

The background of the entire page is a piece of aged, yellowish-tan paper. Several dried hazel leaves are pressed onto the paper, their intricate vein structures clearly visible in shades of brown and tan. The leaves are scattered across the page, with one large leaf in the lower left and another in the lower right, and a smaller one in the upper right. The overall aesthetic is natural and historical.

THE THREE HAZELS

A SHORT COURSE BY ADAM ROBERSMITH

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Three Hazels: a Druid Qigong Short Course for the AODA

Welcome to the first Triad of the Nine Hazels!

The Nine Hazels Druid Qigong is designed to offer you a bodily practice that is both good for your health and useful for your development and deepening of foundational energetic/magical skills. Within this short course, you will find information about why Druidry and Qigong work well together for this purpose, how each movement pairs with an energetic/magical skill, and how to practice the first three hazels of the Nine Hazels qigong most effectively. You'll find a companion video showing this section of the qigong form at <https://youtu.be/Sl-ru6TxXNk>.

In my over twenty-five years of work with Druids and Pagans, I have seen a pair of concurrent needs: the teaching of magic that draws on both imagination and kinesthetic learning and the need to support bodily awareness and health. Much has been written and said about the dichotomy of body and spirit—physicality and energetics—in our broader Western culture. Many of us struggle with time enough (or discipline enough) to practice any one thing deeply, much less exercise *and* magic. In Druid fashion, I have sought a third thing that could unite these into a useful, practical, manageable whole. My experience with qigong and tai chi as a practitioner (and as the partner of an expert qigong and tai chi practitioner and teacher) led me to create the Nine Hazels: a qigong form that would support the learning of basic Western magical energy practices, provide health benefits, and encourage a sense of embodiment as a spiritual, magical, natural being.

I hope that you will develop a deeper experience of your energy and magical skills as a result of beginning Nine Hazels, no matter whether you are new to these practices or have years of experience.

May your practice bear abundant fruit!
Adam

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The Energies of Existence: Where Druidry and Qigong Meet

Facing the sky, I feel the sun warming my skin, the wind moving past, rain falling as thirst-quenching drops upon me. I see the stars and the moon in their slow progression above. The heavens offer goodness that I take in through life-giving light, darkness, wind, and rain. Opening to these gifts, I also find myself drawn out toward the expansive cosmos into unimaginable vastness, into peace, into utter blessing.

Under the soles of my feet, I feel the earth as both soil and stone. My toes can feel the give of good topsoil, the gritty slip of sand, the sharp and skitter of gravel and scree. I sense the stability that the bedrock offers, the interplay of solidity and gravity that keeps me on the surface of the earth. Connecting with the ground, I know myself to be part of this ancient earth, its history, cycles, and slow changes, a long and abiding presence.

And then, in between, are all of us: you and I and other living things, occupying a middle space that is vital, flowing, growing, and moving. The plants, the animals, the fungi, and the single-cells, all receiving what is offered by heaven and earth and then transforming those elements through every moment of living. Paying attention to what is above and what is below reminds us of our connection to all other inhabitants of this world, with whom we share air and soil, imagination and place. Feeling the wind or the ground reminds us of our existence right here and right now; we are not just observers in this world, we are the creations of it. Accordingly, many cosmologies consider the sky and the ground as parents of all life. We exist as we do because of the interaction of what is materially above us and below us. Many of these cosmologies also posit that the energetic above and below—the spiritual above and below—have an equal or greater role to play in our in-between existences.

Druid Revival and Taoist cosmologies both use a lower/middle/upper framework to explore existence and everything within it. Using the visionary (if ahistoric) work of Iolo Morganwg, Druidry arising from the Druid Revival imagines the cosmos within a framework of *calas* (stone), *gwyar* (water), and *nwyfre* (sky). These three elements are more than just their material forms. They also correspond to the body, the blood/life, and the mind; form, process, and vision; and matter, energy, and spirit. All things can be understood as the interplay of these elements.

The Taoists also use a three-part framework, understanding a dynamic harmony in between yin and yang. Yin corresponds to the earth, darkness, below, the body, and *jing* (the essence of the body, such as sperm or egg). Yang corresponds to heaven, light, above, the spirit, and *shen* (the most vast and transcendent part of oneself). The dynamic harmony of life gives rise to the created middle, humanity, breath, our heart-mind (the unity of emotion and intelligence), and *qi* (the energy of our living bodies through time and space). *Jing, Qi, and Shen* are referred to as The Three Treasures, lifting up their importance for health and vitality.

