

The Crane Frolics

Guiding principle:

Circling lightly in the peace of the heavens,
never stopping heavily.

Mnemonic:

The crane's body floats and stands like a pine,
One's mind should soar as through layers of clouds,
Spreading wings, wild goose alighting, and single-legged stance,
Using light intention, ascend and descend the qi and breath.

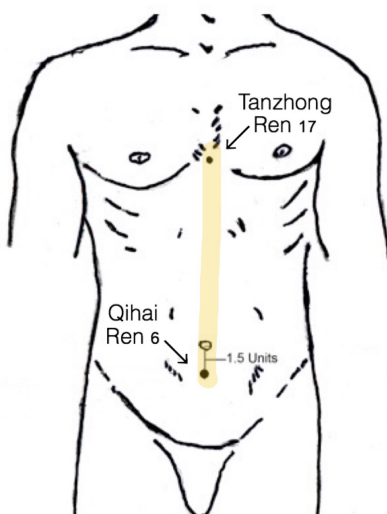


The crane is a bird that excels in flight, circling lightly as it soars in the sky. It floats in the sky like clouds moving across the face of the moon. When standing, it is like a majestic green pine, standing tall, straight, and firm, unmoving as it towers overhead.

When practicing the crane frolic, one should be as comfortable and free as a crane spreading its wings and soaring through layers of clouds, completely unfettered, without a care in the world. There are a few exercises, such as spreading wings, wild goose alights, and standing on one leg, which comprise the principal motions of the crane frolic.

When practicing, the ascent and descent of the qi and breath must be gentle, fine, and slow. Use "intention", but only to a point. Don't overdo it, as excessive focusing of "intention" can easily cause qi stagnation, and, if the qi is stagnant, one cannot reap the benefits of having properly regulated qi flowing through the vessels.

The motions of this frolic are light, expansive, and soaring.



The path from Qihai to Tanzhong

- Breathe naturally (either inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth or inhaling and exhaling through both at the same time), keeping the mind at the point qihǎi (The Sea of Qi).
- This frolic regulates the flow of qi in the vessels, and serves to dredge the channels and collaterals.
- The point qihǎi (The Sea of Qi) is located 1.5 cun below the umbilicus (the combined width of the middle knuckles of your index finger and middle finger). It is an important waypoint on the Ren (Conception) Vessel. It is the "sea of qi's birth", and is principally used for things like treating deficiency and depletion of the zang (yin organs) qi, insufficiency of true qi, emaciation due to general deficiency, and menstrual irregularity.

This school refers to qìhǎi (The Sea of Qi) as a point of the “lower dantian”. Keeping the Mind in this location also assists with abdominal respiration.

After establishing a stable foundation in the training of crane frolic, one may begin to train the ascent and descent of qi between qìhǎi (The Sea of Qi) and the point tǎnzhōng (the center of the chest).

- The point tǎnzhōng lies directly between both nipples, and is an important waypoint of the Rèn/Conception Vessel.
- It is also one of the eight great meeting points of the body (the qi assembles/gathers/meets at tǎnzhōng/in the center of the chest).
- When practicing, the qi and breath should slowly ascend from the point qìhǎi to the point tǎnzhōng as one inhales qi, and should slowly descend from the point tǎnzhōng to the point qìhǎi as one exhales qi.
- This alternation of inhalation and exhalation, of ascent and descent, helps to regulate the flow of qi in the vessels.

Most, however, when training, only pay sufficient attention to the exhalation of qi and its descent, and don't pay enough attention to the ascending, inhalation of qi, which they do in order to prevent the qi and breath from rising excessively.

Crane Stepping:

Draw the left foot back to the inside of the right foot, with your toe touching the ground. At the same time, turn your body slightly to the left. As you inhale, take half a step forward with your left foot, touching the ground with your toe, and extending the top of your foot and your lower leg. Your back leg should be extended, with the entire sole of your foot in contact with the ground, like you are standing in mud. As you do this, your hands should open outward, so that your palms face forward, with your five fingers separated and slightly bent. Your elbows should be slightly bent, and both eyes should be directed straight ahead. As you exhale, both elbows should relax, your hands should return to their original position, and your right foot should be withdrawn to the inside of the left, with its toe touching the ground and both knees slightly bent. At the same time,

the body should turn slightly to the right, keeping the entire body relaxed. (Figure 22-25) This is left style.

