

Yoga, Flexibility, and Taekwon-Do

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Introduction

In this thesis I will be discussing flexibility, Taekwon-Do training, 'Astanga Yoga' as I have been taught, its background, the system, anatomy, and the benefits I have received with regards to my practice of Taekwon-Do.

At the time of writing this thesis I have been doing yoga for around 18 months (albeit not as frequently as I would have liked). During this time I have noticed many benefits, not only in Taekwon-Do practice but in general life. Taekwon-Do and yoga have been a great physical and mental compliment to each other for me.

Both Yoga and Taekwon-Do train (and require to practice) great focus, balance, strength, power and of course flexibility.

Flexibility

Why do we need to be flexible? The first obvious reason is for physical ability. In Taekwon-Do we are taught many hundreds of techniques, many of them require a degree of flexibility far exceeding that of 'normal life' e.g. high twisting kick or any high section kicks for that matter. For many of us the ability to do any of these types of techniques needs a decent period of warm up before the techniques can be done correctly, however, what is Taekwon-Do defined as? Quoted "a version of unarmed combat designed for the purpose of self defence", (Condensed ITF Taekwon-Do encyclopaedia, 1995). So, keeping this in mind what is the use of high combat kicking/flying (or any technique which requires greater than 'normal' flexibility) if a warm up is required in an unanticipated self-defence situation?

The more flexible you are the more ability you will have when 'cold' i.e. if your flexibility is at a superior level you will have the ability to do the techniques the instant they are required as opposed to when you are 'warmed up'. This is what I have termed 'inherent flexibility' (as opposed to just straight ballistic) and it requires a lot of training, but is possible.

The more flexible you are the less likely you are to be injured, due to the increased adaptability of your body's structure (joints, muscles, tendons, ligaments).

The more flexible you are the better performance of your muscles due to their efficient contraction and relaxation (smooth sliding of the muscle fibres). Efficiency is also increased due to better arterial blood supply and venous return, i.e. transport of fuel and oxygen into muscle, and by-products of metabolism (work/exercise) transported back out.

We train hard, this damages muscles, that is what exercise does to our bodies and why we do it. Our bodies in-turn rebuild slightly stronger than before to handle an increased load. However, without proper stretching before and after exercise the muscles (and supporting soft tissues) develop a residual 'scarring' from the damage, not allowing smooth and efficient contraction. Students therefore do not reap the full benefit of the effort they are putting into their training.

The key is to not just stretch, but to stretch sensibly. Incorrect stretching on your path to flexibility can harm you as much as help you

Taekwon-Do Training and Flexibility

Through my Taekwon-Do practice I had already trained my body to a degree of flexibility and strength, but in retrospect it was very isolated (restricted to a few gross movements) and not global enough. I was also used to being taught in a systemised and disciplined class.

Due to this previous training when I began yoga I felt it was relatively easy to get started and to advance. I won't kid anyone when I say that the yoga training is very challenging and quite painful (in some instances), but thanks to Taekwon-Do this was minimised. If there is a degree of flexibility at the start the ability to get into the poses (asanas) (without the instructors help) and engage the stretch is increased and the benefit from the stretches is maximised earlier, as is the progress. This progress obviously has a flow-on effect into the students Taekwon-Do practice earlier also.

Right at the start of yoga my training it became clear just how uni-dextrous (as opposed to ambi-) I had become over the years. This was evident in my flexibility, strength and coordination. Also from the flexibility side of things my ability was, as mentioned earlier, only good in a 'ballistic' sense i.e. explosive high kicking using momentum of the leg from its mass to stretch the antagonistic (opposite) muscles, allowing the kick to

go high. This is opposed to having an 'inherent' flexibility where the leg can be lifted with now effort and 'kicked' into position , thus giving more control and also being able to kick 'cold'.

Through the various yoga 'asanas' (will be described/defined later), flexibility is gained in almost all joints (joint, muscle, ligament and tendon) through all maximum ranges of motion, even some ways you never thought possible.

