

Luk Tung Kuen:

# The 36 Health Exercises of Master Ha kunh

Part One:

## Breathing for Taijiquan



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# LUK TUNG KUEN: THE 36 HEALTH EXERCISES OF MASTER HA KINH

BY JOHN VOIGT

*"Luk Tung Kuen is like a sweet and delicious long-simmered and wholesome Cantonese-Style Soup that functions as a gentle medicine adjusting and benefiting the vital life energy [qi-氣]."*

—Master Ha Kinh

## THE SEARCH

**F**or years I have been looking for a combination of stretching, moving, breathing, and visualization techniques that would increase my mental and physical well-being.

I discovered many wonderful exercises—I have documented some of this search in previous issues of *Qi Journal*, see "Qigong in the Park," Fall 2009; and "Taiji Qigong" in Winter 2011-2012]. But until recently I kept seeing (and doing) one marvelous set of movements of which I hadn't the slightest idea of what exactly they were, or even what they were called. And this was no rare item either: I saw people doing it from the East Coast to the West Coast of the United States. Whenever I dared ask (in English) what is this Qigong called, I was told something in what sounded like the Cantonese language. Sad to say, I had no idea what they were saying. In an attempt to find out more about it, I scoured through many books, spent many hours on my

computer using various search engines, typing "qigong" in all sorts of spellings, even—against my better judgment—Chinese traditional and simplified scripts. In all this searching I found nothing. Nothing at all.

At last I found an English speaking practitioner, a stocky smiling older Chinese gentleman. They called him "Harry" and he wore a large Stetson cowboy hat. To my question he replied, "It's from Hong Kong, so they call it the Hong Kong Hei Gong." Noting my blank expression, he continued, "Hei—[pronounced 'hay']—is how qi is pronounced in Cantonese."

The only problem is that what Harry told me wasn't exactly correct. He had given me a variant slang term—not its "official" name.

Then one morning in Oakland's Madison Park there came a breakthrough. After having done "what-ever-its-name-was" with about a hundred people, I asked and was given its name on a slip of paper. I took the hastily scribbled Chinese characters 六通拳 and made the short trip over to San Francisco to find a Chinese book store.

There I was told that it meant "Luk Tung Kuen" or in English "Six Circulation Fist." Eagerly I asked the knowledgeable store owner to sell me all the books and videos she had about it.

She thought for a moment, shook her head but





**Oakland Fall 2011. Doing LTK no. 4 "Hands Out to Sides" in Madison Park, Oakland, California.**

searched the store anyway. When she returned she told me sadly, "There are no books about it—not even in Chinese. There is a DVD available in Hong Kong, but we don't have it here." Another reflective pause—then, "Maybe when you get home you might be able to find information on the internet."

Back in Boston, and now with its proper Chinese name, I went to the standard digital sources and typed in Luk Tung Kuen. Wikipedia had nothing. Google Books had nothing. Google Magazines had nothing. Amazon.com did have one entry, an now out of print used VHS tape. (I immediately bought it, and later had its instructions translated from Cantonese into English.) However I did find two very important websites, one in California, the other in Hong Kong. Their basic URLs are given at the end of this article.

By now I knew that every day thousands of people do Luk Tung Kuen in this country and in China. Nevertheless no meaningful introductory explanation had been written in English about it in any book or magazine! It was then I decided to do this article.

### MASTER HA KINH

It all begins with a strong willed and charismatic woman named Ha Kinh—(何瓊 sometimes written as "Ho King," and pronounced "Haw King"). She was born in Guangdong province in Southern China in 1918. Her father, (Ho Wing Siu 何永紹), was a acupuncturist who created his own exercise regime based on Chinese martial art boxing, and on his knowledge of the body's internal organs, joints, and energy (qi/chi) meridians.

At sixteen Ha Kinh contracted malaria. Medicine did not work and she grew sicker. The story goes that her father taught her the exercises he had developed. She practiced them daily. Within a week, she completely recovered. In 1941 to escape an invading Japanese army, she and her parents moved to Saigon. There she married. Living conditions were difficult. Suffering from malnutrition, she became deathly ill. A Malaysian doctor recommended exercise. She remembered her father's exercises and began to practice them. Once again she regained her health. After a series of tests, her doctor confirmed the benefits of these exercises. Together they named them Luk Tung Kuen.

