freedom from wants. Of course, it is not just the Dragon Dance that leads to this ultimate contentment—now that you are aware of these mythological symbols, you are free to see this journey unfolding in any dance you choose to perform. It is really the dance of my life.