Comparison of Taoist Cosmology and the Druid Elements*

	<u>Taoism</u>	<u>Druidry</u>
Upper	Heaven Yang Spirit <i>Shen</i>	<i>Nwyfre</i> (Sky) Vision Mind Spirit Solar Current
Middle	Humanity/Life Dynamic Harmony Heart-Mind <i>Qi</i>	<i>Gwyar</i> (Water) Process Life/Blood Earthly Energy (heat, light, etc.) Lunar Current
Lower	Earth Yin Body <i>Jing</i>	<i>Calas</i> (Stone) Form Body Matter Telluric Current

These two systems are not identical. They come from different places and times, arising from different cultural and spiritual contexts. Their ways of imagining the universe do not overlap perfectly, yet they share some commonalities. Neither system sees the levels as progressively “better,” instead recognizing the importance and value of each in relation to the others. The lower aspects are material, physical, bounded, and formed. The middle aspects are energetic, flowing, alive, and changing. The upper aspects are spiritual, visionary, boundless, and formless. As creatures of the middle, we engage with both what is above and below; we (and all of life) are spirit, matter, and the processes that hold them together.

The energies that Nine Hazels develops are called *qi* in Taoism and *nwyfre* in Druidry. Both systems acknowledge these subtle energies of existence, though *qi* and *nwyfre* are located in different levels of their respective cosmologies. Comparing *qi* and *nwyfre* as cosmological concepts could offer endless nuances of understanding; however, in practice, both names refer to things that we can experience with our senses and imaginations. Both systems seek to encourage practitioners to better understand these subtle life energies, engage with them more fully, and bring them into healthy expression. Each system includes practices—magic and qigong—to help us intentionally engage the material and spiritual aspects of our lives.

* There are more detailed descriptions of the three Druid elements in *The Druidry Handbook* by John Michael Greer (pp. 60-62) and Taoist/Chinese cosmology, particularly The Three Treasures in *The Healing Promise of Qi* by Roger Jahnke (pp. 60-67) as well as *Tai Chi: Health for Life* by Bruce Frantzis (pp. 194-196) and *Opening the Energy Gates of Your Body* by Frantzis (p.25).

The similarities of Druid magic and Taoist qigong can offer Druids (and others) a way to adapt and imagine practices of energetic awareness and physical health centered in our living bodies. Qigong, meaning *energy practice*, is a term that includes many different forms and styles of practice. The National Qigong Association notes that “all styles have three things in common: they all involve a posture, (whether moving or stationary), breathing techniques, and mental focus.”* The various forms and styles of qigong address a variety of needs, abilities, and end goals – some focus on physical health, others on mental or emotional balance, and still others on spiritual care and growth. Some qigong is related to the work of martial arts, training the practitioner in both physical and energetic defense and attack. Other qigong focuses more specifically on the circulation of energy through the body for health and balance. All qigong is a foundation for the development of spiritual skills and well-being; therefore, we will practice it as a way into Western energetic or magical skills, too.

Magic, which I think of as *energy work*, takes a wide variety of forms and requires mental focus for effective practice, too. Magic seeks to affect the inner and outer worlds through the direction of energy and alteration of patterns and interconnections. Some magics are defensive, offensive, or protective; some are healing and balancing for an individual, a community, or the earth; some are aimed at shaping who we are and will become. In Druid and neo-Pagan traditions, certain energetic/magical skills have become commonly understood as foundational for the magical practitioner, including centering, grounding, shielding, projecting, and receiving. Much of our Western magic is performed through the imagination as connected to energy; ritual and spellcraft, rather than exercise forms or postures, are common ways we embody our energy work.

Movements and postures, like those of qigong, offer us a way beyond ritual or spellcraft to develop our energetic and magical awareness. By choosing movements and postures that relate to specific kinds of magic/energy work, we can practice these skills in a way that becomes habitual in mind and body and has the added benefit of supporting bodily health. Not every Druid practices magic, of course, but all of us engage with *calas*, *gwyar*, and *nwyfre* simply as embodied beings. We are connected to the material and spiritual worlds—to heaven and earth—as a part of the flow of life. Whether we seek to practice magic or not, anything we can do to increase our understanding of existence and the health of our beings is wise and worth doing.

Nine Hazels is a Druid qigong.† It uses traditional or modified traditional qigong movements in a new sequence in order to give the practitioner both a good practice for the body and a system for developing awareness of Western magical/energetic skills. Each movement is one of the nine hazels‡ connecting with a particular skill so that the action of the body supports the awareness and practice of the skill. The sequence of the nine movements builds one skill upon another so that at the end of each session, the practitioner is more aware of and more full of vital energy than at the start.