By 1963 Ha Kinh relocated to Hong Kong and began teaching Luk Tung Kuen publicly. The number of students grew. In 1985 she went to live with her children in Los Angeles and continued to teach LTK. Many of these students would go on to teach LTK throughout the United States, and the world. In 1986 she returned to Hong Kong to stay. To spread her teachings—which also include giving to charitable institutions—her pupils formed the Luk Tung Kuen Association, where today she is listed as "Founder and Chief [but] never President."

Over the years, Master Ha Kinh has been adamant about certain things. Luk Tung Kuen is to "Strengthen the Body and Serve the Society." It is to be practiced outdoors in groups, or singularly, each morning every day of the year. It must always be presented free of charge, and open to all people regardless of age, gender, race, religion, educational, or economic background.



**1980 Hong Kong. Master Ha Kinh leading a Luk Tung Kuen practice in a park, north of Kowloon, Hong Kong. From <http://www.luktungkuen.org.hk/category/hoking>. Used with permission of Master Ha Kinh.**





Author in Boston, April, 2012. LTK no. 1 "Hands Open the Door."

Its purpose is to promote good health for those who practice it diligently.

Now in her 90's, she is still healthy and active in the world of LTK.

There is a short video clip made less than a year ago that captures her dynamism. Go to <http://www.luktungkuen.org> scroll to "News and Events," then to "2011: Ha Kinh Visit December."

### LUK TUNG KUEN: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE FORMS

Disclaimer: *Caution:* If you have any physical disabilities or health problems you should consult with your physician or health care provider before undertaking this, or any other, exercise program.

These exercises are not offered as treatment for any illness or other medical problems. They are (in the words of Master Ha Kinh) "Targeted

to help our bodies stay healthy."

More about the health benefits of LTK from <http://www.luktungkuen.org>

The controlled movement regulates the cardiac muscles which facilitates and improves blood circulation.

The stretching of extremities tightens abdominal muscles, and improves the elasticity of the joints in your hands and fingers.

The hand movement stimulates the acupoints which in-turn stimulates the function of the brain, heart, kidneys, shoulder, arms, fingers and central nervous system.

### MOVEMENTS 1 TO 36

What follows is a summary, offered only as a short introduction to Luk Tung Kuen. For instructions to properly learn the exercises refer below to "Sources For Further Information."

The entire program lasts for approximately forty



minutes. It is best done outdoors, in groups, early every morning. The exercises should be done in the order given. No other exercises should follow them. However if a person has difficulty doing any exercise, they should move as gently and comfortably as they can—or simply disregard that particular exercise.



**1. Hands Open the Door.** Interlock the fingers and extend the arms forward knuckles out. Turn palms forward and take three deep breaths. Bring hands back and forward ten times. Then bend downward ten

times. In terms of Traditional Chinese Medicine this helps clean and clear [疏通] the veins and arteries [血管] of the heart.



**2. Hands Open the Door, Number Two.** Extend right foot, interlock fingers, and press down over the right leg five times. Repeat this on the left side. End by extending arms forward with palms out, then bring

hands back to the chest ten times. This exercise is also for the veins and arteries of the heart.

**3. Crossed hands.** With right hand over left hand, bring arms above head and force them back once, then circle arms down by the sides of the body. Do ten times. Repeat movements with the left hand over the right. Beneficial for the joints of the fingers, and for bones and muscles of the arms. Helps in reducing belly fat.

**4. Hands Out to Sides.** Arms extend horizontally. Look at the left hand and drop the middle finger ten times. Look at the right hand and drop that middle finger ten times. (Related to Shaolin One Finger Qi Gong.) Helps avoid Neurasthenia—a condition commonly diagnosed in Asia, but not in the West. The symptoms are fatigue, anxiety, headache, neuralgia and depressed mood. This exercise also opens and cleans the nerves of the brain.

**5. Rotate the Wrists.** With arms still extended, but with face looking forward, turn the hands clockwise ten times, then counterclockwise ten times. Benefits acupuncture points on the hands, especially LI-4.



**6. Beauty in the Mirror.** Left leg forward. Left hand in front of face and right hand on small of the back. Turn to the left as you reverse hands. Turn to the right and reverse hands. Ten times. On each turn to the side the

wrists quickly touch. Reduces body fat.

**7. Bicycling.** With hands on hips, kick the right foot back ten times; then forward ten times. Do the same with the left foot. (Resembling pedaling a bicycle backwards; then forwards). Steady yourself on something if necessary; don't fall over. Strengthens sense of balance, hearing, and the nervous and lymph systems.

