

This martial artist, engineer and teacher offers unique techniques to improve your balance, flexibility and overall body alignment.

Master An Sung Sop holds an engineering degree from Michigan Technological University. He builds bridges, but not the kind that connect cities. Master An applies his understanding of physics to the principles of human motion. The bridges he builds allow his students to comfortably travel between the restorative and martial arts.

Restorative arts are techniques that bring the body toward its optimal state of harmony and compensate for the stresses of daily life. They include a wide variety of health promotion methods that have evolved from Eastern and Western traditions. Restorative arts complement martial arts training. The challenge is to find, test and apply restorative principles of human ecology that are safe and scientific.

Master An believes we should also contemplate the historical, philosophical and cultural relationship between restorative and martial arts. Then we must consider how it all applies to human and social evolution. Luckily, explains Master An, countless others have already traveled this same road.

BUILDING BRIDGES With MASTER AN SUNG SOP

By Ed Thomas, Ed.D.

*Master An Sung Sop with
the author, Dr. Ed Thomas*

BODY/MIND, POWER/PEACE: HISTORIC PERSPECTIVE

Great teachers throughout history have promoted the synergistic cultivation of body and mind. Society prospers when the masses understand and embrace this perennial wisdom. A sound mind reflects peace, justice and harmony. The 17th Century French philosopher Pascal wrote of this relationship and its social implications:

“Justice without power is inefficient; power without justice is tyranny. Justice without power is opposed, because there are always wicked men. Power without justice is soon questioned. Justice and power must therefore be brought together, so that whatever is just may be powerful, and whatever is powerful may be just.”

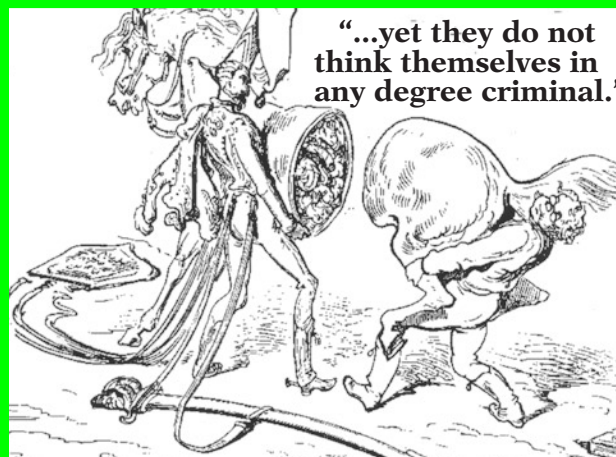
Christian saints are often shown carrying a sword (representing power) and a book (representing knowledge, justice, peace and wisdom). Plato remains today the ultimate citizen-soldier of Ancient Greece. His real name was Aristocles. “Plato” was a nickname given by his wrestling teacher. It means “broad shoulders.” He was an athlete and a soldier willing to surrender life and liberty in defense of high ideals. He was also a philosopher immersed in the search for wisdom.

The Wha Rang tradition has influenced Korean culture for centuries. King Chinhung wisely appointed the Buddhist Priest Won Kwang Bopsa to develop a martial, intellectual and moral system of education that follows the rules of nature. Choosing healthy and intelligent young men of high moral standards from good and noble families, King Chinhung successfully initiated Hwa Rang Do (way of flowering youth). The ancient Wha Rang spirit still permeates Korean literature and poetry, and Wha Rang Do remains a model for today’s warrior-intellectual.

The founding fathers of the United States of America also recognized the vital importance of balancing power with the peace and justice that emerges out of knowledge and wisdom. The symbolic arrows and olive branch depicted on the Great Seal are clear evidence that the United States was born of a noble vision by warrior-intellectuals.

We now live in troubled times as American society grows continually more mechanized and anesthetized. This has blurred the relationship between physical culture and morality. Such cultural confusion is not uncommon. The 19th Century English philosopher Herbert Spencer warned his generation against the decay of physical morality when he wrote:

“We do not yet realize the truth that as, in this life of ours, the physical underlies the mental, the mental must not be developed at the expense of the physical. . . . Perhaps nothing will so much hasten the time when body and mind will both be adequately cared for, as a diffusion of the belief that the preservation of health is a duty. Few seem conscious there is such a thing as physical morality. Men’s habitual words and acts imply the idea that they are at liberty to treat their bodies as they please. Disorders entailed by disobedience to Nature’s dictates, they regard simply as grievances: not as the effects of a conduct more or less flagitious. Though the evil consequences inflicted on their dependents, and on future generations, are often



body, the brain eventually grows flatter under gravity's pressure. The lungs lose their apex, and the abdominal organs eventually sag, putting unhealthy pressure on the lower organs. The intervertebral discs gradually compress, dehydrate and grow thinner. This often leads to the common backache which now effects 80% of the American public.