In my opinion flexibility is a concept that that is appreciated to be vital in the practice of Taekwon-Do but never fully trained by the Taekwon-Do student. Here are a few reasons I think why:

- At training we are taught as students the Taekwon-Do 'package' – what the patterns (Tul) are and how to do them, sparring system (free, step, model etc), theory of power, how to move, how to breathe etc. These things are in the syllabus (the package). Self defence, fitness and flexibility are however really at the instructors' discretion and will be determined by the instructors' knowledge. There is no real defined package for self defence (apart from what the attacks are), fitness and flexibility. Some instructors have a vast array of self defence knowledge (and a passion for it) and obviously their students will benefit from this knowledge. The same is true for the instructor whom knows much about fitness exercises and or stretching.
- For most Do-Jangs' that I have seen there are different phases of training styles during the year where different aspects of Taekwon-Do become a focus i.e. when a grading round is near, tournaments, self defence, etiquette and discipline, fitness, and yes flexibility. In a perfect world there would be emphasis on all aspects of the 'Art' at every training or at least every week, but this doesn't really happen. With regards to self defence I think this is a problem, where the moves are meant to be drilled with repetition to become conditioned reflexes (again, the instant they are required) without thought, not just drilled leading to a grading round. How many times do the black belts have to revise even the most basic of wrist grab releases let alone a full fledged attack!
- Training to degree is organised to take care of the technical aspects of Taekwon-Do to efficiently maximise the clubs training time from the instructor and his/her knowledge (which for most clubs is two times a week). Fitness and flexibility training would take up too much of the class time if it were to be of maximum benefit, therefore, this responsibility lies on the shoulders of the student outside of club training.

So to get the maximum benefit from your Taekwon-Do training there are a lot of things out of organised training time that need to be done. So we come down to the real point, the concept of 'self motivation'. Self motivation is something that some find easy but the majority find hard, especially when it comes to any form of exercise i.e. something that is uncomfortable, as humans we tend to shy away from pain and develop all sorts of mechanisms that make our lives easier (from diet pills, to cars and computers). So to push yourself to get benefit from exercise becomes a mental battle, which is why there are people called 'personal trainers', coaches, training buddies, and TAEKWON-DO INSTRUCTORS. For some students that is why they join a martial art, so they can have someone shout orders at them to make them work, and they will, and they get the obvious benefit of that effort, otherwise they will never push their bodies and minds.

Where am I going with this? Well, back onto the topic of flexibility again, the potential problems are:

1. There is no system to follow
2. It is uncomfortable to practice
3. It takes effort especially since has to be done outside of normal training times

All these points are potentially going to work against the self motivation of the Taekwon-Do student.

I'll be the first to admit the fact that I will try harder if someone is pushing me in my training. So what can be, and what was done? The answer I found to help me in my flexibility was yoga, in particular 'Astanga Yoga' i.e.

- An organised class outside of training
- A step-by-step system to follow
- An instructor to educate and push you in proper technique
- Basically just like a Taekwon-Do class!

Background on Astanga Yoga

Yoga means the 'union of body and mind' where the body is the individual and the mind is the universe, spirit. It originated in Hindu culture from the remnants of the ancient Indian civilization 3-5 thousand years B.C.

The first systemised writing on yoga practices and thought is from the great sage Patanjali. His book is called 'Patanjali Yoga Sutra' is in which he has formulated yoga as 'eight limbs' or 'eight-fold' path. This is where the term 'Astanga' of Astanga Yoga came from. In Sanskrit (ancient writing style/language of the era) 'Asta' means 'eight' and 'Anga' is 'Limbs'. It is pronounced (and often written) as 'Ashtanga'.

The eight limbs are:

1. Yama - Principles or moral code (control and discipline)
2. Niyama - Personal disciplines (rules, methods and principle)
3. Asana - Yoga postures/positions
4. Pranayama - Yoga breathing, breath control
5. Pratyahara - Withdrawal of senses (avoidance of undesirable actions)
6. Dharana - Concentration (on object)
7. Dhyana - Meditation
8. Samadhi - Salutation (contemplation), the merging of individual consciousness with universal consciousness

Astanga Yoga as taught today was compiled from a manuscript written on a bundle of palm leaves, 'The Yoga Korunta'. The Yoga Korunta was discovered in the late 1930's by the yoga master Sri Tirumalai Krishnamacharya and his disciple K. Pattabhi Jois whilst researching Sanskrit texts at a Calcutta university library. The said manuscript was dated between 500-1500 years old. The two translated and reconstructed the Astanga Yoga Series and Pattabhi Jois and (under encouragement from his master) took the instructions as the basis of his practice and teaching.

Pattabhi Jois is still teaching this method today in Mysore, India (ironic name isn't it?). The Astanga Yoga that is taught is a form of Hatha Yoga which focuses on 'Asana' (posture) and 'Pranayama' (breath control), as underlined in the above 'eight limbs'. To distinguish the unique system from Patanjali's original 'Eight-fold Path' it is sometimes referred to as 'Astanga Vinyasa'.

Asana

These include all kinds of forward bending, backward bending, turning, twisting and inverted positions in a systematic way. Each asana is dependant on the preceding asana e.g. if you do a forward bending asana then the next should be a backward bending asana. Much like in a pattern it is not a bunch of random movements but a system of applications – attack and appropriate block then counter the attack (in various situations). These 'counter poses' in Astanga Yoga help to keep balance of all the organs in the body in some way.