**8. Circling the Foot.** With hands still on your waist, draw circles with the heel of the right foot. First clockwise, then counterclockwise, each way ten times. Repeat with the left foot. Steady yourself on something if necessary. A stretching exercise for rheumatism and blood circulation.

**9. Bend Knees and Beat Drum.** Assume a crouching position with legs a shoulder-width apart. Imitate beating a drum with alternate hands. Beneficial for the vital organs; and as exercise in general does, this strengthens immunity to cancer.

**10. Hand Exercise.** The right hand is above the head with palm facing up, the left hand by the waist with palm facing down. Right hand pushes up, as the left pushes down, ten times. Reverse hands and push up and down, ten times. Stimulates 18 important acupuncture points on the right side, and the left side. Good for blood circulation, heart, brain, kidney, shoulder, and central nervous system.



**11. Deep Knee Bends With Six Way Boxing.** Make the LTK fist—(crook thumb into palm, curl other fingers over thumb; this helps keep power in the arms and body). Assume a crouching position. With one fist on waist,

the other fist powerfully punches down between the legs, then quickly relaxes. Reverse the arms and repeat. Each punch has three counts, for a total of six punches. This form also is called "Luk Tung" ("Six Circulation") because it opens



and cleans energy pathways and flushes out bad blood helping to prevent blood clots.

**12. The Crab.** Arms swing forward and make the LTK fist, heels lift and drop. Arms with elbows up, swing back and are folded; hands pull to the sides twice as the head turns to each side. Beneficial for the thyroid and heart.

**13. Hands Make Circles.** Place the right hand, with palm up, above head. Left hand at waist with palm down. The fingers of both hands are spread with the little fingers held straight. Rotate hands up and down by the sides of the body. Do ten times.

**14. Windmill.** Both arms are held horizontally to the left side of the body, left hand above right hand as if holding a basketball. Make a circle (resembling a windmill or Ferris wheel) by tracing hands down then up to the right. Do ten times. Reverse and repeat movements starting with arms pointed to the right side. With each swing, hands pause briefly when directly above head. Use the waist to turn the body. Builds waist strength and pushes blood to every corner of the body.

**15. Hands Push Out.** Palms face down, thumbs touch sides of hips. Arms go forward with palms down, as heels go up. Heels drop as arms with palms facing down move horizontally out to the sides. Then palms immediately face up and down, then arms quickly swing down and hands slap sides of the upper legs. Five times. Helps prevent amyotrophy (loss of muscle tissue).



**16. Yin and Yang.** Inhale through nose. Raise arms with yang force forward with palms up. Lift heels. Exhale through mouth, and arms with yin force go horizontally out to the sides, palms down, and swing straight down like doing the breast stroke in swimming, except the fingers are extended. Five times. This helps develop the reflexes to catch ourselves in case we accidentally fall down. That way we "only hurt skin instead of hurting bones."

**17. Breathing Exercise.** With tip of tongue on roof of mouth, bend forward with arms hanging down—and like sucking on a straw, inhale through the mouth. Come up as you exhale

through the nose and lift the palms up to the eyes. Turn palms quickly outward, then back toward the eyes. Do this up-down lifting movement ten times. Benefits the lungs, and qi of the body.

**18. Shovel the Mud.** Palms massage down from the waist to the front of the legs. For the acupuncture points on the sciatic nerves.



**19. Hands Straight Swing Out.** Begin with arms horizontally extended to both sides. The left arm remains straight, as the right arm is turned and folded to the left, the right hand ending in front of the left shoulder. Reverse and repeat with the right arm extended to the right and the left arm turned and hand folded into the right shoulder. To prevent dizziness, look at the middle finger of the fully extended arm only after making the turn. This exercises the arteries and veins to help avoid hypertension.

**20. Swing Out With One Hand.** (Similar to no. 19.) Begin with arms horizontal to each side. Fold the right arm to the left chest just below the shoulder. Then fling the right arm out and return it to a right horizontal to the side, as the left arm is flung to the right. Always look forward, never to the sides. Use power when swinging out. This exercise cleans the capillaries of the heart and helps prevent blood clots.

**21. Waist and Tummy Exercise.** This exercise uses complicated hand and arm positioning. With one foot extended, alternating hands go down toward the toes and various gestures are made with the palms. Begins with right foot extended, then left foot extended. A stretching exercise for the toes and knees. Also cleans and opens capillaries and stimulates acupuncture points.

