

Ho-Hub Hyung
A Healing Form for Balance and Health

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“Men are disturbed not by things but by the views which they take of them.”
- Epictatus, 500 B.C.

“My life has been full of tragedy, and at least half of it actually happened.”
- Mark Twain

Introduction

Grandmaster Kim Soo's legacy and contributions to the world of martial arts are significant and ongoing. His dedicated practice has not only helped him live a life of balance, well-being and achievement, but has also fostered a legacy that continues to serve as a stepping-stone for thousands of his students. Modifying his natural way martial arts to modern times and purposes, he has refined potent martial arts tools for his students, reorienting the practice from its historical purposes towards more modern concerns such as health, peace and prosperity.

Modern life's frantic pace can make it difficult to cultivate desired states of peace, calm and equanimity. Our nervous systems are constantly bombarded by the events of our busy lives and “stay-connected” concerns, including email, cell phones, text messages, traffic, and the other infinite and myriad forms of “noise” and stress. Not long ago, human life was more naturally balanced between activity and rest, noise and quiet, whereas today, many of us are in an almost constant busy state.

For years Grandmaster Kim Soo has emphasized that martial arts practice must change with the times. Historically, the purpose of martial arts practice was military, mostly on behalf of the state. The martial arts samurai was a warrior, expected to put his life on the line for his country. During much of human history (and still today in many developing countries) the average human lifespan lasted forty-something years; probably significantly less for the warrior. Therefore, martial arts training was designed to maximize power. The historical martial artist was not concerned with longevity, health and well-being.

Today, human beings live much longer lives, and as people age, care and attention are needed in order to preserve health and well-being into the later years of life. Not only care for the body, but also care for the mind, spirit and nervous system. Grandmaster Kim Soo came to this realization during the mid-1970's after he experienced a significant back injury and related health issues, caused in part by his martial arts practice. He realized that martial arts practice must change to address these modern human needs.

Lessons from an Injury

Grandmaster Kim Soo's martial arts practice began in Korea in 1951 when he was in the fifth grade. His practice was based on the samurai model of hard training and maximum power. He earned his first degree black belt in 1954. He began teaching martial arts full-time in 1963 in Korea. In 1968, he relocated to Houston, Texas where he has continued to teach full-time until the present. His practice and revolutionary teaching style, however, have changed significantly over the years.

During the mid-1970's, Grandmaster Kim Soo began to experience the physical toll of sustained hard martial arts practice, combined with the stress of adjusting to life in a new country with limited language skills, unfamiliar customs, financial stress, and almost no Korean community. Recalling that time in his life, he simply explains, “I was in terrible shape.” He lost partial hearing, experienced a blood abnormality, and lived in almost constant back pain from a ruptured disc and other issues. He visited various doctors, but nothing seemed to help. Chiropractors and acupuncture similarly offered no relief.

Plus, because he persisted with his hard martial arts training and teaching, his injuries were not healing. Something needed to change.

It was during this injury period that Grandmaster Kim Soo began to reevaluate his martial art philosophy. Although he appreciated the confidence, strength and discipline he had gained through his practice, he recognized too that to continue this path, he needed to adjust the practice to make it sustainable for the practitioner over 30, 40, 50, 60, even 70 or more years of age. He sought to realign martial arts training toward the principles of health, balance and lifetime sustainability. He sought to align his martial arts with the philosophy of Sang Hwal Mu Do (lifestyle martial arts). He emphasized that martial arts practice should not be for short bursts of power and to die an honorable death for the kingdom or state, but rather, with sustained practice, should tend toward healing and maintaining a healthy body, mind and spirit over a lifetime. Recognizing this need to transform the practice of martial arts, Grandmaster Kim Soo's first step was to heal himself.

Grandmaster Kim Soo's healing period lasted from approximately 1978-1985. It was during this period that his martial arts philosophy evolved, and led to perhaps his greatest contribution to the world of martial arts. Grandmaster Kim philosophy is that martial arts practice should align with fixed principles that transcend all practice, and that tend toward balance, sustainability and healing.

Grandmaster Kim Soo recalled that historically, nobody talked about rhythm and balance. Training was hard and fast. He recognized that this hard practice was moving chi throughout the body without returning it to the danjan. He acknowledged that his practice did not orient itself toward proper breathing, and the body's tendency towards balance and rhythm. He supposed that these were the factors that were leading to his injuries. He sought to adjust his practice in alignment with core healing principles so that his body, mind and spirit would re-balance, and that natural healing could and would occur.