Pranayama (Breath Control)

Breath control in yoga also has many features similar to that of Taekwon-Do e.g. to stabilise the body, to relax, to concentrate focus etc. Part of the practice of breath control uses the term 'Bandha' (pronounced bunda) which is defined as 'a particular action involving pressure of strain on muscles'. My definition would be more along the lines of 'gaining stability of the body by utilising the core muscles especially pulling up of the pelvic floor musculature'. It is expected in yoga to maintain firm 'Bandha' as it is utilised in the asanas for control. In Taekwon-Do our bandhas are used as a part of generating power as well as in the control of movement

How to Breathe

Before you move onto the actual practice of the Astanga Vinyasa Yoga Series here is an important note on breathe control and the 'how to' whilst performing the asanas.

The breathing is timed in with the poses (asanas) and the intermediate movements. Astanga Yoga differs from other forms in that it is quite active (not just passive stretching on floor). The intermediate movements are designed to keep your heart rate up and the sweat flowing!

The whole series is done breathing only through the nose (in and out) and this can be quite difficult especially when you get tired, short of breath, or when the asana is very twisted not allowing you to draw breath easily! This is where your discipline (perseverance) for breath control becomes very important.

The breath in and out are the same length and very slow. They are also quite audible, often described as a 'soft sibilant hiss'. This type of breath is called 'Ujjayi' breathing' or 'Victory breathe'. This breath empowers the movements in the Ashtanga sequence as well as contributing towards building the inner heat. Air is taken into the back of the throat with a constriction of the muscles, resulting in a hissing sound. As the throat passage is narrowed the speed of the air passing through it is increased.

Astanga Yoga Series Components

The series is broken down into:

1. Sun Salutations (salutes) A & B – Suryanamaskara A & B – Warming up
2. Standing Asanas
3. Sitting Asanas – Primary Series
4. Back Bending
5. Finishing Asanas

This is the 'basic' Astanga taught and although some of the poses seem daunting, but for the keen Taekwon-Do student they will come quite quickly. The 'advanced' series are quite spectacular and are far out of the scope of this thesis for a few reasons a) I haven't been taught them, b) they are ridiculously hard, and c) you have to have mastered the basic series first before even having a show at attempting them!

Equipment

Yoga is usually performed on a spongy rubber mat slightly longer than the length of your body and around 80cm wide. The only requirements are a space to stretch out. In the beginning during some of the poses a strap (or your belt) is used to hold onto the foot to pull you further around (until your flexibility improves).

A Few Notes before Starting

Each of the asanas are held for 5 long inhalations and exhalations, except for the back-bending and finishing asanas (these will be mentioned). The breathing should be performed as mentioned earlier, to keep you relaxed but strong and in control.

Before you begin in yoga, keep in mind:

- Don't push yourself too hard
- Always listen to your body rhythm
- Be patient and practice everyday
- Remember doing yogasana is not a competition
- Do asanas' within your limitations. Daily practice makes you feel better day by day.

The above yoga practices are completely applicable to the study and practice of Taekwon-Do in my opinion.

Astanga Vinyasa Series

NB the following pictures are of me doing the poses to my ability, as such they are to be used as a guide for students and instructors. Only a qualified yoga instructor should be used for absolute reference and practice. Where I cannot perform the pose a line drawing will be added instead☺.

Salute to the Sun - A



1. Stand with feet together arms beside body
2. **Inhale** as raising arms to sides bringing palms together above head fingers to ceiling, tilt head back looking to hands
3. **Exhale** as folding in half bending at waist, forehead to knees, palms to the floor
4. **Inhale** keep body in same position, lift head to look up, straighten spine



5. **Exhale** leaving palms on floor, jump feet back and lower body into press-up position 1 inch off floor
6. **Inhale** scoop chest forward and up arching lower back, lifting head and chest up looking to ceiling, this is called 'Upward-facing Dog' or just 'Up Dog'
7. **Exhale** rolling weight back onto balls of feet, push back with hands raising pelvis up as high as possible, straightening spine, relaxing head down. This forms upside down 'V' called 'Downward-facing Dog' or just 'Down Dog'. Remember to lift 'sit bones' and push weight onto heels – **Hold for 5x breaths**
8. Jumping feet between hands then straighten knees

11. **Inhale** into 'Up-Dog'
 12. **Exhale** into 'Down-Dog'
- Only hold for 1 breath**

Step **left foot** in between hands then repeat steps 8 to 12 on the other side (left)

