

# Finding the Ki to happiness

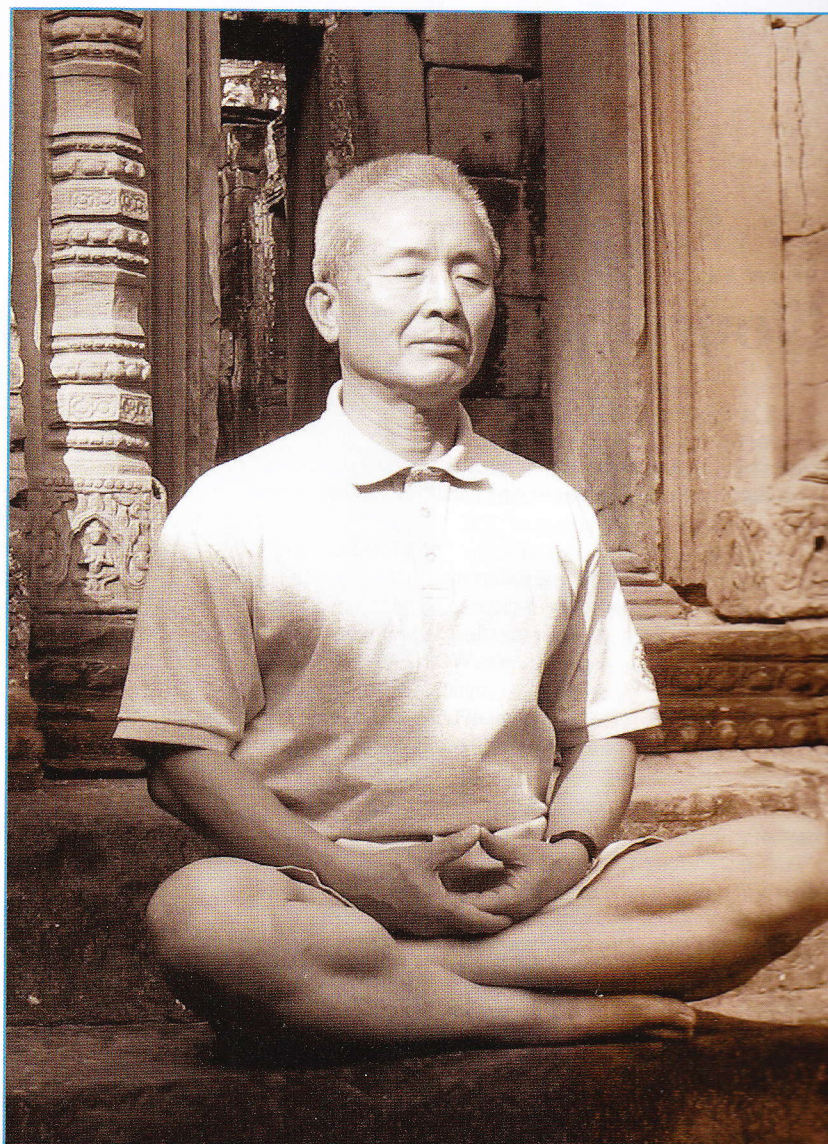
**Ki Meditation promotes a sense of calm that improves all areas of your life, as Sharon Lougher discovers**

**T**hink about the last time you were hot-headed and angry, scared out of your wits or, worse still, in a state of blind panic. Along with those heightened emotional and mental states comes a tangible side-effect – breathing that's rapid and shallow. Understanding the link between the mental and physical state can be useful, however: control one, and you control the other; control breathing, and you control the mind. Which is why long-term ki meditation – the practice of deep, abdominal breathing to relax and invoke a clear mind unaffected by external circumstances – is considered vital by practitioners of traditional martial arts and holistic health. It's the difference between freezing to the spot or quickly gathering a clear, rational understanding of the situation as it confronts you, whether it's a potentially life-threatening one, like someone approaching you in the street with a knife – or merely a rabbit rustling some leaves in a dark forest.

## Mindfulness

Tammy Parlour is a fourth-degree black belt in the Korean martial art of Hapkido, and main instructor of Chang's Hapkido Academy in London. In addition to eight sessions of physical Hapkido training, she conducts seven ki sessions a week at her school in Blackfriars. For her, the practice of ki meditation is pivotal to becoming an expert in this sophisticated and complex martial art – after all, martial artists must be in a relaxed state known as 'mushim' to be the most effective.