Master An explains that the human body is over 85% water and molded by gravity's force. If we fail to intelligently apply natural laws, human ignorance, not gravity or nature, is the villain. Human intellect is capable of profound reason and insight. Nature provides the principles, but we must properly apply them to our daily life to profit.

UNCOMMON POSTURES

Extension - The extended postures compensate for the debilitating effect of chronic flexion. Master An uses numerous partner and equipment assisted movements, three of which are demonstrated in the following sequences. As the postures become more fluid and precise, the benefits multiply. Moving beyond the point of comfort and control brings no progress and invites injury. Concentration and good technique are necessary to safely master these and other restorative arts.

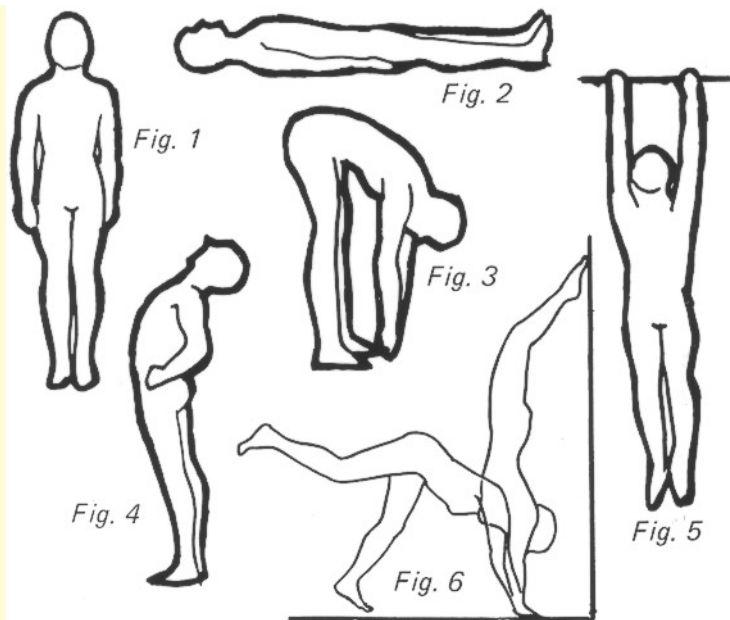
Kneeling Extension -Kneel on a padded floor facing away from a wall. Point the toes and adjust the knees to shoulder distance. Bring the pelvis forward and reach back until your hands touch the wall. Tighten the buttocks slightly. Hold the position for three to five seconds and repeat the motion ten to fifteen times. A spotter should support the lower back until assistance is no longer needed. Breathe naturally. If any strain is felt, move closer to the wall.

This extended posture elongates the sartorius, rectus femoris, iliopsoas and tensor fascia latae. Shoulder girdle muscles are conditioned as are the abdominal groups. The longitudinal ligaments on the front of the vertebral column are also elongated.