* From the NQA website <<http://nqa.org/about-nqa/what-is-qigong/>>

† Qigong sequences often have symbolic or descriptive names, such as “Eight Brocades” or “Five Animal Frolics.” Who am I to break with tradition?

‡ Referring to the Irish lore that the hazelnut is a potent source of wisdom. The myth about how Fionn MacCumhal became wise from a taste of the wisdom in hazelnuts eaten by a salmon is a good example.

Together, the Hazels have an internal structure that reinforces the learning from each individual skill and movement. The movements are organized in triads that support your readiness to work with *qi* and *nyyfre*, and then work with external energies and internal energies. In this short course, we focus on the first triad: three movements that support one's energetic readiness.

The First Three Hazels Skills and Movements

	Attending to the Self	Attending to the Flow of Energy	Attending to the Perception of Energy
Energetic Readiness	Ring the Bell 1 st Hazel: Centering	Meridian Tracing 2 nd Hazel: Awakening	Heaven and Earth 3 rd Hazel: Grounding

Each of the Hazels is a self-contained movement. You can practice any of them individually (and should while you're learning them!), but practicing them all in order will support you in strengthening the health of your body and the skills associated with each movement. As you learn them in order, practice them in order as well, linking movement to movement. Don't forget the companion video showing this section of the qigong form at <https://youtu.be/SI-ru6TxXNk>.

The Nine Hazels: Skills and Movements

What You Need to Know Before You Begin

Energy Anatomy: Both Druidry and Taoism understand the body to have three main energy locations along the core of the torso. Taoism calls them the lower, middle, and upper dantian. Druids call them lower, middle, and upper cauldrons or the womb, heart and head energy centers. Nine Hazels, like other qigong systems, will connect with all three centers in the movements, but focus mostly on the lower dantian/cauldron/womb center.*

Starting & Ending Position: Stand at rest with your knees slightly bent (neither locked nor crouching) and with your torso neither slouching, nor at-attention stiff. Your arms and hands will hang at rest to your sides, with the backs of your hands and your forearms facing forward.

Standing Position: Stand the same as starting, but with your hands crossed over lower dantian – palms inward, dominant or preferred hand on top.

Point: When pointing your hands or feet, they will make a single long line with your arm or leg. A pointed foot extends the top of the foot, placing the toes in line with the leg, just as a pointed hand extends the fingers in line with the arm.

Flex: When flexing a joint, it becomes bent, rather than straightened. Flexing your wrist or ankle is the opposite of pointing, resulting in the fingers or toes being pulled back from the line of the arm or leg. Imagine gesturing for someone to stop with your hand made flat with the palm facing them, or trying to prevent a charlie horse in your leg by pushing your heel down while stretching your toes back toward your shin. Flexed knees are bent, not locked. When we talk about flexed knees in the Nine Hazels, they should be slightly bent and ready to move, but not deeply bent as though preparing to jump.

Expand: Make your arms, legs, and spine straighten and extend outward. This action will create more room in your torso for your breath and cause your body to take up more space. This is like allowing a spring to expand, releasing the energy it stores when it is held small.

Contract: Bend your arms and legs as well as round your spine slightly, drawing inward. This action will encourage you to exhale and cause your body to take up less space. This is also akin to contracting a spring, such that it holds energy for expanding within itself.

* There are more detailed descriptions of these energy centers in *The Druid Magic Handbook* by John Michael Greer (pp. 191-195), *The Healing Promise of Qi* by Roger Jahnke (pp. 63-65), and *Opening the Energy Gates of Your Body* by Frantzis (p. 138-139, 238-239).

Breathing: Coordinate your breathing with the movements. Inhale when expanding and exhale when contracting unless instructed otherwise. If that kind of coordination proves to be troublesome or distracting, simply breathe as is comfortable, unless instructed otherwise.

Safety: With any movement or exercise, it is important to pay attention to the limitations and abilities of your body. If you cannot stand or stand for long, you can do the upper body movements while seated. If you are unable to bend your spine or move an arm as far as the movement indicates, you can adjust the movements to meet the abilities of your body.

Do your best to match your opposite sides and movements. We all have imbalances in the strength and flexibility of our bodies. Don't worry if they aren't perfectly matched. (You'll see my own imbalances in the video, and I've been working to improve them since I saw them.) Perfection is not the point! Instead, follow the lead of your more limited side. If your body will only turn so far to one side, do only that much on the other. If you can only raise one arm so high, raise the other one no higher than that. In many cases, it is possible that the qigong will help to create greater strength, flexibility, and balance as you practice over time.