'The literal translation of mushim is "no mind",' she explains. 'If we use a more western vocabulary we might say that mushim is "mindfulness". It is a state of being fully alive, an ongoing expression of pure human nature. When meditating, for instance, "no mind" doesn't mean that I don't hear a sudden gun shot or the clanging of a bell; I am aware of what is going on, but am not being influenced by it. Sometimes, we can get so fixated on something that we become almost paralysed, controlled by our own fear and imagination. In the board room, for example, we might become so worried about



## How to do it

Sit cross legged on the floor, hands resting on your knees, with your palms facing up and thumb and middle finger touching. Don't slouch or sit bolt upright; just sit in a normal, relaxed position. Partly close your eyes. Wet your lips and smile. Then breathe: inhale slowly through your nostrils and imagine it's coming from your abdomen rather than your chest. Then hold your breath for ten seconds, contract the anus, as if all the energy is concentrated around your abdominal area, then slowly exhale and relax. Repeat this a for ten minutes; as you become more comfortable with the process, increase the number of seconds you inhale/hold your breathe/exhale or spend longer than ten minutes repeating these actions. Try to relax and clear your mind as you do so. And don't forget – always remember to smile!





## Overcoming the self

In February of 2008 my partner and I separated; our son was five years old at the time. It was a very emotional period of my life.

The emotions were so strong that at times my judgement became clouded and it was hard to find the best path forward. I knew that two things were important, firstly the happiness and continued stability that our son needed and deserved; secondly, learning to make positive changes in both our lives.

I had been practicing Ki Meditation under Instructor Parlour for about a year at that time. Of course I still struggled and felt emotional at times but, when this happened, attending Ki meditation classes enabled me to get control of my life again before any damage was done. What I learnt about frequent meditation and abdominal breathing helped me through this very difficult time in my life. It allowed me to keep a balanced and objective mind and not succumb to pride and ego driven emotions, anger, hurt, and self-doubt.

My ex-partner and I still have a very happy little boy and are still both friends; a positive result to a negative situation. All this was, and continues to be, possible for me by learning how to overcome my 'self'. I owe this largely to what I have learnt from Instructor Parlour and ki meditation. **Duncan Horn**, Ki and Hapkido student



Tammy Parlour with Master Chang



## Finding connection

There are times in our lives when we can feel very alone, even if we have a loving partner or close friends. People can describe the sensation of being misunderstood, or having something missing, or simply feeling that they are not getting anywhere. The temptation might be to try and fill the space with an affair or alcohol or by throwing ourselves into work but these are solutions that numb the feeling, they don't cure it. I have been learning about ki under Sabounnim (a term of respect for your teacher in Hapkido and Ki) Parlour for nearly five years. I have so much still to learn but I have found that through the breathing exercises and regular meditation, I can feel calmer and stronger and more connected with the world and the people around me. If I bring my emptiness to ki class, I leave it behind. **Anna Glover**, Ki and Hapkido student

the presence of the CEO that we lose our ability to speak fluently on a subject we know inside and out. In a state of mushim we can concentrate fully on the here and now; we are not preoccupied by other issues or controlled by our fears and insecurities. A good state of mind can be compared to a jar of water with sediment in: shake it up and the water becomes cloudy and opaque; let the sediment settle, and the water becomes clear.

## Drawing breath

A typical ki meditation class at the school lasts for 45 minutes, and involves sitting and

moving meditation accompanied by deep, long drawing of breath (breathing in as if oxygen is a reel of cotton), holding it for a few seconds, and then breathing out at the same rate. Instructor Parlour and the master under whom she has studied since the age of 12, Master Gedo Chang, also tell Zen and Taoist stories to provide insight into human nature, spirituality and how a nervous mind can distort reality to negative effect. One of her favourites is the story of the monk Won Hyo, who decided to travel to China for enlightenment. The journey was long and arduous. Along the way he took a nap; early in the morning he awoke with an incredible thirst. It was dark, but blindly feeling around his


body he found a cup with water. He drank the water and drifted back to sleep feeling much relieved. Later in the morning he awoke to find that the cup that he drank from was actually a human skull and the water that he drank was stagnant. He immediately felt nauseous and vomited. At that point he had a realisation: "Last night I thought this was water and it quenched my thirst. This morning I see that it is something else, so I am relating to it quite differently and am sick to my stomach. Therefore, mind makes everything and without mind everything is empty." With this great insight Won Hyo realised he did not have to travel to China. Instead, he remained in Korea, resigning from