Hold the second (last) 'Down-Dog' for 5x Breaths



18. Jump feet back in between hands
19. **Inhale** straighten the knees and tilt head back, looking up and straightening spine
20. **Exhale** fold in half again
21. **Inhale** squat with knees together whilst skimming finger tips on floor from slightly behind, raise hands forwards and up, palms together above head maintaining squat, tilt head back to look at hands
22. **Exhale** relax arms back besides body

Repeat whole B-Salute 3x



- As I mentioned earlier, these Sun Salutes (A&B) are used as a warm up to prepare the body for the coming asanas. When I first started out I was very tired after just doing these!
- The breath in and out are very important, remember all breath is in/out through the nose only
- The breath in and out are timed equally and to each movement, so you know how long to perform each asana and each of the intermediate moves
- Listen to your body rhythm and don't rush, even if you're tired try not to pant, remember 1 breath = 1 movement unless holding a pose.
- To lessen confusion I have replaced the Sanskrit names of the following Asanas with numbers and letters
- Remember to hold these Asanas for the **full 5 breaths** before moving onto the next

Standing Asanas

1a

- From the neutral position standing at front of mat **inhale** lift chest
- **Exhale** folding in half, bending at the waist to grab the big toes with the thumb and forefingers. Lift the sit bones relaxing the head down. **HOLD**



1b

- From 1A **inhale** look up straighten spine
- **Exhale** placing the backs of the hands on the mat whilst standing on the palms. **HOLD**

2a

- From the neutral position at the front of the mat swing the right foot back along (side facing) the mat stretching arms out wide to form a 'star' shape
- Pivot the right foot down the mat, keeping knees locked. Stretch right hand out forward and down to grab the right ankle whilst stretching the left hand to the ceiling and looking toward that hand. **HOLD** then **Repeat other side**



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2b

- Repeat the start of 2a
- Twist the torso and stretch out the left hand and place it on the mat on the **outside** edge of the right foot.
- Stretch the right hand to the ceiling whilst turning the head to look at the hand. **HOLD** then **Repeat other side**



3

- Repeat the start of 2A again except make the stance longer
- Place the right palm on the mat on the **outside** edge of the right foot
- Stretch the left hand up and forward to front of mat palm down whilst looking toward the hand. **HOLD** then **Repeat other side**



4a

- Form another wide stance as in 3. Hands on hips, **inhale**
- **Exhale** fold in half placing the palms flat on the mat in between the feet, relaxing upper body and neck. **HOLD**. Remember to lock knees by lifting up kneecaps.
- Hands on hip and extend back up, move straight on to 4b



4b

- From the wide neutral stance place hands on hips again, **inhale**
- **Exhale** fold in half leaving hands on hips, keep the knees locked and strong. **HOLD**.
- Return back to neutral again, move straight on to 4c



4c

- From the same stance as before interlace fingers with palms together behind back. **Inhale**
- **Exhale** fold in half letting the hands fall forwards over the head and stretching the shoulders. **HOLD**
- Place hands back onto hips and extend upright again, move on to 4d

4d

- Same stance again, **inhale**
- **Exhale** fold in half to grab big toes with thumb/forefinger to pull body closer to floor. **HOLD**
- Place hands back to hips and extend back upright to neutral then step back to front of the mat

5

- Step around to the right form a slightly narrower stance than previously.
- Place palms together behind back with fingers pointing upwards, slowly work hands up back
- Pivot right foot to face down along the mat keep knees locked
- **Inhale** raise chest, **exhale** bend forward chest to knee. **HOLD**
- Return then pivot feet 180 degrees to face opposite direction and **repeat**, then step back to front of mat



6a

- Bring left hand to the left waist and raise right knee
- Grab right big toe with right thumb/forefinger
- Stretch out knee raising leg as high as possible. **HOLD**
- Move straight into 6b



6b

- From 6a swing leg out to side and up, keeping body position as it was
- Maintain balance. **HOLD**
- Move straight into 6c



6c

- From 6b swing leg back around to the front
- Place both hands on waist whilst keeping leg out straight. **HOLD**
- Release leg down and **Repeat other side**



7

- Standing in the neutral position at the front of the mat lift the right heel high up into the groin on top of the left thigh
- Drop the right knee down and out till the knee is pointing as down and close to the left knee as possible
- Reach around the back with the right hand to grab the left big toe with the thumb/forefinger
- Fold in half placing the left palm on the mat. **HOLD**, release leg then **repeat other side**



8



- Do steps 1-8 of Sun Salute A then move straight into steps 2-9 of Sun Salute B, **HOLD** pose 9 (Warrior 1)
- Pivot feet 180 degrees whilst maintaining pose, **HOLD**
- Maintain stance and stretch arms out along length of mat (Warrior 2). **HOLD** then pivot feet 180 degrees again whilst maintaining pose, **HOLD**
- Place hands on mat either side of front foot then move into 'Up-Dog', 'Down-Dog'
- Jump feet through in between hands into seated position to begin **Primary Series**