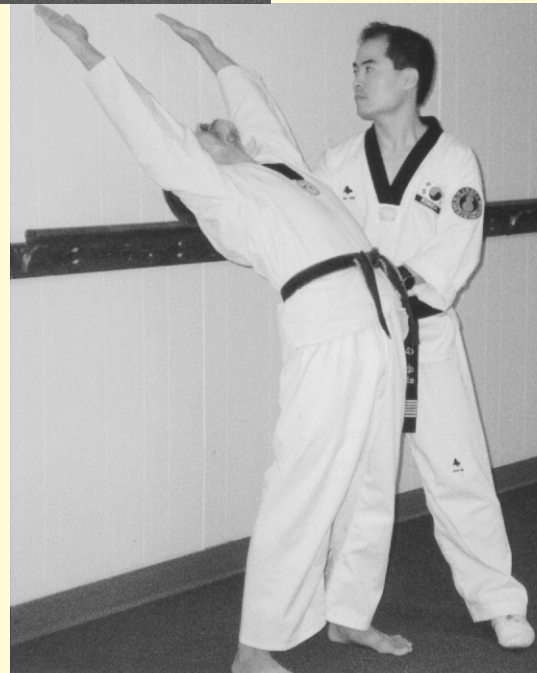
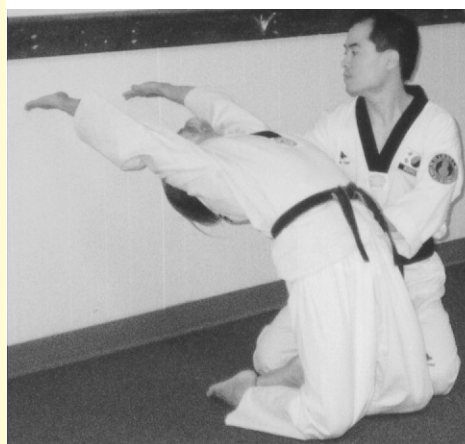
Standing Extension -This posture provides benefits similar to kneeling extension. The vertebral and abdominal muscles are especially elongated. Hold the posture for five to ten seconds and do three to ten repetitions. Move cautiously and use a spotter.

Partner Flexion-Extension - Squat back to back with your partner as he sits cross-legged. Keep your feet shoulder distance and flat on the ground. Reach overhead and hold hands with your partner. As he leans forward, extend gently until you are both comfortable. Keep your hips down and relaxed. As you and your partner become more comfortable, allow your breathing to harmonize. Hold this posture until either of you feels the need to recover, and then return slowly to the starting position. This technique is especially good for the shoulder girdle, and it expands the chest.

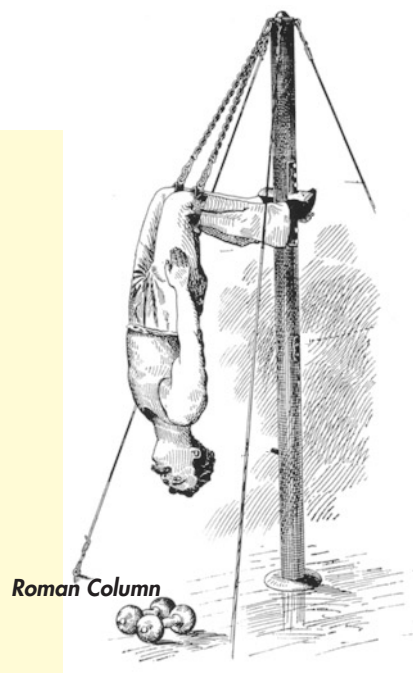
Brachiation - Brachiating (hanging) by the arms is a well-known means of elongating and decompressing the body. The spinal column receives therapeutic traction,



SIX BASIC POSTURES



“...many 19th Century Europeans including the German Turners used a variety of inversion techniques.”



and the shoulder girdle muscles are strengthened. The abdominal wall is retracted, and the viscera (thoracic and abdominal organs) are lifted toward their natural elevated position.

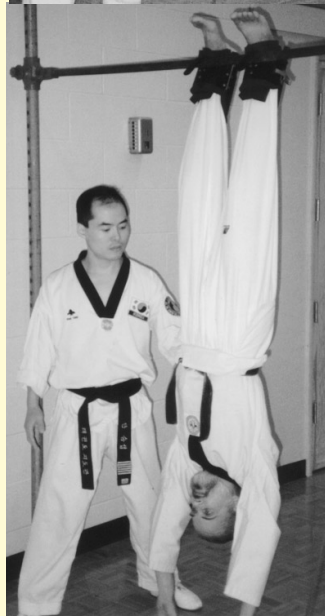
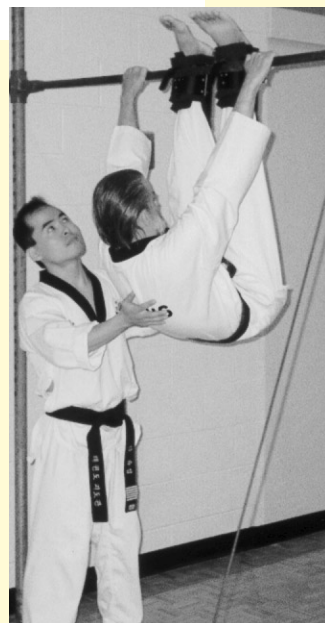
The traveling rings are Master An's favorite brachiation device. To build the momentum necessary to move up and down the row of rings, the rear arm must flex while the front arm remains extended. When the bent arm is released, the body swings forward under the strength of the suspended forward arm.

