MahaVajra

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Kuji-In in Daily Life

A practice with the nine seals

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INTRODUCTION

Your first few minutes

Begin with a gesture and a few words.

What you are practicing

Kuji-In means the Nine Hand Seals. A seal joins something you do with your body to something you want to understand. Take trust. You can explain what trust means and still hesitate when it is time to act. In the first seal you learn to recognize the feeling of being able to count on yourself. Once you know that feeling, you can notice when it is present, when you lose it, and what you can do next.

The nine seals give you nine subjects to explore in this way. Each has a Japanese name, a hand position and a short expression. Start with RIN. There is plenty to learn from one gesture held comfortably for a few minutes. You can practice sitting on a chair, whatever your age, experience or religious background.

Settle the body and breath

Sit with your weight supported. Let your shoulders drop and rest your elbows where you can bring your hands together easily. Weave your fingers loosely and extend the two middle fingers until their tips meet. This is RIN. Notice where your fingers touch. Ease the pressure until you can keep the shape and breathe comfortably. Rest the hands whenever they need it.

In my second book, Qi-Gong and Kuji-In, I begin with the body because you can feel what it is doing. Qi is the traditional Chinese word for the energy we work with in these exercises. To begin, put one hand on the lower belly. Let it move outward a little as you breathe in and settle as you breathe out. Keep the shoulders quiet. When you form the seal again, let that easy movement continue on its own.

There is a lesson here from Kung-Fu training. When learning a form, you go slowly enough to notice an unnecessary effort. Try it with your hands. Form RIN once while watching your fingers. Release it, then form it again and feel what happens in your jaw and shoulders. You may discover you tightened a muscle that had nothing to do with the gesture. Let it rest. That small correction is something you can carry into the next repetition.

How the five parts fit together

The hand gesture is the mudra. It gives you a physical way to recognize the practice. The focus point, called a chakra in this teaching, tells you where to place your attention. The mandala is the image you hold in mind. In RIN, you feel the base of the body and imagine red light there. Feeling the contact with your seat and imagining a colour are two different things. You can do both, even if the colour is quite faint.

The mantra gives your voice a part in the practice. The fifth part is the teaching you contemplate, called dharma. In RIN that teaching is trust. Recall an occasion when you followed through on a decision. Once you recognize the feeling, let the details of the occasion fade. You can stay with the feeling for a breath before you say another word.

Learn two parts first. Hold the gesture and say the English phrase. When you can do that without checking every finger, add the focus point. Bring in the image when you are ready. If the image occupies so much attention that you forget the quality, simplify the next repetition. You will learn more from two parts you can feel than from racing to remember five instructions.

Why chant a mantra?

A mantra is a short sequence of sounds you repeat aloud or inwardly. RIN is the Japanese name of the seal. Its English phrase, “I meet myself,” gives you access to the philosophy. The Sanskrit mantra is a separate recitation. The English phrases in this guide express what you are practicing. They are philosophical adaptations, so reading one will not tell you the literal meaning of each Sanskrit word.

Try saying “I meet myself” once at a comfortable volume. Listen to the words as you say them. Pause long enough to notice how you actually feel. Then repeat them with that feeling in mind. Speaking involves your breath, your mouth and your hearing in one act. When your thoughts wander, the sound gives you a familiar place to come back to. In silent recitation, you can follow the same sounds inwardly.

Read a new Sanskrit line slowly with the page open. Breathe wherever you need to, including partway through a long line. When the sounds become familiar, give more of your attention to the teaching they accompany. You can stay with English while you learn the hand positions. Practice when you can give it your attention, and finish the sitting before returning to driving or other work that needs your eyes and hands.

CHAPTER 1

RIN · Trust

Meet the person who is here today.

What does it mean to trust yourself?

Self-trust begins with knowing how you respond when you have a choice to make. Some of us tense before we even know what we are worried about. Others answer quickly and discover their hesitation a moment later. RIN gives you time to notice that first response. Once you recognize it, you can decide whether you need more information or whether you are ready to act.

Say, “I meet myself.” What is there to meet? Start with what you can feel right now. Your hands may be steady while your belly feels tight. You may be interested in the exercise and unsure of doing it correctly. Both can be present. If you can acknowledge the uncertainty and still make one deliberate movement, you have a small, real experience of trusting yourself.

