

The Tao of Survival focuses on real-world, core survival skills that can save your life anytime and anywhere, in any adverse or unforeseen situation. It provides an abundance of exercises based on fundamental concepts that no other survival book covers, including developing mind/body skills, fully engaging your senses to be aware of your surroundings and how to deal with fear.

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AYRES



THE TAO ((OF)) SURVIVAL

SKILLS TO KEEP YOU ALIVE

GIBBS
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THE TAO ((OF)) SURVIVAL

SKILLS
TO KEEP YOU
ALIVE



JAMES
MORGAN
AYRES

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CENTERING, BREATHING AND ENTERING TAO SPACE

Empty yourself of everything. Let the mind become still.

—Lao Tze

Breathing, centering and entering Tao space are the first steps and foundations of each exercise. Tao space is a survivor's state of mind/body that, once acquired, you will be able to enter at once, while on the move and in high-stress environments. For our primary lessons we'll start in a familiar and comfortable place and take as much time as needed. The format for this lesson is different than those that follow in that you do not need to set an alarm or fixed time for the lesson. The length of the lesson is not determined by time but by the number of breaths and how long it takes you to center and enter Tao space. Some center and slip into Tao space the first time they try. Others require more time, a few much more time.

Others reach Tao space and don't realize they have done so because they are expecting a sudden and dramatic change in their perceptions. Indeed there are, sometimes, dramatic changes in perception. But there is also a subtle level of Tao space that you can find your way to in which you simply seem hyperalert and aware; this is essentially the first level of Tao space. As you progress you will likely find yourself entering deeper levels of Tao space, which will further intensify your experiences. For the purposes of this book, I'll simply refer to Tao space without getting into more detailed and esoteric discussions of different levels.

It doesn't matter if you need one, ten or a hundred repetitions of the basic exercises to be successful. What matters is that you achieve success. Entering Tao space is fundamental to mastery of the following lessons and to developing survivor's mind. Once accomplished, you'll be able to center and enter Tao space easily and quickly and remain as long as you like, perhaps all the time.

There are three exercises in this lesson: sitting, standing and moving. Stay with the first exercise, sitting, until you have mastered it. Once you can center and enter Tao space sitting, go on to standing. After you master standing, go on to moving.

Sitting Exercise

Select a position in which you can sit comfortably for an extended period. Sit with your back straight. It's important to keep your spine as straight as possible to allow the free flow of energy. Visualize a strong, flexible cable attached to the top of your head and holding the weight of your body. As well as aiding in alignment, this also allows your body to spin, turn and move freely in the later exercises involving walking, running and other movement.

Tuck the base of your spine under just a bit. Or think of it as rolling your tailbone under and to the front, or pulling your pelvic bone forward and slightly up by using your lower abdominal muscles, thereby tilting your pelvis and bringing it into proper alignment. This will require some flexion in your lower abdomen. Let your hands rest in your lap.

Close your eyes. For training purposes only, we close our eyes to start the first exercises. Doing so helps us to direct our attention in the beginning. As you acquire expertise, you will not need to close your eyes to shift into Tao space, or to use any of the other skills you will acquire.

With your eyes closed, take in a slow, deep breath and visualize your breath passing through your nose and nasal passages, down through your throat, filling and expanding your lungs and being drawn down into your belly and your tan tien, which you visualize as a balloon the size of a grapefruit just below and behind your navel. This spot is your center of balance, of energy, of your physical and energetic body. Visualizing air and energy being drawn into your tan tien helps to center you, build energy and refine focus. With each breath you take in, see this balloon filling with energy.

Exhale slowly and fully, see your breath rising from your tan tien up through your lungs and throat and out through your mouth. As you breathe out, let the concerns of your day drift away. Allow your mind to become as calm as the surface of a still pond in deep forest. This place of stillness is one you'll become familiar with, a place you'll come back to for all of these exercises and more importantly a state of being you'll create in your mind/body that you'll go to in times of high stress and when you need to act decisively.

Keep your attention on your tan tien, your center. Random thoughts will arise. Allow them to drift away like soap bubbles on the wind. If you wish, you

can observe them and name them as they arise: “thinking about work,” “thinking about dinner,” “thinking about repairing the car,” and so on. But do not allow those thoughts to divert your attention from your center. Just note them and let them go.