**22. Stretch the Arm and Kick Up the Foot.** Right arm extends horizontally to the front. Take one step forward with the left foot and kick up the right foot. Then left foot steps backward. Do for five kicks. Reverse legs and repeat kicks, five times. Helps regulate blood sugar levels, and strengthens the pancreas.

**23. Bouncing Up and Down.** (Like Jumping Jacks). For the intestinal digestive system.

**24. Eagle Posture.** Knee bends with arms extended horizontally to the sides. This benefits the heart



by facilitating the up and down movements of heart muscles.

25. *Change the Method of Breathing.* Hands on hips. Inhale through the nose with the tip of the tongue on the hard palate, then exhale through the mouth as you lower the tongue. Five times. Helps avoid Sclerosis (i.e., hardening) of the body and blood veins.

26. *Eye Exercise.* Fingertips draw circles around the eyes pressing acupuncture points, especially Urinary Bladder-1 (where the inner corner of the eye meets the nose). Relieves eye strain, prevents crow's feet, helps in avoiding cataracts.



27. *Neck Massage.* With hands alternating, brush palms upward from the jaw, ten times. Brush with alternating palms across upper neck by the jaw, ten times. Tap with fingertips up and down from cheeks to

lower forehead. Tap up and down from temples to upper sides of head. Beneficial for blood circulation to the brain.

28. *Rotating the Waist*—(resembles doing “Hula Hoops”). Hands on hips. Breathe deeply with attention focused to the lower abdomen (dan-tian). Circle hips to the left ten times, then to the right ten times. Promotes the digestive system.

29. *Stretch Out Hands.* Arms, with palms facing down, are extended horizontally to the sides at shoulder height. With palms still down, shake the hands two times. Then make LTK fists and bring them to temples, then the fists with knuckles facing down go back to the sides. Then palms face upward and fingers are thrown out. Five times. Helps joints in the hands.

30. *Tapping Nerves Behind the Ears.* Palms cover ears. With right hand only, flick the index finger on the back of the head, ten times. Repeat with the left hand index finger, flick ten times. For hearing and the hindbrain. Caution: Never put fingers directly in the ears!

31. *Sweep the Side of the Body.* Women: Bend to the right side. Left hand with palm up goes over head, right hand brushes down from left armpit over left side of body to just below the waist. Do five times. Now do it the opposite way by bending to left with right hand up, left hand brushing down the right arm pit. Do five times. Men: Do it in reverse order to the women: what

is left-or-right directions for the woman, will be right-or-left directions for the man. Benefits the Liver and the Kidney.

32. *Light Jogging.* Do at an easy comfortable pace for up to 250 counts. Use the LTK “clenched fist.” Beneficial for the Respiration.

33. *Neck and Waist Exercise.* This complex set of movements includes the LTK fist, extending the arms, stroking the legs, and bending. Besides the counting, the leader will call out power words like “Strength” and “Force.” Beneficial for the joints and spine.

34. *Knee Exercise.* Raise and drop the hands and arms, then bend the head to the left, then right, each three times. With hands on knees, circle the knees from left to right ten times, then right to left, ten times. Stay relaxed and do not force.

35. *Standing on One Leg.* Hold the left foot and stand on the right foot, and extend the right arm. (Resembles “Pose of the Dancer” in Yoga, except the extended arm is held horizontally out to the side.) This may be difficult to do: if necessary do hold onto something to keep your balance. Count to 130. Then reverse sides and again count to 130. This exercise benefits the sense of balance.



36. *Stretching Legs.* Put your left foot forward. Arms go forward then back and form LTK fists on the waist. Bend the left knee and with right leg extended out to the rear, slowly lower the body. Then eight or so spoken “Strength” commands; and again do the same thing, still with the left leg extended to the front, but now the spoken command is “Sit down-Sit down....” Then reverse the position of the legs and repeat the whole thing. Benefits the thighs and calves, and helps avoid leg cramps.