Form the first seal

Interlace your fingers. Extend both middle fingers side by side and bring their tips together. Rest your arms at a comfortable height. Ease the fingers apart a little if the joint feels strained. Check the shape against the photograph once, then notice whether you can recognize the gesture by touch.



RIN seen from the front



RIN seen from the side

Bring your attention to the perineum, the soft area at the base of the body between the genitals and the anus. Leave the muscles there at rest. Imagine a small ball of red light pulsing there. Over a few easy breaths, picture its light filling the pelvis and reaching the tailbone. As you finish, gather the light back into the original point. Knowing where you intend it to be is enough when an image is faint.

In the Qi-Gong teaching, the image at the base is a fire you nourish. Try attending to the same place through a whole breath. Notice whether your jaw tightens when you decide to stay there. You can keep the decision and release the extra effort. This lets you feel the difference between holding your attention and bracing your body.

The Sanskrit mantra

Om vajramanataya swaha

The explanations of all nine mantras in this book are very brief. The philosophy goes much deeper with practice. Here is a place to start. Recall one thing you know you can do, however small. Hold the gesture and recite the line with that sense of being dependable. When you finish saying it, stay with the feeling for one breath. The next time you practice, begin with what you recognize from today.

Find out what you can count on

Choose one ordinary action you have been putting off. Identify the part you know how to do, such as opening a document and writing its first sentence. Do that part. Afterward, ask what you learned about the moment of hesitation. Did you need an instruction, some time, or simply a beginning? Your answer gives you something more specific to trust the next time you face a similar choice.

CHAPTER 2

KYO · Responsibility

Find the part of a situation you can change.

Find your part

Responsibility becomes easier to understand when you separate what happened, what you did, and what you can influence now. If you missed an appointment, the time has passed. You can still make a call. Blaming yourself may take ten minutes without changing anything. Making the call takes one of the means available to you and puts it to use.

KYO follows trust because it asks you to do something with the capacity you recognized in RIN. Look closely at the word “my” in “my responsibility.” Other people make decisions of their own. You can ask a clear question, change how you speak or withdraw from an exchange. You can also acknowledge the effect of something you did, including a good effect. Knowing which part belongs to you keeps your effort useful.

Follow the movement outward

Bring your hands together. Point both index fingers upward and curve the middle fingers over them. Bring the thumb tips together and weave the remaining fingers. Use the photograph to find the arrangement, then let your wrists settle.



KYO seen from the front



The folded fingers of KYO

Bring your attention to the lower abdomen, between the pelvis and the navel. Picture a small orange sun there, radiating light in every direction. Let the belly move gently with your breath. In Qi-Gong, the inner region of the lower belly is called the Dan-tian, a place where Qi is gathered in practice. For KYO, keep the centre in one place and allow the imagined light to travel outward. That distinction gives you a way to feel where an action begins and the direction it takes.

Say, “Many means and methods.” Let one possible response come to mind. Keep breathing long enough to find a second. For example, you can give an answer now, or ask for the information that would let you give a better answer tomorrow. The second possibility often becomes apparent when you stop insisting that the first one has to work.

The Sanskrit mantra

Om isha naya yantraya swaha

As you recite, consider the tone in which you are about to act. A sharp voice and a calm voice can carry exactly the same request. In the Qi-Gong teaching of KYO, what you send outward matters. You can observe this directly by listening to your voice and, later, by paying attention to the reply. Leave room for the other person to surprise you.

Check the effect

Choose one action that is actually yours to take. Once you have taken it, compare the effect you intended with what happened. If your instructions were misunderstood, ask which part was unclear. That answer shows you which words to change. Responsibility includes the freedom to adjust what you do when the result teaches you something.

CHAPTER 3

TOH · Harmony

Give a feeling time to make itself known.

How a feeling becomes a reaction

A feeling can arrive before you have words for it. You may notice pressure in the belly, then the thought “I’m annoyed,” then the urge to interrupt. These belong to one experience, yet they give you different information. The sensation tells you something has stirred. The words are your first explanation. The urge points toward an action that is still yours to choose.

TOH is the practice of letting that experience be felt. Harmony is possible even while something is unpleasant. Begin with a mild feeling you can stay with comfortably. Give it enough time to notice whether it changes. You may discover that some of the tension came from trying to make the feeling disappear before anyone noticed it.

Give the feeling room

Fold the index and middle fingers of both hands inward and interlace them. Extend the thumbs, ring fingers and little fingers as shown in the photograph. Let your abdomen move easily as you breathe. Give your attention to the inside of the belly.