Primary Series – Seated Asanas

- These next asanas are done either sitting with legs on ground, off ground and body off ground supported on hands
- Intermediate movements are performed after left and right sides are done before next asana
- Intermediate movements consist of bringing hands beside body, crossing ankles then jumping feet through into press-up position as before, 'Up-Dog', 'Down-Dog', jumping crossed ankles back through hands to seated position.
- These movements are only held for 1 breath each. They are designed to keep the body 'warm' and to stretch/reset the body before the next asana
- This will be abbreviated to '**Jump back**'



1a

- 1a**
- Sitting tall legs out straight, palms besides body
 - Lift chest and straighten spine. **HOLD**, then move to 1b



1b

- 1b**
- From 1a **inhale**
 - **Exhale** bend forward chest to knees to grab feet or big toes with thumb/forefingers. **HOLD**, then release back to neutral sitting



1c

- 1c**
- From sitting position **inhale**
 - **Exhale** bend forward as before however stretch further forwards to grab wrists **past** feet. **HOLD**, then release back to sitting position



1d

- 1d**
- From sitting position place palms back on mat behind body about 30cms, fingers forward, **inhale**
 - **Exhale** lift pelvis to make a plank of body whilst letting head fall back. **HOLD**, then release and **JUMP BACK**

2a

- Sitting upright put right foot high onto upper left thigh
- Reach around back with right hand to grab right big toe (use a strap around foot if you cannot reach), **inhale**
- **Exhale** bend forward to grab left foot with left hand. **HOLD**, then release and **repeat other side, JUMP BACK**



2a

2b

- Sitting upright bend the right knee pulling the foot to lie flat along the side of the body
- Keeping both 'sit-bones' flat on the mat (if this is hard then support body with left hand out to the side, or lift left side up on a book etc), **inhale**
- **Exhale** bend forward to grab left foot, **HOLD**, release and **repeat other side, JUMP BACK**



2b

2c

- Sitting upright pull the right foot high into the groin, let the right knee drop to the floor but keep the hips square, **inhale**
- **Exhale** bend forward to grab left foot. **HOLD**, release and **repeat other side, JUMP BACK**



2c

2d

- Sitting upright repeat 2c but lift pelvis off floor and lower it onto foot so that heel is in between the sit-bones, **inhale**
- **Exhale** bend forward to grab foot. **HOLD**, release and **repeat other side, JUMP BACK**



2d

2e 'broken toes'

- Sitting upright, grab right foot and turn it downwards until it is vertical (toes down)
- Push sole of foot into the inner left thigh and toes flexed onto mat, **inhale**
- **Exhale** bend forward to grab left foot. **HOLD**, release and **repeat other side, JUMP BACK**



2e

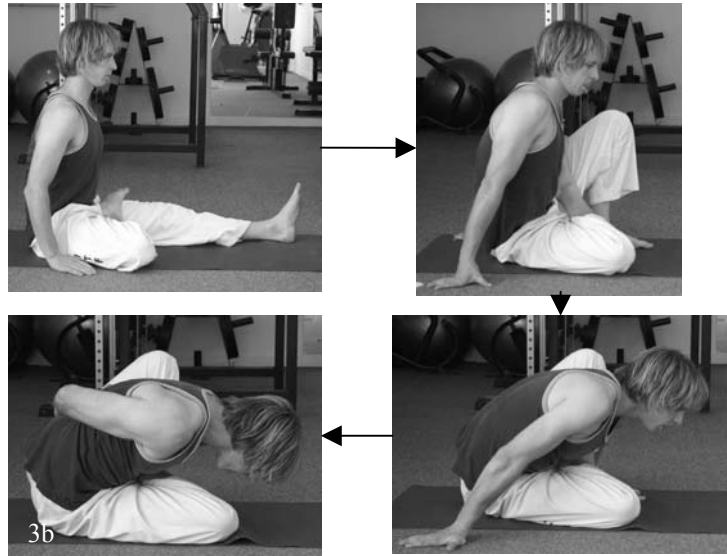
3a

- Sitting upright, bend right knee vertically
- Lean forward to stretch right arm around right knee
- Reach around back to grab left hand, **inhale**
- **Exhale** bend forward. **HOLD**, release and **repeat other side, JUMP BACK**