To begin this re-orientation, Grandmaster Kim Soo went back to the fundamentals, beginning with Kibon Hyung II Chol (Basic Form #1). Except that instead of practicing the form hard and fast, the way he had been taught and had practiced it for almost 20 years, he slowed it down. He sought to incorporate the principles he was discovering through his practice, insight, and meditation. Instead of focusing on fast and hard punches and blocks, he now concentrated his attention on breath, balance, and rhythm. Thus began Grandmaster's practice of ho-hub hyung, sometimes called danjan breathing form practice. Through focusing attention on the danjan and on the breath (ho-hub translates as "inhale-exhale"), Grandmaster Kim discovered the principles of health and sustainability, and enabled his body to do what the body tends toward naturally, the ability to heal itself.

Grandmaster Kim suspected that danjan ho-hub practice would turn things around for him, and he was correct. Although it took close to seven years, he practiced Ho-Hub Kibon Hyung II Chol daily, and one day on a golf course sometime during 1985, he realized that he was healed. Commenting on why it took so long to heal, he explains that his seven-year ho-hub practice effectively untied the knot that he had been tying for 30 years.

Ho-Hub Hyung

Now healed and firmly fixed in the natural way martial arts principles, Grandmaster Kim Soo sought to develop a new ho-hub hyung for his students. Although Ho-Hub Kibon Hyung had served its purpose for himself, he felt that it was time to develop a new hyung which would serve as a healing form and practice for his students. His idea was that this new form would not only help his students heal their own imbalances, but also to reduce the likelihood of imbalanced practice and resulting injuries, as he had experienced.

Late in the 1980's, Grandmaster Kim Soo created Chayon Ryu's unique breathing form – Ho-Hub Hyung. He conceived this form as the first in a series of four forms he intends to develop. Ho-Hub's focus is to develop vital energy (ki), build calm, and teach mental and physical balance. (The other three forms will emphasize self-defense, exercise, and offense.) After practicing and refining this breathing form for a

decade, he began teaching it to his students in the late 1990's. Grandmaster Kim comments that he waited a decade to start teaching this form because it took this long to prove its positive effects.

Ho-Hub Hyung is intended for any level student, and every student can benefit from its regular practice. He calls it a form of junbee (being ready), and explains its purpose is to control breathing and balance the mind and nervous system. Grandmaster Kim considers this form a tonic against the negativity that often results from a frantic and stressful lifestyle. He describes this form as a meditation and prayer, as well as a practice of self-care.

Grandmaster Kim Soo explains that humans breathe all the time, however, often because of stress or lack of awareness, many people develop unhealthy breathing patterns (shallow, uneven, noisy, and irregular). Ho-Hub Hyung is a form of conscious breathing, and is intended to teach more healthy breathing patterns (deep, smooth, quiet and regular). According to Grandmaster Kim Soo, Ho-Hub Hyung cleans the dirty air, lets in fresh air and builds chi, which is good for health and long life.

Balancing the Mind

While the quantity and variety of activities available to entertain and challenge us today is exciting and fulfilling on many levels, it is also important to recognize the potential for (and for most of us, likely) mental, physiological and spiritual consequences of being so much "on the go." Much of the negative consequences can be summarized under the heading of "anxiety." Many of us blame our dissatisfaction and illnesses on stressful outside factors, and endeavor or "wait" for those outside factors to change in order to cultivate the life we desire. Yet, the true culprit of imbalance and disease is generally not the stress itself, but rather anxiety. Anxiety is a purely self-induced, internal phenomenon, a byproduct of what Buddhists call "wrong thinking." Or as was spoken by the ancient Greek philosopher, Epictatus, quoted above, "Men are disturbed not by things but by the views which they take of them."

To understand anxiety, it is important to define and distinguish three terms: "stress," "fear" and "anxiety." The first, "stress" is simply our brain and nervous system's response to any new information or change in the environment. For example, driving in traffic, a busy day at work, or even dojang sparring puts our system under stress. Stress itself is not negative, but rather a survival function. Our brain's primary directive is to keep us alive, and any new information or change causes stress on our brain and nervous system, because we are unconsciously evaluating the information to see if there is risk of harm. Moreover, stress moves us to action, without some, we would be lethargic and unproductive. Therefore, some amount of stress is good and necessary. Too much stress, however, can overtax our brain and nervous system.