### WHAT ARE THEY SAYING?

When you see or practice LTK in a park—or in front of your computer—you will hear a constant flow of spoken words. First you should know each of the moves are usually being counted. Also power words are occasionally given—especially with the more intense punching, kicking, and yoga-like super stretches. So you will hear words sounding something like “Choo-Lay” meaning something like “Strength” or “Force” and imply-



## DEFINING LUK TUNG KUEN - (LTK)

The Chinese characters 六通拳, literally mean "Six Circulation Fist," but that has little practical significance in English. Using their visual pictograms, what follows is a more useful symbolic etymology of those three words:



**Six 六**—Figuratively the character [this should appear as the copied calligraphy. If not use any Chinese pictogram of six of your choice] resembles a human body: two legs, two arms, a body, and a head (or "brain"). For the Chinese, "Six" implies the ability to move easily in all six directions: forward-backward, up-down, left-right. Six also traditionally carries the ideas of: Longevity, Expansiveness and Universal Power.

**Tung 通**—The character resembles water or sewage pipes, so we gain good circulation of blood and life energy throughout the body; as well as cleaning, clearing, and flushing out waste matter—in other words we "dredge" out the impurities.

**Kuen 拳**—literally is "Fist." Fundamental to many of the movements is the "LTK Fist" where the thumb is covered with the other four fingers to keep in power (qi) in the hands, arms, and body. But there is more to it than that. It relates to what Americans call "tai chi," but in Chinese is actually *tài jí quán*, meaning "Supreme Boxing." (*Quán* is the Mandarin pronunciation of the Cantonese *Kuen*.) "Fist" becomes "Boxing" and continues to become "Exerting the hands and body," and finally "Exercise."

Luk Tung Kuen is best defined as: An Exercise of 36 Movements That Promotes the Strength of the Body and the Healthy Circulation of Blood and Vital Energy.

ing "Throw it out with Power!" Similarly there is "Bock-Taw-Lay" meaning something like "Arm-Head-Shoulder Strength," or "Gang-Lay" meaning "neck strength." Then there is the opposite, "Soy-die" meaning "Relax." None of the words used in LTK have an overt Political, Religious, or Spiritual meaning.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

The majority of the information in this article comes from various Luk Tung Kuen groups and their web sites, from a privately circulated handbook, and from several personal conversations. A special thank you goes to Chuchu Wen for her translations. However any mistakes or misinformation is the fault of the author alone.

There are hundreds of places worldwide where you can find Luk Tung Kuen every morning. Consult <http://www.luktungkuen.org/> for

addresses. You might even simply travel to the closest Chinatown early some morning, as I did, and find a park with a group of people doing LTK. But don't call it a "qigong." Master Ha Kinh says that it is not because it never uses any qigong style abdominal or reverse breathing.

There is a overriding social component to LTK which should not be overlooked. The people I practice it with are most often middle-aged and elderly women. When we finish the exercises they invite me to join them at a close-by fast food restaurant. Coffee is ordered for all, and happily they converse in Cantonese (I smile) and they share delicious home baked goodies. Actually, like mischievous schoolgirls, they sometimes even talk between themselves when doing the LTK forms. For them LTK is about Community—not isolation. I believe that is the source of much of LTK's health granting qualities. And they, and I as well, certainly enjoy doing it. ■

The author of this article may be contacted at [john.voigt@comcast.net](mailto:john.voigt@comcast.net)

## SOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

<http://www.luktungkuen.org.hk> Contact Email: [info@luktungkuen.org.hk](mailto:info@luktungkuen.org.hk). (Site of the Luk Tung Kuen Worldwide Association, 3/F Lee Shing Mansion, 43A Jordan Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong. Tel: 2783 8381 / 2985 8338.)

<http://www.luktungkuen.org> (Based in California, highly recommended.) Contact Email: [info@luktungkuen.org](mailto:info@luktungkuen.org).

世界六通拳畫冊—(Worldwide Luk Tung Kuen Handbook). [Text in Chinese, but there is English text for each of the 36 movements. This book may not be publicly available. [info@hkca.org.hk](mailto:info@hkca.org.hk).]

The Orthodox "Luk Tung Kuen," VHS. © 1990 by Master He Qiong. The Orthodox Luk Tung Kuen, DVD. © 2012 by Master Ho King. [from 1990 version]. Contact: [info@luktungkuen.org.hk](mailto:info@luktungkuen.org.hk). Price \$30 HK dollars.

Instructions on how to do LTK are at <http://www.luktungkuen.org.hk/category/ltk/>. If you click on any of the 36 pictures you will see a video of Master Ha Kinh explaining (in Cantonese) and doing that form; however there are also written instructions in English. You will find another outstanding instructional video in English by going to <http://www.luktungkuen.org/> then to "LTK Step By Step."