Inversion - The family of inverted postures includes headstands, handstands, forearmstands, shoulder-stands and many other beneficial postures. Lesser degrees of inversion may be accomplished by lying head downward on an incline. Each of these postures is accomplished in contact with a surface, so the body is never fully decompressed. Some of these balance positions can be dangerous and should be learned from an experienced teacher.

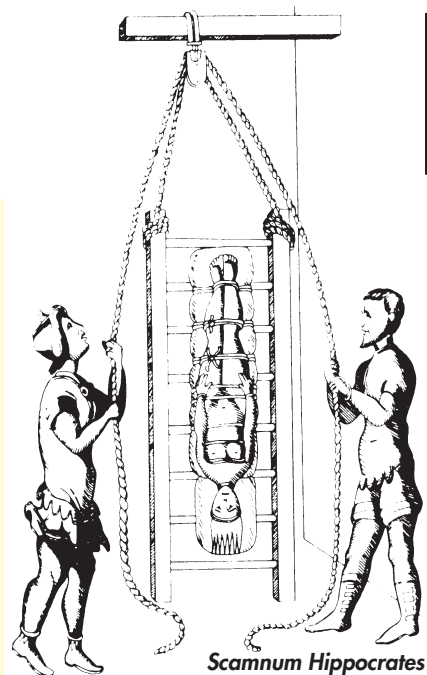
Inverted brachiation (hanging from the lower limbs) is unique in allowing complete elongation. It can be best done by using inversion boots and/or the inversion machine. The inversion machine allows for oscillation, control of incline angles and total inversion. Clinical evidence suggests that full inversion and oscillation can:

- Relieve pain and muscle spasms in common back problems.
- Provide maximum amount of safe traction in minimum time.
- Allow rhythmic and soothing oscillation to relax muscles.
- Improve circulation.
- Decompress or unload the intervertebral discs by painless vertical suspension.
- Provide maximum mobility of the spine without strain to the spinal cord.
- Stretch paraspinal and vertebral muscles and ligaments.
- Strengthen ligaments and soft tissue.
- Provide free inverted suspension; enabling full range of motion for maximum restoration of joint function.

Physicians in the middle ages inverted their patients with a device called the “Scamnum Hippocrates.” The famous strongman C. A. Sampson recommended the Roman Column in the late 1800's, and many 19th Century Europeans including the German Turners used a variety of inversion techniques. Buddhist monks and Hindu



“Buddhist monks and Hindu yogis have also been known to suspend themselves upside down from trees.”



Scamnum Hippocrates

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When practiced mindfully, inversion is safe for healthy individuals. If you have doubts about your own situation, consult a reputable physician or chiropractor. Under no circumstances should you attempt inversion if you are experiencing any of the following conditions:

- History of uncompensated congestive heart failure
- Severe vascular disease
- History of space-occupying brain lesions
- Arterial hypertension (uncontrolled)
- Severe myopia with tendency for retinal tears
- Carotid artery stenosis
- Osteopathia: e.g., cancer and tuberculosis of the bone
- Detached retina
- Glaucoma
- Vulnerable areas of stress from recent surgery
- Hiatus hernia (large)
- Ventral hernia
- Extreme obesity
- Pregnancy

Total inversion should be approached carefully. Always use a secure bar and spotter. Begin by practicing the mount and dismount. Never stay inverted beyond the comfort level, and maintain your awareness. Practice inversion only in the presence of mature individuals who understand its value. When possible, seek advice from an expert in the use of inversion equipment. You will be amazed at the variety of beneficial inverted techniques you can master.

The oscillation machine allows you to flow without effort from the upright to inverted posture by simply extending and moving your arms overhead. Once the basic principles of the machine are mastered, oscillation can be achieved by rhythmic movement of the arms. From the fully inverted position, techniques such as inverted extension are possible.

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