The second is "fear." We experience fear if our brain determines that a change in the environment has a significant likelihood of causing us harm. If a significant risk of harm is perceived, then we react with what is often called the "fight-or-flight" response. This reaction initiates a series of physiological activities which tend to increase our likelihood of surviving dangerous situations. Some of these response activities include: elevated heart-rate and blood-pressure, the release of cortisol and adrenaline into our systems (rocket fuels for the fight-or-flight response), and the shutting down of non-essential activities for survival in favor of sending blood and glucose to the arms and legs so that we can run faster and fight harder. Non-essential activities for survival include our immune system, which is why people under significant fear and anxiety tend to get sick, and our advanced brain function, specifically the cerebral cortex, where we are most capable of creative, rational thought. Under fear, we rely on far more primitive brain centers, the reptilian and mammalian brain, which are faster in reaction time, but much less creative and rational. We also tend to get more aggressive under fear and anxiety, a generally appropriate response to danger. The primary directive under fear is to mobilize resources to survive, which is very much a samurai response. This mode of living is exhausting, and does not sustain health, balance nor longevity.

The third term, "anxiety" is similar to fear in that it stimulates the fight-or-flight response, but the cause of fear is different than anxiety. Fear is based on real, present potential for harm (we see a snake on the side of the pathway, an angry person is shouting at us, or we've just been cut off in traffic). Anxiety is a danger that has been invented in the mind. In other words, anxiety is the result of a mental story that includes a distorted probability calculation of potential – largely unidentified, future, and often times,

irrational – harm. For example, a person might feel anxious because they make up negative meaning when someone does not return their phone call or does not respond to their greeting as expected. Now they imagine that they are being rejected, and are going to suffer consequences. Another person might suffer anxiety as a result of making up that they will get hurt if they spar, or forget their form during a rank exam. A third person causes themselves anxiety making up that they might lose their job at some time in the future and not be able to support their family. This last person might lie awake unable to sleep at night as they replay the negative future fantasy over and over in their head and then will be exhausted and perform poorly on the job the next day! It is also important to consider that the anxiety itself tends to increase the likelihood of the outcomes we invent.

When it comes to anxiety, it is important to note that human beings prove to be terrible at assessing the probability of negative consequence, and often times make up the worst possible interpretation of events to support their anxiety addiction. For example, a common anxiety disorder some people experience is a fear of flying on an airplane. Even though the risk of dying on an airplane is roughly 1 in 11,000,000, a person with flying anxiety will unconsciously assess the risk of dying on the airplane as much higher (for example, 50%). Once that unconscious calculation is made, they will experience the effects of anxiety. And knowing the true odds does not help once anxiety has begun because the part of the brain where that information is useful, the cerebral cortex, has shut down as part of the fight-or-flight response. In other words, if the brain makes up a story (“I will be laughed at if I make a mistake”), and based on our worst fears, calculates that there is some significant potential of harm, then the physiological response activated by the nervous system is the very same fight-or-flight response as would be activated if we were in real danger. We become aggressive, reactionary, our negative prophecies tend to become self-fulfilling, and we get sick and suffer physical toll on body and mind.

Now consider the Mark Twain quote above: “My life has been full of tragedy, and at least half of it actually happened.” Albert Ellis, a recently deceased professor of psychology estimates that 90% of what we think we know, isn’t fact at all, but rather story that we make up in our heads. To the extent that our stories include personal danger, we will experience anxiety. If we make up tragedy, the anxiety is greater. If we judge ourselves as having failed, not enough, or falling short, we suffer additional anxiety. Again, anxiety is not based on actual potential harm, but made up danger that is distorted and largely phantom. Most people are unaware that they are doing this to themselves. Yet they experience the symptoms of the fight-or-flight response as well as the consequential physical and emotional results, and declare themselves to be helpless victims and blame the world for their problems.

Simply stated, human beings tend to make up the causes of their anxiety, and many of us, because of the stressful pace of our lives, live in an unconscious state of constant alert. The result is a tax upon our physical and emotional health. The more we do this, the more likely we are to experience significant health problems. For one it might be depression, for another a back injury, heart-attack or worse. And the more anxiety we create, the more likely we are to further distort our calculations of potential harm, live in an increasing state of alarm, as our anxiety accumulates. Over time, we become more and more exhausted, worn out, unhealthy, out of balance, and aggressive, towards others and ourselves. This can easily become a downward spiraling and self-feeding anxiety cycle that if not checked, will ultimately lead to angst, depression, disease and worse.