Take in a second slow, deep breath, expanding your lungs, drawing air and energy down into your tan tien. Allow your muscles and joints to be loose and relaxed; not slack, but softly poised like a cat ready to jump. Keep your attention on your tan tien. Do not force concentration. Allow concentration.

Again, exhale slowly and fully. Your attention will wander to externals: noise in the street, an itch on your arm or nose. When that happens, gently bring your attention back to your center, to stillness. Do not force anything.

Draw in a third deep, slow breath, seeing and feeling air and energy being drawn into your center, your tan tien. Feel the energy and power building in your tan tien so that you could leap up and across the room in a microsecond. You actually will do this in a later lesson. But for this lesson we’ll stay in our seats.

As you exhale, feel the energy expanding from your center and suffusing your body. After the third exhalation you will be relaxed, alert, poised and balanced, fully centered and feeling your concentrated power in your tan tien.

Continue breathing and drawing in energy. Now open your eyes. Do not focus on any one thing. Let your eyes be soft and unfocused. See the room around you, the chairs and other furniture, the color of the carpet, the texture of the walls. While keeping attention focused on your tan tien, allow your awareness to expand to take in everything in your environment: the quality of the light streaming through the window, the sounds of passing cars, the drip of water from the kitchen faucet, the fabric of your clothing, the scent of apples in the kitchen. You feel calm, fully aware of your body and your center, your tan tien, and the energy you are drawing in and storing there, and of your surroundings. You are centered and in Tao space.

Remain in this state of centered awareness as long as it is comfortable. Later you will find this state to be restful and can extend your time as much as you want. But for now, for training purposes, limit your time to a few minutes. When you start to tire, take in a slow, deep breath and exhale fully. Stand up and walk around. Think about what you have accomplished. Review step-by-step what you have experienced.

Repeat this exercise each day. It’s a simple matter to sit and center for the space of a few breaths when you arise in the morning. Many do this sitting exercise sitting on the side of their bed after awakening. With time and consistent practice you will become centered as a matter of habit.

The next two exercises will be standing and moving while centered and in Tao space.

Standing Exercise

Lao Chung Li, one of the Taoist adepts I studied with in Hong Kong, reminded me every day, “You must do the standing. Without the standing you have no foundation.” For the benefits of centering and entering Tao space to be useful in the everyday world and in survival situations, we must be able to center and enter while on our feet and while moving. This lesson focuses on standing; the next will focus on moving.

Stand with your feet at shoulder width, knees slightly bent, feet pointed straight ahead as if you were standing on railroad tracks, and aligned so that your toes are in line with your knees. You should be barefoot or wearing comfortable, thin-soled, flat shoes—no heels. Heels throw your balance forward and make it more difficult to attain correct balance. Shoes, if any, should be wide enough so that your toes can spread and you can flex them individually. Flex your feet and toes as if grasping the floor, or as if you were standing on sand. Remember to keep your spine erect, and visualize a strong, flexible cable attached to the top of your head and holding the weight of your body. Flex the muscles of your lower abdomen and roll your tailbone under and to the front by using your lower abdominal muscles to pull your pelvic bone forward and slightly up, thereby tilting your pelvis and bringing it into proper alignment.

Arms are at your sides, elbows bent with open hands resting by your hips. Visualize your tan tien as a balloon behind and slightly below your navel, and balance your body so that your weight is centered there. Feel your balance so that if you were to move you could move freely in any direction around the balloon. Your eyes are open and soft, unfocused.

Take in a slow, deep breath and visualize breath and energy passing through your nose and nasal passages, down through your throat, filling and expanding your lungs and being drawn down into your belly and your tan tien.

Exhale slowly and fully. Continue breathing, slip into Tao space and relax into this position, maintaining slight tension on your lower abdominal muscles and keeping your tailbone tucked under, and keeping your feet and toes flexed as if you’re grasping the floor or a sandy beach. Grasp the floor with your toes. Feel your legs as if they were powerful springs holding you comfortably, strongly. Slightly shift your weight from foot to foot without moving your feet. Raise and lower your weight without moving your feet. Feel how the muscles in your entire body adjust to your shifting weight. Bend your knees a little more and relax deeper into this position. Do not bend your knees any more than is comfortable.