

Dantian

Dantian, dan t'ian, dan tien or tan t'ien is loosely translated as "energy centre."

A dantian is considered to be qi or life force energy. The lower dantian is particularly important as the focal point of breathing techniques as well as the centre of balance and gravity. Dantians are focus points for metamorphosis of the three treasures jing, qi and shen. The term dantian used by itself usually refers to the lower dantian.

A few reasons for this are;

- 1) It is the first and original source of chi energy.
- 2) The other dantians and most tai chi energy points in the body cannot be felt until enough energy has been built in the lower dantian. Energy then travels to these other points and lends them their "sensation."
- 3) In martial terms it is the centre for power.

The lower dantian is considered the body's second brain. The term "gut feeling" comes from the understanding that the dantian is the home for kinesthetic (relating to a person's awareness of the position and movement of the parts of the body) feelings, communication, and awareness. Western science follows a similar concept crediting the nervous system as the brain in the gut. Researchers have found that much like the brain in the head, the nervous system sends and receives impulses, records experiences, and responds to emotions. The masters of martial arts, the healers in the world, and the mystics in Daoism all knew/know this and this is why we start at the lower dantian when our training begins.

Dantian which is considered to be the foundation of rooted standing, breathing, and body awareness in martial arts. The lower dantian has been explained as, "the root of the tree of life." In this article I will introduce the dantians and explain that there are three of them, however I will focus on the lower dantian. These three energy centres have been identified in the body, they control and store energy. The three dantians are each associated with one energy, known as the three treasures. Martial artists often instructed by their masters to centre their mind in the navel or lower dantian. This is believed to aid control of thoughts and emotions. Acting from the dantian is considered to be related to higher states of awareness or samadhi. Samadhi is the eighth limb in the yogic practice in yoga and meditation. Samadhi, the suffix, Sama, meaning "even" and Dhi, the prefix, meaning "mind." Samadhi is a state of total concentration and awareness.

The Three Dantians:

The lower - (Jing) - Behind the naval. Where the process of developing, refining and purifying essence (jing) into vitality (qi) begins.

2) The middle - (Qi) - In your chest where your heart is. Associated with storing spirit (shen) and with respiration and health of the internal organs, in particular the thymus gland. This is where vitality or qi is refined into shen or spirit.

3) The upper - (Shen) - Behind the forehead where the brain is. Associated with the pineal gland. This is where shen or spirit is refined into wu wei. "Wu Wei never acts yet nothing is left undone." It doesn't mean not acting, it means "effortless action." It means being at peace while engaged in the most frenetic tasks so that one can carry these out with maximum skill and efficiency. It is comparable to being in the "zone." Being focused on what you are doing, in a state of being in the "flow."

Three Treasures: Jing, Qi, and Shen:

In Chinese medical theory, there are three things that are essential to sustaining human life: Jing, Qi, and Shen. They are called the "Three Treasures," and each one contributes to the overall health and wellbeing of the body.

JING - The first treasure is called "Jing," which is translated as "essence." Essence is seen as the basis of growth, development, and reproduction.

QI - The second treasure is called "Qi," which is the vital energy of the body. As with any other substance in the body, Qi has specific functions.

SHEN - The final Treasure, "Shen," is translated as "Spirit" or "Mind." The Shen is responsible for things like thinking, planning, and feeling.

Martial artists have known about this technique for centuries, and this is one of the reason that some of the most well known fighters of our times were and are capable of excessive power. Speed, explosiveness, and rootedness all manifest from this basic piece of bioenergetic anatomy, the three dantians. Regarded as the major energy storage facilities in the human body, everything we understand about our physicality, emotional balance, and connection to intuition can be credited to the health and welfare of these three dantians. Martial artists can benefit astronomically by this practice. Each has an energetic responsibility to keep the human body operating with efficiency. When the three are nurtured, the body, mind, and spirit have a noticeable advantage when it comes to physical, mental and spiritual health.