Tai chi and qigong teacher Bruce Frantzis advocates the 70% rule: Only do 70% as much as you are capable of doing.* If you follow this for the degree to which you extend or contract as well as for the number of repetitions you do, you will be less likely to injure or exhaust yourself. Moreover, by practicing at 70%, your 100% capacity will grow, and your 70% will become correspondingly more capable over time.

Make your practice most fruitful by doing your best for your body and your energy!

* See *Opening the Energy Gates of Your Body* by Frantzis (pp. 28 & 35).

The First Hazel: Centering & Ring the Bell

If you watch a performer, an athlete, a ritual leader, or anyone who is about to do something that requires effort and awareness, they often take a moment to prepare themselves. They may close their eyes or breathe deeply. They may shake their limbs or become very still. No matter what is happening outwardly, internally they are gathering their intent and presence so that they can be fully engaged with what they do next. These internal and external actions are ways of *centering*, of bringing one's awareness and being fully into your body in this moment.

You can imagine centering in many different ways. I often think of it as bringing all of myself together from the various places to which my attention has travelled. I call back the part of me that is replaying a conversation from yesterday, thinking about what is happening at work when I'm not there, or wondering what will happen tomorrow. I draw in the part of me that is attached to the book I've been reading or the family member who I'm concerned about, the work in the garden, garage, or kitchen that is nagging at me. Sometimes I think about pulling myself back together from these things specifically if they are really hard to set down, but usually I simply allow the core of myself, my center, to draw every part of my attention back within.

You may find more specific images or feelings helpful. Perhaps you envision yourself as the center of a spiralling movement of attention inward, like a galaxy or water flowing through funnel into a jug. Perhaps you feel your core growing in gravity so that all of your being must coalesce in this place and time. Use whatever image or feeling helps you come together in the center of yourself. Over time, this image may change or refine itself. It may eventually no longer be necessary to have an image once you have practiced this skill sufficiently. Any of those changes (whether for this skill or the others) is just fine. Right now, use what is most helpful for this practice.

Try this yourself. Remember, your center is not your head! Nor is it your heart. Feel your center in the core of your body as the line of your three dantian/cauldrons in front of your spine and behind your breastbone. Engaging the lower dantian as a part of your core is essential to this centering practice, the Nine Hazels as a whole, and to fully existing as an embodied person.

When you are centered, you should feel as though you are in this time and place alone. Your attention, intention, and presence will be engaged with this moment and what you are about to do. I always feel a sense of anticipation when centered, as I have gathered up all my energy and it is now just waiting to be set into motion, directed to a purpose. It may feel a bit like holding up a pendulum before it swings, or lightly compressing a spring before letting it expand. It should not feel stressful or explosive, but rather energized and ready for whatever comes next, whether it be leading ritual, running a race, or beginning your qigong.

The movement that I call Ring the Bell is based on the first movement of tai chi. Ring the Bell mimics the action of pushing a large bell from the side (or person on a very large swing).

- 1) Begin from your starting position as described in the previous section.
- 2) Contract slightly, then expand, straightening your spine and standing up taller while raising your arms with elbows bent and pointing toward the ground. Move your arms outward and upward from the wrists. Your hands should remain relaxed and hanging loosely. At the end of the movement, your arms will be 75% extended (keeping a bend in your elbows) with your wrists at shoulder height.
- 3) Draw your arms inward at the wrists, contracting until your elbows are fully bent but not pulled tight. Your wrists and hands remain at shoulder height.
- 4) Flex your hands and push forward as though pushing a bell to ring.
- 5) Let your arms return to your sides, reversing movement 2, so that you may either repeat the movement or return to starting position.

Use each contraction and expansion to become more aware of yourself, to draw in all the parts of you that are connected elsewhere. As you center yourself, leaving behind other concerns, you will create plenty of room within your awareness to hold your energy.

The Second Hazel: Awakening & Meridian Tracing

Awakening isn't just the first thing you do in the morning. It's something that we all do many times throughout every day. We do awaken from sleep, but we also wake up from our daydreams, the screen-induced haze that computer work or websurfing can cause, or anything that draws us so far out of ourselves that we forget when and where we are. I wake up—become more fully aware again—from books I'm reading, meetings I've been attending, or the highway driving I've had on my commute. We also must awaken our bodies in times when our minds are overwhelmingly engaged. Our world is growing ever more designed to encourage and value mental activity or passive reception of information. Many of us now need to seek out exercise because our work and leisure doesn't require healthy physical activity. Even beyond that, it's easy to stop being conscious of the body in a world that places less value on physical activities than mental (or digital) ones.