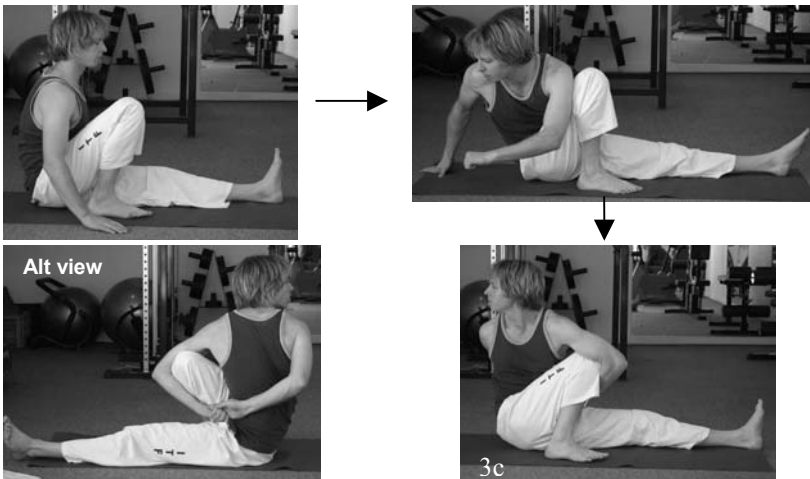
3b

- Sitting upright, lift right foot high up onto the left thigh
- Bend left knee to vertical
- Lean forward to stretch right arm around left knee
- Reach around back to grab left hand, **inhale**
- **Exhale** bend forward. **HOLD**, release and **repeat other side, JUMP BACK**



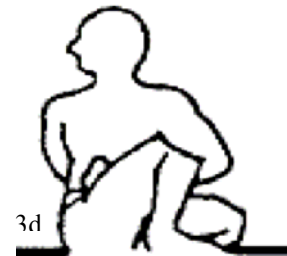
3c

- Sitting upright, bend right knee vertically, left knee out straight
- Twist torso to the right **outside** the right knee
- Bend the left arm around the knee
- Reach around back to grab right hand
- Turn head to the right to face away from body. **HOLD**, release and **repeat other side, JUMP BACK**



3d

- Perform 3b (left foot on right thigh) however instead of leaning forward twist torso as in 3c (to outside of vertical knee)
- Bend the left arm around the knee
- Reach around back to grab right hand
- Turn head to face away from body. **HOLD**, release and **repeat other side, JUMP BACK**



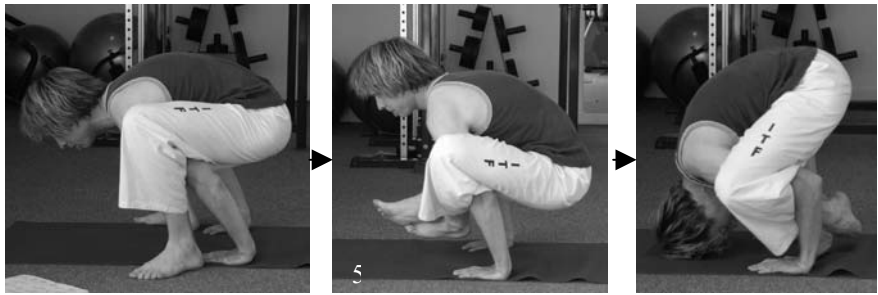
4

- From the neutral seated position lift the legs up with straight knees to 45 degrees
- Keeping spine straight also extend arms out parallel with the floor, balancing on sit-bones. **HOLD**, then release
- Cross the ankles and place palms down on mat either side of body
- Keeping crossed ankles off floor, lift body weight on hands (do not hold)
- Relax pelvis back to mat but keep feet off ground, straighten knees back into position, **HOLD**, Repeat 5x in total, **JUMP BACK**



5

- From 4 instead of jumping crossed ankles through, jump feet around **outside** of hands
- Work feet around and cross ankles
- Lift feet off mat supporting body on hands, **HOLD**
- Tilt body forward until head touches mat in front, release
- Uncross ankles and lift them one at a time back around hands. **JUMP BACK**



6a

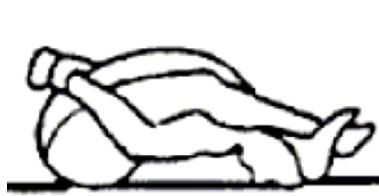
- From 5 jump feet back around outside of hands again, sit down on mat
- Stretch arms out to the sides under bent knees, **inhale**
- **Exhale**, straighten legs and bend forward, chest to floor. **HOLD**, release and move onto 6b



6a

6b

- From 6a bend knees back up and move arms backwards, lift arms up behind back to grab wrists
- With **instructors help** the ankles are lifted up and crossed behind head. **HOLD**, move straight onto 6c