TOH seen from the front



The finger pairs of TOH

Ask, “Who am I?” For this sitting, let the question direct you back to your immediate experience. Imagine golden-yellow sunlight shining from inside the abdomen and spreading through the inside of the body. In KYO the light moved outward. Here you let it reach the places within you that you usually pass over. Include the tight spot as well as the places that feel easy.

If all you hear is an explanation of why you feel this way, set that explanation aside for a breath. Where is the sensation now? Does it have a clear edge, or is it spread out? It is fine if it stays exactly as it was. Allowing it to stay gives you a chance to learn what it feels like without having to defend it.

The Sanskrit mantra

Om jita rashi yatra jiva ratna swaha

Recite the line and let the sound occupy your voice while you listen inwardly. The second book brings humility to this seal. You can respect an obstacle without spending all your energy fighting it. Try that with an uncomfortable feeling. Once you stop opposing its presence, see what choices are still open to you.

Take the pause into conversation

Notice one urge to answer quickly. Finish listening. Feel the movement in your belly for a breath, then choose your first sentence. Perhaps you need to say, “I disagree.” Perhaps you need another minute. Later, recall the point at which you became aware of the urge. Recognizing it a little earlier is a practical change you can carry from one conversation to the next.

CHAPTER 4

SHA · Power

Let a quiet decision lead to action.

How an intention becomes an action

In TOH you asked, “Who am I?” In SHA you answer, “I AM.” Say the words and stop there for a moment. You are here before you add a description of what you do well or what you would like to change. From that starting point you can ask a practical question. What do you choose to do?

A decision and the excitement of making it are different experiences. Excitement can fade long before the job is done. Personal power includes being able to return to a decision once the excitement has passed. Choose something small enough to feel what happens as you decide, start, pause if necessary, and return. This is how determination becomes familiar in the body.

Let the light come outward

Extend the thumbs, index fingers and little fingers. Fold the middle and ring fingers inward and interlace them. Compare the gesture with TOH. The change in which fingers extend gives your hands a clear signal that the exercise has changed. Place your arms so that your shoulders can stay loose.



SHA seen from the front



SHA seen from the side

Bring your attention to the solar plexus, the soft area just below the breastbone. Let the golden-yellow light that filled your body in TOH shine outward from this point. In the second book, the solar plexus is described as a place from which energy is distributed. Here you can work with that image by letting a clear decision take a direction. Keep breathing easily as you say, “I AM.”

If you find yourself pushing your chest forward to feel stronger, let it settle and repeat the words. Does the decision still feel clear? Try a quieter voice. Removing effort that does nothing for your decision leaves more attention for the action itself.

The Sanskrit mantra

Om haya vajramanataya swaha

Recite with one action in mind and consider who will feel its effects. Strength includes taking responsibility for what your decision sets in motion. At the end of the line, name one way to carry it out with care. Sometimes that means speaking firmly. Sometimes it means choosing a time when you can give the matter your full attention.

An engagement with yourself

Make a small agreement with yourself for today. Give it a beginning and an end you will recognize. “After lunch I’ll write one paragraph” is clear enough to check. At the end of the day, find out whether you kept that engagement. If you did, notice what made it workable. If you missed it, identify the point at which your plan stopped fitting the day. You can make a smaller agreement tomorrow and try again.

CHAPTER 5

KAI · Self

Give yourself the care you give to someone you love.

Why care for yourself?

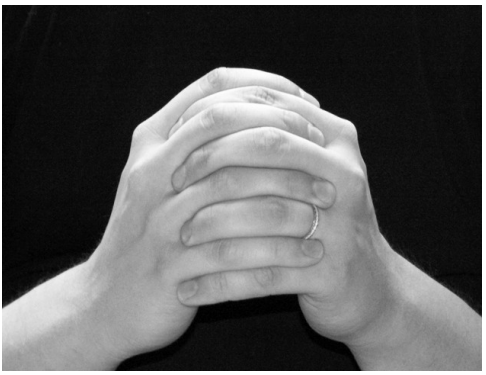
You know your own experience from the inside. You feel your hunger before anyone else knows you are hungry. You hear the words you use against yourself even when you say nothing aloud. This gives you a particular responsibility. You can notice a need while it is still small and decide how to respond to it. This is where the practice of self-love begins.