Awakening involves re-engaging your whole self. In western terms, we often separate mental and physical awareness; I encourage you to let go of the separation and understand yourself as a whole being, with all your different systems intertwined and supporting one another. When you awaken, it becomes clear that your body is part of your consciousness. You may feel your "self" existing in your head or brain, but your body is bringing sustenance and chemicals to and through your nervous system so that your self has a living home. Your consciousness includes awareness of the whole of your body, from the muscle and skin of your scalp to the sensory nerves at the base of your heels and tips of your toes. Awakening brings us back into ourselves: our embodied, spiritual, thoughtful, emotional selves.

Taking into consideration the specifics and capabilities of your body, check in with yourself: Are you able to sense the tips of your toes without touching them? What about your fingers? Can you bend your spine or another array of joints, moving only one joint at a time? Can you feel how limber or tight the muscles connecting your ribs are? How about your organs – can you sense discomfort in your stomach or bowels? How about your liver or lungs? Can you feel when your heart is laboring or feeling strained? What about your eyes?

Some advanced qigong practitioners are able to sense their internal organs beyond pains and discomfort that obviously demand attention. Some magical practitioners can feel the energetic changes in their bodies that correspond to healing or protection from harm. Most people don't begin with that level of awareness. Instead, we have to begin by reminding ourselves of what our own energy feels like and how our bodies feel as well. This movement, Meridian Tracing, gives you the opportunity to examine both of these feelings.

- 1) Begin in standing position. Your hands will be held at your dantian, your dominant hand crossed over your other hand. (For example, if you are left-handed, your right hand will have its palm against your torso and the palm of your

- left hand will be placed on the back of your right hand.) From there, the movement will keep the palms of your hands in contact with your body.
- 2) From the dantian, separate your hands, moving them along your belt line to your sides. From there, run your hands down the outsides of your legs to your ankles, around your feet to your toes, the insides of your ankles, and then back up the insides of your legs.
 - 3) Move your hands to the front of your legs as you reach your pelvis and back to starting position with your hands upon your lower dantian again. * Whenever your hands reach the lower dantian, slow your tracing and intentionally connect the energy between the dantian and your hands.
 - 4) From here, separate your hands again, moving them along your belt line to your lower back. You'll begin moving your hands up the two sides of your spine.
 - 5) Now it becomes tricky. You won't be able to keep your palms flat for long, so allow your hands to rotate toward your thumbs. When you are as high on your back as you can easily and comfortably go, bring your hands through your armpits and around the front of your arms. Maintain contact with your body and focus on the energy of your back to get through this anatomically necessary detour.
 - 6) Reach back over your shoulders and resume moving your hands, palms against your body on either side of your neck, over your scalp, down your face, neck, chest, and stomach. Return your hands to your dantian, dominant hand over secondary hand. Connect your energy intentionally again before beginning the next iteration of this movement or the next new movement.

As you perform this movement, you will be awakening your physical awareness through touch along the energy meridians of the body, reminding yourself to feel the top of your head, your back and sides, and even the very ends of your toes. You will also be awakening your energetic awareness by tracing where the energy flows within you with the movement of your hands. As you move, think both about the feeling of your body as well as sensing the energetic connection between the energy centers of your palms and those within the rest of your body. You may feel that energetic connection strongest in some places than others, such as your dantian, your lower back, your feet, your heart, your genitals, or your head. That's just fine. Over time, you will be seeking to develop greater awareness all throughout this movement. For example, be very aware of awakening the energy at the extremities, particularly your toes, the top of your head, and any other part of your body to which you do not usually pay close attention.

* I cross my non-dominant hand over my dominant hand at the dantian in this step, which is the reverse of what I usually do. In this movement, I want to activate but also be even more perceptive than usual, so I emphasize that through the energetics of my hand placement.

The Third Hazel: Grounding & Heaven and Earth

Grounding is the first practice that I actively developed as I began my exploration of energy and magic. It's the most comforting and nurturing magical practice I know. When I feel disconnected from magic, nature, or myself, it is the practice to which I return. When I am feeling weary or drained, grounding brings me strength. When I feel most isolated or overwhelmed, even if it is difficult, I attempt to ground. The fundamental task of grounding is consciously choosing to be connected with the energy of things beyond and generally far larger than yourself. In grounding, we remind ourselves that we are not alone and experience that by exchanging energy with that to which we are connected, drawing or giving energy as needed.