6b

6c

- From 6b release wrists and place palms on floor beside the body
- With **instructors help** the body is swung up to upright supporting the weight on the hands. **HOLD**, release and **JUMP BACK**



6c

7a

- Sitting upright, pull both feet high up into the groin
- Use the hands to turn the soles upwards, **inhale**
- **Exhale** bend forward to touch chest on floor keeping the spine straight. **HOLD**, release then move onto 7b



7a

7b

- Keep feet as they were in 7a, roll pelvis back so weight is on the glutes instead of the sit-bones, **inhale**
- **Exhale** hunch forward (curving spine) to touch forehead to feet. **HOLD**
- Release and sit back up straight keep hands on feet. **HOLD**, release and **JUMP BACK**



7b



8a

- From the seated position spread the legs wide and grab the toes, **inhale**
- **Exhale** and bend forward to touch chest on ground. **HOLD**, move straight into 8b



8a

8b

- From 8a bend the knees in whilst still holding onto toes, **inhale**
- **Exhale**, straighten knees stretching feet up high and wide and balance on sit-bones. **HOLD**, release and **JUMP BACK**



8b

9a

- Lie straight down on back
- Lift feet with straight knees over head then out wide till feet touch ground
- Grab toes. **HOLD for 8 breaths**, then roll straight into 9b



9a

9b

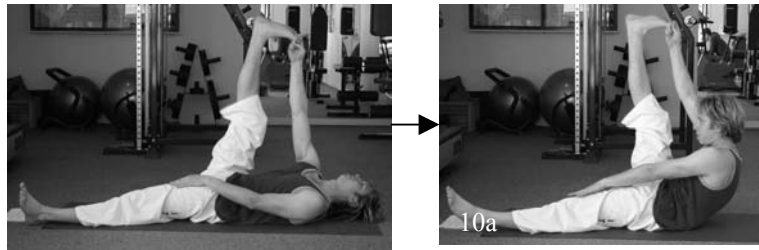
- From 9a bend knees then push up with feet to get momentum
- Roll up and over keeping straight knees, pull feet back so heels touch ground first, not heels
- Stretch forward into pose 8a and **HOLD for 1 breath**, release and **JUMP BACK**



9b

10a

- Roll onto back again
- **Inhale** and raise right leg up with straight knee, grab big toe with right thumb/forefinger
- **Exhale** lift torso up off mat, head to knee. **HOLD**, move straight onto 10b



10b

- From 10a lower the right leg out to the side as far as possible whilst keeping the pelvis flat on the mat
- Turn the head to face away, **HOLD**
- **Inhale** left the leg back to vertical
- **Exhale** lift torso up to knee (do not pause)
- **Inhale** lower torso to the floor
- **Exhale** lower leg to floor, **repeat 10a and 10b on left side**, release then **JUMP BACK**



11a

- Lying on back lift straight legs back over head till feet touch the bat
- Grab **ankles**, then move straight onto 11 b

11b

- From 11a use momentum to roll forward and up onto sit-bones, whilst still holding ankles
- Keep arms out straight and head up. **HOLD**, then release and **JUMP BACK**

11c

- Lying on back lift straight legs back over head again (as in 11a)
- Grab **feet** then move straight onto 11d

11d

- From 11c use momentum to roll forward and up onto sit-bones, whilst still holding feet
- Pull up to vertical. **HOLD**, release then **JUMP BACK**



Back Bending

1a

- Lying on back, bend knees up to vertical with feet still flat on the mat
- Grab both ankles, **inhale**
- **Exhale** lift pelvis high (mini-bridge) **HOLD**, release then move onto 1b (full bridge) if possible
- If not possible then repeat mini-bridge (**3x in total**)



1b

- Lying on back, bend knees up to vertical with feet still flat on the mat as in 1a
- Place palms beside head fingers pointing down mat, **inhale**
- **Exhale** lift pelvis high into a full 'bridge'. **HOLD** (try to not let knees flare out)
- Relax back down for 3 breaths then **repeat (3x in total)**



2

- From the back bends it is important to stretch forward again (counter-pose)
- From neutral sitting position, **inhale**
- **Exhale** bend forward to grab feet
- Instructor or partner supports the lower lumbar area and upper-back to emphasise the stretch by tilting the pelvis up and forward
- **HOLD for 15 breaths**, then release and move to 3



3

- Take rest, lying down flat on mat arms beside body
- Do not close eyes. **HOLD for 5 breaths only**



Finishing Asanas

1

- Either free-standing or up against the wall perform a full handstand
- **HOLD for 20 breaths**