People differ in skill, health and circumstance. None of those differences gives us a scale for measuring one human being against another. A beginner can make a mistake that an experienced person would avoid. What follows from that? The beginner needs instruction. The mistake tells you what to teach. It tells you nothing about how much love either person may receive. Apply the same reasoning when the mistake is yours.

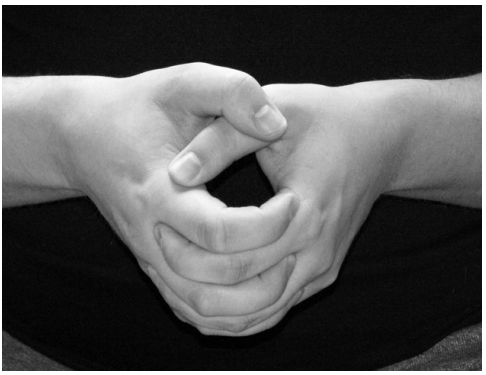
Self-love is a willingness to stay on your own side long enough to understand what you need. Self-care is the action you take with that understanding. You might need rest. You might need to acknowledge something you did and make it right. In both cases you can care for yourself while taking the effect of your actions on others seriously.

Bring your attention to the heart

Interlace all your fingers. Let each fingertip rest at the base of the corresponding finger of the opposite hand. Use a light touch. Bring your attention to the centre of the chest. Imagine golden sunlight warming the heart area, then picture a blue sphere around the whole body. Give the warmth a little time, even if all you can feel physically is your breathing.



KAI seen from the front



The clasp of KAI

Say, “I am complete.” You can be a whole person and still need rest, instruction or company. Let the phrase include the part of you that is having difficulty today. Notice what happens if you say “I’m tired” and leave off the usual second sentence about how much you should have accomplished. For one breath, there is a need in front of you that you can actually address.

The Sanskrit mantra

Om namah samanta vajranam ham

In the second book, I call the KAI gesture the outer bonds. It brings attention to how the world reaches you through your own experience. A voice gets louder and your chest tightens. The tightness is something you can feel; the other person’s intention is something you may need to ask about. As you recite, let the blue sphere include both your awareness of the room and the warmth at your heart. Caring for yourself can make you more available to what is happening around you.

Choose the care that fits

Ask three short questions. What do I feel? What might I need? What can I do about it now? If you notice tiredness, closing your eyes briefly may tell you more than another minute spent criticizing your pace. If you notice loneliness, a message asking for company may fit better than going to bed early. After you act, check what changed. Self-care gets more precise as you learn from your own answers.

CHAPTER 6

JIN · Understanding

Give an idea a second hearing.

What does understanding feel like?

You can remember a sentence word for word and still have trouble using the idea it contains. Understanding becomes easier to recognize when you try to put something into practice. Take the instruction to relax your hands. You might repeat it many times. The moment you discover you can ease your grip and keep the fingers in position, you know something directly. You could show it with your hands before finding the words to explain it.

JIN develops attention to that moment of recognition. In the second book I describe an aspect of understanding that takes place before words. You can explore it with an ordinary thought. Bring to mind the shape of a cup. You recognize what it is and how you could hold it. Wait a breath before naming it. Notice how much of the idea was already there.

Give an idea time to take shape

Interlace your fingers and fold the fingertips inward into the space between your palms. Let each fingertip meet its partner from the opposite hand where it reaches comfortably. In KAI the fingertips rested at the bases of the other fingers. In JIN they meet inside the hands. In the second book this gesture is called the inner bonds. It can remind you to listen for how an idea takes shape within you.



JIN seen from the front



Inside the clasp of JIN

Bring your attention to the base of your throat, the slight hollow above the breastbone. Keep the blue sphere from KAI glowing around your whole body. Say, “I understand.” Feel how the words are formed, then allow a pause after them. You can remain interested in an idea even while part of it escapes you.

Try this with something you are learning. Recall one instruction. Let its meaning come to mind, then put it into words of your own. Where do your words become vague? Go back to that part. A gap you can identify is easier to explore than a whole subject you have dismissed as too difficult.

The Sanskrit mantra

Om agnaya yanmaya swaha

Recite the Sanskrit line without composing your explanation at the same time. Let the sound finish. Notice what remains of the idea when you are quiet. When you return to a conversation, offer what you understood in one sentence and give the other person a chance to correct it. Their answer is how you check your impression.

Try the idea in a new place

Choose an idea from this book and put it to use outside the sitting. For example, you learned in KYO to identify the part of an outcome you could influence. Try applying that to a change in your day’s schedule. If you can recognize the same principle in a different situation, you have learned more than the wording of the exercise.