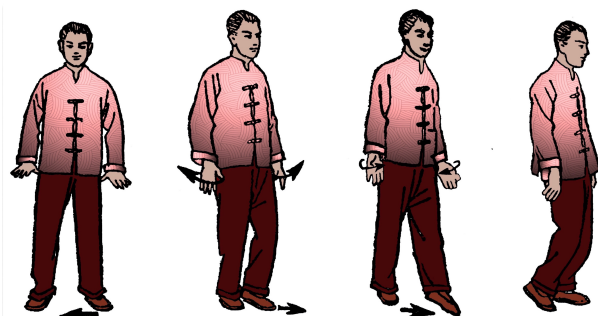


Fig 22,

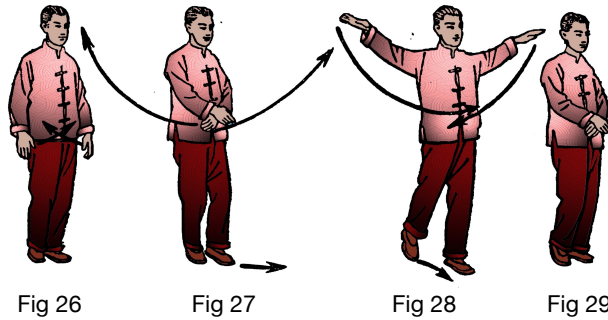
Fig 23,

Fig 24,

Fig 25

Following left style, step out with your right leg as you inhale, mirroring the motion of left style. This is right style. The practice consists of alternating left and right in this manner.

Displaying/Spreading Wings:



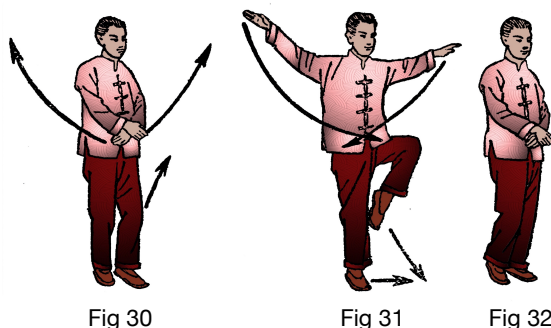
Following the previous exercise, bring both hands together in front of your lower belly as you inhale, after which they should continue to rise on both sides until they reach the level of the head. As your hands rise, your arm and elbow should be relaxed and open/open and extended, and your elbow, wrist, and fingers should be slightly bent, with your fingers "moving like pupae". Your arms

should rise in a wavelike fashion/ripple upward, and you should resemble a white crane spreading/displaying its wings/like the form of White Crane Spreads Its Wings. As your arms rise, your left foot should take half a step forward, with your whole foot on the ground. Shift your weight to your front foot (not allowing your head to go past your toes). Straighten out your front leg and lift the heel of your rear foot. Your eyes should be directed straight ahead. As you exhale qi, both arms should naturally and gradually descend along the same pathway to just in front of the lower abdomen. The right foot should be drawn in to join the inside of the left, with its toe touching the ground, and, at the same time, your body should turn slightly to the right. (Figures 26-29) This is left style.

Following the left style, advance your right foot as you inhale, and repeat the motions of left style. This is right style. Practice consists of alternating left and right in this manner.