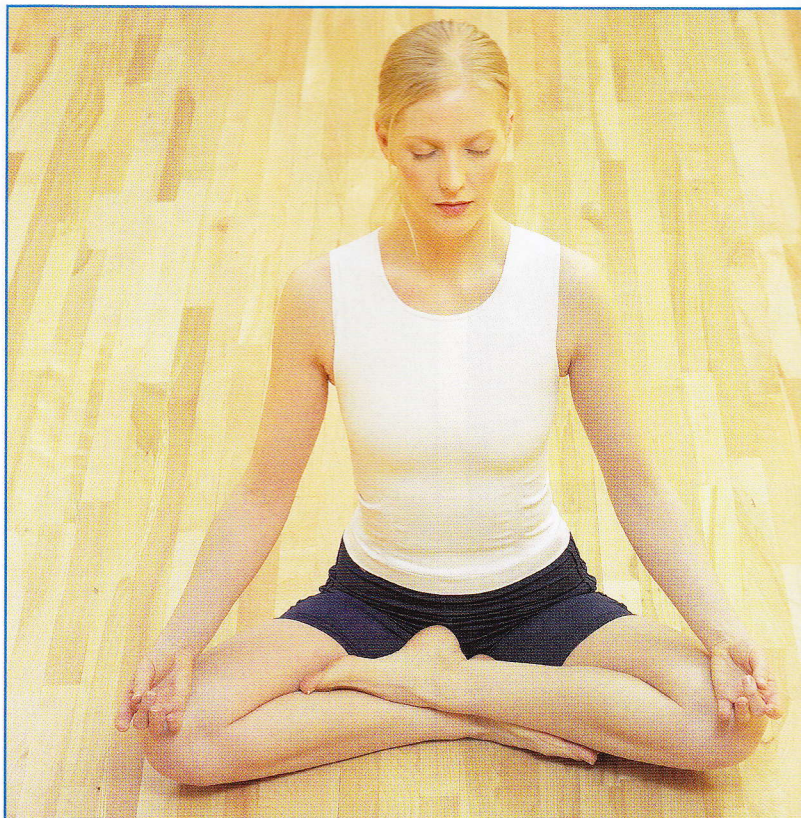


the priesthood to teach as a layman. Won Hyo's astonishment at his unknowing actions and the power of the human mind to transform reality continue to be relevant even today.

Tammy Parlour continues to see new meaning in these sorts of stories. 'I have studied under Master Chang since I was 12. Over those 26 years I have heard him tell each story many, many times. Perhaps because of how I listen, or what's going on for me in my life at that moment in time though, I'm able to gain new insights and understandings every time.'

## Overcoming conflict

Ki breathing and controlling our fears is vital in situations of conflict. But that conflict doesn't always have to be in the training room or in the street – it can help people face up to fears in the workplace, in a relationship, in an exam room or simply walking down a dark, unfamiliar alley. The practice has also seen Western doctors of mainstream medicine espouse its virtues too – over the last few years there have been numerous research articles in medical and mainstream press about the ability of controlled breathing to positively affect blood pressure, reduce stress, and increase attention levels. Ki meditation then, is the path to good health, relaxation, fearlessness and power – it's the reason why, with the right self-defence techniques, a slight 5ft 2 girl can easily overcome a 6 ft 4 muscle man, and the reason why a non-martial artist, could, after just one ki session, strike through a wooden board with their fingertips. It really is a case of mind over matter. 



## More Information

Find out more about Ki Meditation and Chang's Hapkido Academy at [www.changshapkido.net](http://www.changshapkido.net) and [www.ki-meditation.com](http://www.ki-meditation.com). Tammy Parlour's classes are held in London and come highly recommended from our editor. A free taster session is available. Call 07951 535876 for more information or email [tammyparlour@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:tammyparlour@yahoo.co.uk)

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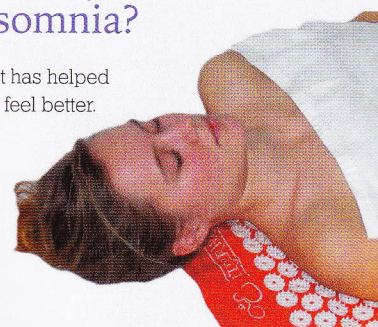
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