CHAPTER 7

RETSU · Perception

Look again from where someone else stands.

How attention selects a view

What you notice depends partly on where you direct your attention. Look at one object close to you. Its edges and details become easy to describe. Keep your eyes in the same position and notice the space around it. Something that was present all along may now come into awareness. The room has stayed the same. You changed the size of the view you were attending to.

The same selection happens when you remember an event. A remark that upset you may be the part you remember most clearly. You may have missed what happened just before it. RETSU gives you practice in moving between a detail and its setting. This also helps you recognize the point at which observation ends and interpretation begins.

Work with two distances

Make a loose fist with your left hand and extend the left index finger upward. Wrap the right fingers around the raised finger. Bring the tips of your right thumb and right index finger to the tip of the left index finger. Use the photograph to check the orientation, then let your hands rest at an easy height.



RETSU seen from the front



The fingertip contact of RETSU

Bring attention to the bony point at the back of the head where the skull meets the neck. In the second book this focus is called the Jade Gate. Direct your attention there gently while your head stays level. Say, “Many levels.” Picture the blue sphere turning white and dividing in two. Let the outer sphere grow wider. Let the inner one draw in until it follows the shape of your body.

Begin with the nearer boundary. Notice the space your hands and body occupy. Then include the larger space around you. If holding both images at once is difficult, move between them. Eventually you may be able to keep the nearer one in mind while allowing the wider one to remain in the background. That change in attention is the exercise.

The Sanskrit mantra

Om jyota-hi chandoga jiva tay swaha

Recite with the wider space in mind. Then give the nearer space a repetition. Notice which one you tend to lose when you attend to the other. The philosophy of RETSU invites you to allow for more than your present view can contain. In daily life that means leaving room to learn something that your current position makes hard to see.

Check an interpretation

Use two short sentences about one real event. In the first, say what you observed. “My question received no answer.” In the second, say what you took that to mean. “I thought the person was annoyed.” Look for one piece of information that would help you tell. You can ask whether your question was heard. A wider view sometimes begins with that small distinction.

CHAPTER 8

ZAI · Creativity

See what happens when one condition changes.

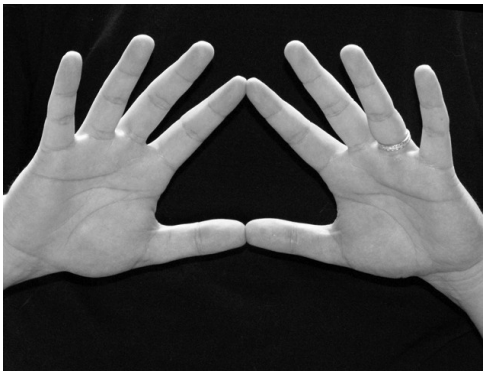
Why a first idea can crowd out a second

As soon as you recognize a problem, a familiar solution often comes to mind. Familiarity is useful. It lets you get ordinary things done. It also makes it easy to accept the first possibility before you have seen what else could work. ZAI asks you to spend a little time with the conditions of the problem while the answer is still open.

Creativity begins with a change you can make. A task might require a quiet place, but does it have to be done at a particular hour? It might require two people, but do they have to be in the same room? Changing one condition at a time helps you see which limits belong to the task and which came with your first idea.

Give imagination space

Face your palms forward and spread the fingers. Let the tips of both thumbs meet, then bring the tips of both index fingers together. The thumbs and index fingers outline a triangle. Leave the other fingers open. Hold the gesture at a height where your shoulders can rest.



The open triangle of ZAI

Bring attention to the centre of your forehead at the upper bridge of the nose. Say, “Everything, everywhere.” Picture white in every direction. In RETSU you distinguished the nearer and farther spheres. For ZAI, let their outlines disappear until the whole field is white. If the outline of an object comes back, allow it to fade and return to the open field. You can remember the idea of white space even with a faint image.

In the second book, ZAI invites contemplation of the elements of creation. Begin with a property you can observe. Water takes the shape of the space that holds it. In a practical problem, what could change shape while keeping its purpose? Allow one such question to occupy your attention after the sitting. It gives imagination something definite to work with.

The Sanskrit mantra

Om srija iva rutaya swaha

Keep the field open while you recite. You can leave an unfinished idea unfinished through one repetition. That small interval of uncertainty gives a second possibility time to appear. If nothing occurs to you, finish your sitting anyway. Leave the choosing and testing for the work that follows.