Grounding, also sometimes called rooting or earthing, is often done as a connection to the earth in tai chi and in western magic, but it isn't limited to earth alone. One can ground (connect deeply and directly) to earth, water, air, or fire; to sun, moon, or stars; to a religious community or a lineage/ancestry.* Practitioners of western magic often follow a tradition of beginning with earth, water, air, and fire. Each of these elements is distinct, specific, and energetically so immense that our needs and uses of it cannot (generally) damage it. Equally important, the larger and more primordial the thing to which one connects, the more likely it is that its energies will be neutral to beneficial for the magician and the magic. The purpose of grounding is to correct imbalances in the self and connect in healthy ways to the world around us. Grounding to human constructs comes with all the benefits and challenges of humanity distilled into energetic form. Grounding to a particular stone, living being, or other finite creation has great risk for the finite creation and for the practitioner as well. I do not encourage these latter two kinds of grounding, lest you create further imbalance or harm for yourself or anything else.

There are a variety of ways to use your imagination to support the practice of grounding. Let's begin with grounding to earth. Many people use their senses as a template and guide for the movement and connection of energy. You can envision a link between your lower dantian and the center of the earth, for example, or a great tree root moving through the earth from your pelvis or your feet. You can extend your energy beyond yourself, using the imagination of touch to reach down into the earth until you meet a welcoming and healthy-feeling connection. Try listening for the sound of the earth—the tone, vibration, pulse, or melody—and then bring your own energy into compatibility with it, either as rhythm or pitch, in unison or harmony. You might taste or smell the earth until you find the energy that is pleasing or right. You might use your sense of balance, feeling beyond yourself until you reach the place that feels balanced and stable.

* Do not ground to a religious community, lineage, or ancestry without having a very strong personal connection and deep knowledge of that history already. Know well what it is to which you are grounding: the desirable and undesirable aspects, the risks and the rewards. Furthermore, do not attempt to ground to a deity! Inviting that kind of energy to run directly through oneself is perilous without the proper preparations, not to mention the permission of the deity. Ritual, prayerful presence, or even spiritual union with a deity is not the same as grounding to an energy or place.

Grounding to earth can easily be a practice that takes days, weeks, or months to grasp. Beyond that initial exploration, one can spend years sensing nuance after nuance. Since this is a lifelong practice, though, I recommend that you don't wait until you feel like you know everything about grounding to earth before attempting something else. When you have gotten comfortable with grounding to your first element, then see what else might work for you.

When I began my exploration of grounding, I started with earth. After earth, I chose air to try. I originally attempted to use the same method as I had with earth, but discovered that air did not work the same way for me. I had to spend some time thinking about how I would sense this new connection. My method of grounding relies on touch first and vision second – I feel my energy extend or shape itself, but I can then envision what that looks like. To connect with the earth, I feel my energy moving beyond the shape of my body to interact with the energy of the ground deep beneath me. To connect with the air, I had to feel something lighter, more gossamer and fine extending into the winds and space above me. Then, to connect to water, fire, stars, and so on, I had to seek out my own instinctive ways of creating links.

Try grounding yourself, using the first idea that comes to you. Try other ideas, too. Take some notes about what feels easy, good, wrong, or simply ineffective. Your ways of sensing these connections need not be—will not be!—exactly the same as mine. You can take these suggestions as something to try first or just as ideas to help you find your own points of departure. There is no *you must do it this way* in learning to ground, other than *you must be wise and safe, grounding only to those things that you can trust completely and are so large that you cannot harm them.*

There are many different movements called “Heaven and Earth” in qigong. They all share a bodily extension upward and another downward, reaching toward the heavens and toward the earth. This particular movement expands and contracts the body while the arms also reach upward and downward.

- 1) Begin with standing position, with your hands crossed over your lower dantian. In this movement, your hands will move in the space in front of you.
- 2) Move your hands out to your sides, palms down, and then contract while bringing your hands and arms downward in a circular way, as though you are scooping up a pile of leaves or laundry.
- 3) When your hands meet facing upward in the middle of the lowest point of the circle, begin to straighten your legs and spine.
- 4) Draw your hands upward in front of the center of your body, carrying what you have gathered until you reach the lower dantian, then move your hands outward once again, this time facing upward. Your hands should be fully separated by the time they reach your middle dantian.
- 5) Circle your hands outward in an upward reach, expanding your body to the sky. Bring your hands together over your head as though you are gathering winds or clouds.