Unleashing the Human Capacity to Heal and Prosper

Many people who have attempted to update their negative thinking realize that to become more optimistic, positive, or stop beating themselves up is a challenging task. It is challenging because the anxiety-creating machinery is a well established habit that can be difficult to overcome through mental efforts alone. And at the same time, unless we can touch and update these largely unconscious processes, we are stuck with the effects of anxiety and our lives will generally not improve. This is where Ho-Hub Hyung can become a powerful tonic for healing.

In order to overcome well-established anxiety patterns, we have to develop an instinct to intervene in the unconscious anxiety-producing machinery and alert our system that we are not in danger, when we are in fact not in danger. When we are in danger, we do not want to interrupt the fight-or-flight response. Our reaction when in fight-or-flight is much faster than would be if directed by conscious thought, and

will rely upon our practices and habits. For example a martial artist will automatically employ his or her falling or self-defense skills when needed, if practiced long enough to become reflexive habits. Others might be well served by an aggressive response in a truly dangerous situation. However, when we are not in danger, we are better served with conscious reactions that result from our more advanced thinking capabilities. Therefore, in order to overcome our anxiety habits, we need a practice that trains us to send a signal to our brain that we are not in danger, when we are in fact not in danger. Ho-Hub Hyung does just that.

Ho-Hub Hyung, if consistently practiced will help to overcome the anxiety-making tendencies of the brain. The controlled breathing – smooth, slow, steady and even – is one of the easiest and best ways to send a loud and clear signal to our brain that we are not in danger. The balance and control practiced in the form will balance and control the nervous system and the hormonal system, which monitors our DHEA release. DHEA is the primary relaxation hormone released when we send a signal to our brain that we are not in danger, which balances the harmful effects of cortisol, the primary anxiety hormone. Practicing this form will stimulate the parasympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system to balance the effects of fight-or-flight. The heart rate and blood pressure will decrease, DHEA will be released, and our healing capacities will be activated.

Anxiety is an unconscious habit for most of us. In order to overcome this anxiety we have to counter with a habit that produces balance and well-being. But because the pace of life results for many of us in a daily dose of anxiety, we need a daily antidote. Ho-Hub Hyung provides the antidote. It is powerful in its effect and only requires a few minutes per day of practice. Less than five minutes per day of practice will serve as a powerful balancing tonic to anxiety, and unleash the body's natural capacity and tendency to heal, balance, and experience joy and well-being. Having this daily practice will create a habit of relaxation response that the practitioner will be able to access in the moments when he needs to choose a direction of peace and balance. In any stressful moment, the student will more likely remember to breathe deeply and smoothly, find the balance and rhythm in the moment, and maintain health and well-being for a lifetime. This is Grandmaster Kim Soo's greatest wish for his students.

Conclusion

Anxiety is a form of “wrong thinking” or “cancer of the brain” that stimulates an imbalance in the nervous system and manifests as physical, mental, emotional and psychological disease. Consistent Ho-Hub Hyung practice is a tonic for anxiety and the consequential ailments that result, by taking conscious dominion over what are otherwise unconscious processes. Breathing is one of the few bodily functions that can occur completely unconsciously, we don't have to think about breathing, or completely consciously. Ho-Hub Hyung is a conscious breathing practice that touches our unconscious or autonomic nervous system and teaches us to play counter-propagandist to our habitual anxiety-manufacturing brains. Ho-Hub Hyung, in essence, trains us to maintain balance and harmony in our lives.

According to Grandmaster Kim Soo, people are searching for a fixed truth, but truth is always changing. Even mountains change over time. Recognizing that the role of martial arts has changed from its martial origins to a more modern need for balance, Grandmaster Kim Soo has codified the principles of harmony, balance and proper breathing into his Chayon Ryu. His theory is that martial arts practiced in alignment with these principles will support health and longevity by allowing homeostasis (the bodies natural capacity for healing and balance).

Just as sustained ho-hub practice helped Grandmaster Kim Soo heal his ailments in the 1970's, anyone who maintains a consistent (daily) ho-hub practice will automatically help bring every bodily system towards balance, allowing the body to do what it tends to do naturally, heal and prosper.