2a

- From the lying position lift the legs up off the mat with feet together
- Lift the pelvis up off mat supporting the lower-back with the hands (the elbows should be in line with the shoulders)
- Lift legs/pelvis till as vertical as possible. **HOLD for 25 breaths**, release then move straight into 2b



2b

- From 2a slowly lower the legs back over the head with straight knees until the feet touch the ground
- Stretch the arms out along the mat and interlace the fingers. **HOLD for 10 breaths**, move straight onto 2c



2c

- From 2b keep the body in the same position and let the knees bend then lower them to the mat
- **HOLD for 10 breaths**, release and slowly lift the legs back up over head until lying flat again



2d

- A counter pose to the neck flexion of 2a-c
- From lying flat arch the back to rest weight on head
- Lift straight legs and pointed toes up to 45 degrees
- Lift arms to same angle with palms together. **HOLD for 10 breaths**



3

- Either free-standing or up against a wall perform a 'head stand'
- From kneeling position place elbows on mat with interlaced fingers
- Straighten legs and push weight on the elbows/forearms and top of head
- Balancing weight on elbows/forearms/head slowly lift straight legs up off mat into the vertical position, trying to straighten body as much as possible. **HOLD for 25 breaths**, then lift straighten shoulders to lift weight off head completely onto the elbows/forearms
- Release legs slowly back down to floor



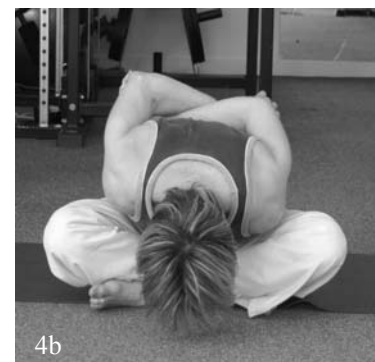
4a

- Sitting in either 'Full Lotus' (both feet crossed up onto thighs) or just easy cross-leg
- Grab opposing big toes behind back if possible otherwise grab opposing elbows. **HOLD for 10 breaths**, move onto 4b
- **Exhale** behind forward chest to floor. **HOLD for 10 breaths**
- Release and move straight into 4b



4b

- From 4a **inhale**
- **Exhale**, bend forward to touch chest to floor. **HOLD for 10 breaths**
- Release and move onto 4c



4c

- Still in 'full lotus' or cross-legged place both palms behind body with fingers pointing forwards
- Lean back and tilt head to look upwards. **HOLD for 10 breaths**
- Release and move onto 4d



4d

- From 4c place the backs of hands onto the knees
- Touch the forefinger and thumbs together only
- Keeping eyes open focus just to the point of the nose. **HOLD for 25 breaths**, move straight on to 4e



4e

- If 'full lotus' possible then place palms on mat on either side of body
- Lift body weight onto hands. **HOLD for 25 breaths**, release and take rest



TAKE REST!

- Great work it's all over! Time for a little lie down!
- Lying flat on mat with arms besides body
- Close eyes and focus on breathing
- **10 minutes**
- **NB** Do try not to fall asleep! This is almost impossible I have found ☺



There you have it! This is a full workout and generally takes about 1 ½ hours in total to complete. This series will stretch just about every major (and minor) skeletal muscle group that you have. To get maximal benefit the series should be performed at least twice a week for the serious Taekwon-Do practitioner.

The sitting asana (primary series) work a lot on hamstring and hip socket flexibility from various angles to fully engage the muscles (there are 3 muscle to each hamstring complex), this is important as in Taekwon-Do kicking as some of the kicks stretch the hamstrings when the pelvis is at different orientations i.e. it is much easier to stretch hamstrings one at a time because the pelvis does not remain fully 'square', as opposed to stretching both at same time e.g. twin foot front snap kick. The main point is to have 'inherent' flexibility so a technique can be delivered correctly and easily with out having to compromise (taking biomechanical shortcuts).

Taking the above point further, what I enjoy about yoga apart from the obvious is the when doing the poses you cannot take shortcuts to make them easier as there is a set way to perform them, and the timing is also set being relative to the instructor. This can only serve the Taekwon-Do student positively in remaining true to form whether it is in patterns, sparring (step, pre-arranged, model, free etc) or flexibility training thus preserving the beauty and efficiency of Taekwon-Do.

I hope this thesis will be of use to all students and instructors alike in supplementing their Taekwon-Do training or to help in the teaching of flexibility classes. I can highly recommend from personal experience to get along to your local 'Astanga Yoga' studio and start reaping the benefit of better flexibility for Taekwon-Do and for life, it is also a great party trick to be able to turn yourself into a 'Pretzel'.

Yours in Taekwon-Do and health,

Dr. Cameron J. Snelling (chiropractor)
III Dan Nibun ITF



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