- 6) When your hands meet facing downwards in the middle of the highest point of the circle, bring your hands down the center of your body to your lower dantian, and either repeat the movement starting with step 2 or stop in standing position.

As you are moving, follow the vertical motion of your hands with your eyes, looking along the center line of your body. Your hands will each make a figure eight in the air. Use your peripheral vision to follow your hands when they are to your sides. As you follow your hands with your eyes, be careful not to bend your neck too severely. If and when you bend your neck, raise your head as though there were a string attached to the crown of your head pulling upward and opening the space in your vertebrae. Ideally, it should feel like you are stretching your neck, lifting your head even as you bend it.

Growing the Tree of Wisdom: Performing the Nine Hazels

I am energized, alive, connected to the world beyond me, and settled within my own being. Whether in motion or stillness, I am present to this place and moment. The elements, the stars and planets, the energies of existence are all available to me as sustenance and inspiration. I am of the earth and of the spirit; my life brings them into dynamic harmony.

When I am at my best, this is how I feel: both settled in myself and embedded in the all-that-is. I reach this way of being through creativity, contemplation, ritual, observing the natural world, and qigong, too. Performing the Nine Hazels offers me a way to be both attentive and open, connecting my inner and outer worlds. Of course, that's not always the way it works. Sometimes I can't find the right time or place. Sometimes I feel uninspired or uninterested. Sometimes my mind, heart, or body just won't remain focused and my practice is a struggle. There are things that we can do to help make practice easier, more effective, and more enjoyable – most of them are answers to the questions *when, where, and how?*

It may be easier to describe the right place and time in which to practice than to actually find the right situation, but it is better to practice in an imperfect place and time than to wait until you have the ideal circumstance. All the same, the best time to practice is usually in the morning, before your day begins in earnest. Making your practice an early part of your day means that you're less likely to get caught up in other things and forget. The energy of the morning hours is also generally suitable for qigong and for the Nine Hazels in particular. If, however, this isn't possible for you or if you need to wait until the afternoon, that's fine!

Again, practice whenever and wherever you're able – do not wait for perfection. Look for a place that is flat and relatively without distractions. Do not practice with the computer or television on. Turn off the ringer on your phone. Turn smartphones and tablets face down, or better yet, leave them in another room. Face a direction that allows you to keep your eyes open without being distracted by too many interesting things at which to look. I generally like to face north, because I enjoy that energy. You may face whatever direction feels best or is least distracting. Practicing outdoors can be enjoyable when the temperature is right, the winds are pleasant, the sun isn't glaring into your eyes, and the area noise isn't too annoying. If anything about practicing outdoors makes it difficult, especially while you're first learning, stay inside. When you reach a point where being outdoors is a joy rather than a pain, enjoy practicing in the fresh air.

When you begin the form, take starting posture deliberately and slowly. Do not rush into movement. Begin Ring the Bell when your posture is stable and you are calm. Keep the movements and the transitions between movements flowing smoothly, marking significant moments (such as the connection with the lower dantian in the Second Hazel) by slowing down a touch or with an intentional energetic connection. At the end of the form, return to standing position in stillness and then return to your day gently. Do not finish and immediately begin something hectic if at all possible! Allow the work you have done to continue to incorporate itself into your being.

In general, your breathing should correspond to the contractions and expansions within each movement. Where there are no contractions or expansions, breathe as it is comfortable. If a movement has specific instructions for your breath, follow them.

Many of us have a tendency to close our eyes when we want to focus closely on an intention or a movement. When practicing these three movements, you should keep your eyes open. Keeping your eyes open will help you keep your balance and see how you are moving, which are both helpful in qigong practice. Energetically, this is important as well. The eyes are a place of interconnection with the energy outside the body – no matter how good or poor your eyesight is, keeping your eyes open will allow for better energetic connection through the movements

You have choices to make about how many times to repeat these three movements. I recommend no fewer than 4 and no more than 8 for daily practice. Using that many repetitions will allow you to really practice each movement and relax into the form. Doing fewer doesn't help build learning sufficiently. Doing more offers diminishing returns in terms of practicing the full form. Should you wish to do more practice, you can either work on individual movements first and then do the whole form, or do the entire form multiple times in one session or throughout the day. Don't overdo it! Your body and energy learn best with time to rest in between practices.