Standing on One Leg/Single-leg Stance:

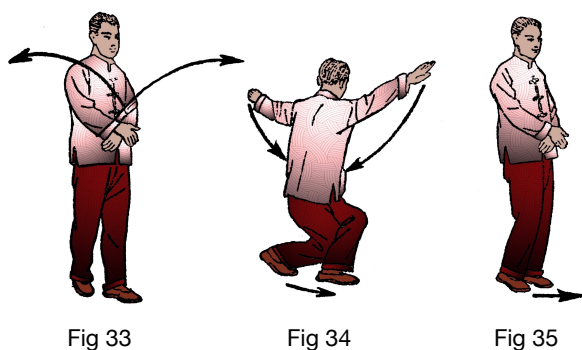
Following the previous exercise, both arms gradually rise on each side as you inhale, until your hands are level with your head. The elbows, wrists, and fingers should be slightly bent, like the move "Spreading Wings". As the hands rise, bend the left leg and raise your knee, with your toe hanging down and your lower leg and foot extended. Your right leg should be straight or slightly bent. Both eyes should look straight ahead, and your form should resemble that of a white crane standing on one leg. Pause slightly, and then gradually descend both arms along the same pathway as you exhale qi, your hands still crossing beneath the umbilicus. Simultaneously, the left foot should descend to the left anterior of the right foot. Allow your right foot to be naturally be drawn in to join the inner aspect of the left, with its toe touching the ground, and turn the body slightly to the right. (Figures 30-32) This is left style.



Following left style, mirror its motions as you inhale qi, this time raising only your right knee. This is right style. Practice consists of alternating left and right in this manner.

Wild Goose Alights:

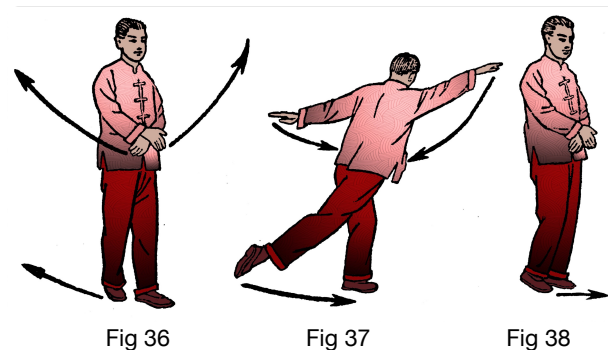
Following the previous motion, take half a step with your left foot directly in front of your right foot as you inhale, with your left toe turned out. Your feet should be, maybe, a foot apart. Both hands should cross in front of your chest and rise gradually, causing the body to turn to the left as and sit down. Your eyes should be directed left and toward the rear. Your hands should ascend to the height of your shoulders, before gradually descending, circling to the left and right. When they reach the height of the nipple, pause for a moment, with your shoulders relaxed and your elbows bent, rippling out to form an arc with your arms. Then, as you exhale qi, slowly descend both arms until they cross in front of the lower abdomen. Stand up and returning your body to its original orientation as you do, draw the right foot back in to join the inside of the left. (Figures 33-35) This is left style.



Following left style, move the right foot forward as you inhale, turning your body to the right and sitting down as you do, mirroring the motions of left style. This is right style. Practice consists of alternating left and right in this manner.

Soaring/Gliding/Hovering:

Following the previous motion, take half a step forward with your left foot, placing it directly in front of the right, with your toe pointing out. Cross your hands in front of your lower belly as you twist your waist to the left and look to the left and back. As you inhale, both arms should gradually rise to both sides, with your right hand rising to the level of your shoulder, and your left to the level of your hip. Both arms should ripple outward, extending to form an arc as you bend your left knee, shift your weight to your left foot, lift your right heel off the ground, and lean forward slightly. Your form should resemble that of a bird soaring in the sky. Then, as you exhale qi, both arms should gradually return along the same pathway to just in front lower abdomen. As you do so, withdraw your right foot to the inside of the left, with the toe of your foot touching the ground. This is left style.



Following the left style, step forward with your right foot as you inhale, simultaneously twisting your waist to the right and mirroring the motions of left style. This is right style. Practice consists of alternating left and right in this way.

The contents of this handout are created using material from Hu Yaozhen's 1963 Five Animal Frolics book; specifically the chapter written by one of Master Hu's students - Jiao Guorui (pages 3 - 44). The material was translated from the original Chinese by Ariel Maayan and edited by Kevin Siddons. Copyright Ariel Maayan and Kevin Siddons, 2019.