Anyone who trains the internal martial arts will begin here. The lower dantian has multiple responsibilities for the body. The lower dantian gathers energy from the earth and is closely related to jing (or essence). The jing is fundamentally everything we consider to be physical and material in the body. The lower dantian and jing are responsible for our physicality as a whole. When the jing is strong and your dantian is full, this person is strong, and full of stamina in all ways and exudes physicality. When the jing is feeble and the dantian is uncultivated and weak, this person is frail, and weak, and low energy. The Lower Dantian, located behind the belly button, generates "jing" energy. It is considered the "superior ultimate"

treasure. The lower dantian is considered to be the foundation of balance, breathing, rooted standing and full-body awareness in martial arts. It is described as “the root of the tree of life” and seen as the original source of one’s internal energy (qi/chi). It is the power centre.

Buddhist and Taoist teachers often instruct their students to focus on the dantian because it centres awareness in the greater mind of the universe, eventually activating samadhi, (higher states of consciousness). Masters of the martial arts are said to be “acting from the hara, (belly). The reason the lower dantian is considered the most important of the three is because it must be open and activated before we can feel or sense the middle and upper dantians. It is the connection point between the physical self and the universal life-force. When this gateway is shut-down or blocked, and for most of us, it is, we are unable to access renewable energy and instead take it from non-renewable sources within our body and environment, which causes depletion. When this gateway is open, we receive transmissions of energy directly from source which flows through our meridians and chakras until it touches every organ, muscle, bone, skin, etc., uprooting and transforming stored fear along the way. The power of this expanding energy cleanses our channels of what we’ve inherited and absorbed at the cellular level. Once activated, this energy travels from our centre up through our chakra system, clearing the energetic pathways so the flow of life-force can properly access each of our cells. It keeps pushing until it reaches the top of our head. Once there, feelings of bliss, expansion and light pervade our entire body, mind and spirit. This is another way of describing the source and rise of “kundalini energy”. In yoga philosophy, kundalini is a powerful divine energy that lays coiled like a snake at the base of our spine or root chakra. This shakti energy (divine feminine power) is predominantly cultivated through various methods such as, yoga practice, chanting mantras, meditation and pranayama breathing. One way of describing their connection might be to say that the lower dantian is the engine or generator of vital life-energy, while the kundalini awakened at our root, is the catalyst that ignites that engine.

When the jing is strong and the dantian is full, this person is strong, robust, and full of stamina in all ways and exudes physicality. When the jing is feeble and the dantian is uncultivated and weak, this person is frail, aging, and low energy. When our energy is not focused and centred in our lower dantian, it can float upwards. This disturbs our upper dantians, affecting mental and emotional wellbeing. This creates distress and disease. Smaller afflictions and nuisances in life cause more irritation than usual. We lose sight of our essence and purpose, no longer living with true intent.

To increase our energy in the three dantians you begin cleaning and building energy are posture and breath. We maintain a good posture and regulate our breathing. Then we coordinate our movements with our breath and at an advanced level move our energy internally with our intention. Strengthening and grounding oneself in the lower dantian will benefit the other dantians.

Lower dantian breathing exercise;

We can strengthen our lower dantian to build and hold our Qi. Lower dantian breathing benefits us by helping us feel healthier, less stressed and happier. Having a stronger core means that you are less vulnerable to falling off balance. This means we can be physically, emotionally and mentally more stable. A simple meditative practice can be practised as follows;

Hold a still and erect posture. Feet shoulder-width apart. Knees slightly bent so they are not locked. Pelvic floor pulled forward. Spine straight. Neck pulled back. Head straight. Imagine a string passing from the sky to the crown of your head, through your spine to the ground between your feet. Draw the breath deep down and to the lower dantian expand the lower abdomen on inhalation as the diaphragm expands. Allow the focus of the mind rest in this lower dantian. Observe the Qi as warmth filling up in this vital centre with each breath.

To assist your focus remaining in this area you can place your hands, one on top of the other, over the lower dantian. For males, the left hand should be underneath, for females, the right. This can be practised daily for 10-15 minutes, or longer if desired. Mindful movement.

In martial arts, the lower dantian is of primary focus. By keeping attention at the core it becomes easier to move. When physical movements come from this centre they are stronger, more purposeful and softer. Action needs less energy as it comes from the centre of your soul. By focusing on the lower dantian you also become more stable and grounded. This is applicable for both physical movements as well as movement in our life. Mastering the art of movement from your dantian does take time and practice. It is best learned from a teacher who can correct your posture and guide you through this process.