Finally, keep track of your practice. Pay attention to how many repetitions you do when you do the form. Consider whether different numbers of repetitions changes how you develop your skills or experience the practice. How many times do you practice during the week or the day? Does location or time matter? What questions do you have or discoveries have you made? You can do this in many different ways: a blank book, a word processor log, a blog shared with others, and so on. Appendix B is a basic practice log that you may use to track your learning and experiences, but I encourage you to do what works best for you.*

* If you're not a person who usually finds journaling or keeping track of your learning in this way useful, that's fine! I do recommend trying it, if only to have a record of your experiences and questions as you begin learning the Hazels. It can be useful to look back and see what was easy, how you struggled or wondered, and how you have changed.

Appendix A: Brief Guide to the Nine Hazels Qigong First Triad Movements & Transitions

The First Hazel: Centering & Ring the Bell

1. Begin from your starting position as described in the previous section.
2. Contract slightly, then expand, straightening your spine and standing up taller while raising your arms with elbows bent and pointing toward the ground. Move your arms outward and upward from the wrists. Your hands should remain relaxed and hanging loosely. At the end of the movement, your arms will be 75% extended (keeping a bend in your elbows) with your wrists at shoulder height.
3. Draw your arms inward at the wrists, contracting until your elbows are fully bent but not pulled tight. Your wrists and hands remain at shoulder height.
4. Flex your hands and push forward as though pushing a bell to ring.
5. Let your arms return to your sides, reversing movement 2, so that you may either repeat the movement or return to starting position.

TRANSITION: When you are ready to go on to the Second Hazel, move your hands from your sides to your lower dantian to take standing position.

The Second Hazel: Awakening & Meridian Tracing

1. Begin in standing position. Your hands will be held at your dantian, your dominant hand crossed over your other hand. (For example, if you are left-handed, your right hand will have its palm against your torso and the palm of your left hand will be placed on the back of your right hand.) From there, the movement will keep the palms of your hands in contact with your body.
2. From the dantian, separate your hands, moving them along your belt line to your sides. From there, run your hands down the outsides of your legs to your ankles, around your feet to your toes, the insides of your ankles, and then back up the insides of your legs.
3. Move your hands to the front of your legs as you reach your pelvis and back to starting position with your hands upon your lower dantian again.*
Whenever your hands reach the lower dantian, slow your tracing and intentionally connect the energy between the dantian and your hands.
4. From here, separate your hands again, moving them along your belt line to your lower back. You'll begin moving your hands up the two sides of your spine.
5. Now it becomes tricky. You won't be able to keep your palms flat for long, so allow your hands to rotate toward your thumbs. When you are as high on your back as you can easily and comfortably go, bring your hands through your armpits and around the front of your arms. Maintain contact with your body

* I cross my non-dominant hand over my dominant hand at the dantian in this step, which is the reverse of what I usually do. In this movement, I want to activate but also be even more perceptive than usual, so I emphasize that through the energetics of my hand placement.

and focus on the energy of your back to get through this anatomically necessary detour.

6. Reach back over your shoulders and resume moving your hands, palms against your body on either side of your neck, over your scalp, down your face, neck, chest, and stomach. Return your hands to your dantian, dominant hand over secondary hand. Connect your energy intentionally again before beginning the next iteration of this movement or the next new movement.

TRANSITION: When you are ready to go on to the Third Hazel, remain in standing position.

The Third Hazel: Grounding & Heaven and Earth

1. Begin with standing position, with your hands crossed over your lower dantian. In this movement, your hands will move in the space in front of you.
2. Move your hands out to your sides, palms down, and then contract while bringing your hands and arms downward in a circular way, as though you are scooping up a pile of leaves or laundry.
3. When your hands meet facing upward in the middle of the lowest point of the circle, begin to straighten your legs and spine.
4. Draw your hands upward in front of the center of your body, carrying what you have gathered until you reach the lower dantian, then move your hands outward once again, this time facing upward. Your hands should be fully separated by the time they reach your middle dantian.
5. Circle your hands outward in an upward reach, expanding your body to the sky. Bring your hands together over your head as though you are gathering winds or clouds.
6. When your hands meet facing downwards in the middle of the highest point of the circle, bring your hands down the center of your body to your lower dantian, and either repeat the movement starting with step 2 or stop in standing position.

CLOSE THE FORM: Return to standing position and take a few moments in stillness to just breathe before going on to other things.

Appendix B: Nine Hazels Practice Log

Date: Notes on Practice (Movements, Repetitions, Form):

Experiences/Observations:

Questions:

Date: Notes on Practice (Movements, Repetitions, Form):

Experiences/Observations:

Questions:

Date: Notes on Practice (Movements, Repetitions, Form):

Experiences/Observations:

Questions:

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