Test one possibility

Write down the result you want in one sentence. Name two ways you could try for it. Choose the smallest part of one idea that can be tried today. For instance, before reorganizing a whole room, clear one work surface and use it once. See what became easier and what you had to reach for. What you learn from a small trial can change the next idea.

CHAPTER 9

ZEN · Peace

Let the practice come to rest.

How to let an exercise end

In the first eight seals you gave your attention something to do. You formed gestures, repeated sounds and built images. In ZEN you bring those activities to a close. There is a moment after the last sound when you can hear the room again. Give that moment your attention without immediately filling it with another instruction.

The word for contemplation here is “Perfection.” You can understand it through completion. A breath comes to its end. For that instant there is nothing you have to add to make it a completed breath. You may still have unfinished work and feelings to attend to later. You can let this particular act be complete.

Release the image

Open your right hand, palm up. Curl the fingers of your left hand loosely and rest their knuckles on the fingers of your right hand. Bring the thumb tips together lightly. Settle your hands in your lap. Notice that they can keep the gesture with very little effort.



The resting hands of ZEN

Give your attention to the whole upper part of the head. In the language of Qi-Gong and Kuji-In, this is the crown. Recall the white field from ZAI. Then stop renewing it. An image held in mind tends to change or fade when you give it nothing more to do. Let that happen. Even the wish to see whether it has faded can be allowed to pass.

The second book closes with a meditation on “no mind.” A mind that has been busy learning needs time to settle. Trying to push out each thought gives you a fresh task every time a thought arises. When you notice a thought, let it be there. You do not have to supply its next sentence. Keep breathing and see what happens when you leave it alone.

The Sanskrit mantra

Om arapacana dhi

Recite the line softly. Listen all the way through the final syllable. Let your mouth relax and stay with the silence that follows. Sound in the room can be part of that rest. If you start another repetition automatically, finish it gently and pause again. You are learning that you can give attention freely and also let it rest.

Return to ordinary activity

Open your hands. Notice the support beneath your feet and seat. Look around the room before you stand. If something needs to be done, choose the first action and give it your attention. One everyday sign of this practice is being able to stop rehearsing a finished task long enough to be present for the next one. That is a modest, quite usable experience of peace.

REVIEW PRACTICE

Sitting with the nine seals

Bring the nine gestures together, then take the practice into your day.

Put the nine seals together

Once you recognize the gestures individually, practice them in order. Let each seal last long enough to recall its teaching. When you finish a recitation, ease your fingers apart. Find the next hand position before adding the new words and focus point. These small transitions help you notice which part of the previous seal continues and which part changes.

Begin with RIN. Feel the base of the body, picture the red light gathering and recognize the quality of trust. In KYO, bring attention to the lower belly and let orange light radiate outward as you consider what you can do. In TOH, feel inside the belly and let the golden light spread within. Allow your feelings time to become clear. In SHA, the same gold shines outward from the solar plexus. Give a decision a direction.

In KAI, let the gold warm the heart and picture the blue sphere around you. Ask what you need and consider one act of care. In JIN, keep the blue sphere, move attention to the base of the throat, and listen for the understanding that comes before words. In RETSU, bring attention to the back of the head. The sphere turns white and divides. Include both the nearer view and the wider space.

In ZAI, give attention to the forehead. Let the outlines dissolve into white in every direction. Leave room for a possibility you have yet to imagine. In ZEN, rest the left knuckles in the right hand and bring attention to the upper head. Let the image and the recitation come to an end. Give yourself a few quiet breaths before you get up.

Where to spend another minute

Ask yourself which part was hardest to keep in mind. If you lost the hand position, look at the photograph and form it slowly once more. If the words came easily but you forgot the teaching, put the words aside for a moment. Recall one time you felt the quality, then recite with that experience in mind. These are different difficulties. They call for different adjustments.

You can also choose a seal because of something that is happening in your life. If you have a decision to make, give SHA a little more time. If you keep overlooking how tired you feel, spend that time with KAI. On a day when you have only a few minutes, a careful sitting with one seal is a complete practice in its own right.

Notice what carries over

At the end, record one thing you observed in the sitting and one thing you tried afterward. Be specific enough that you can recognize a change when it happens. “My hands relaxed while the decision stayed clear.” Later, “I kept the agreement I made for this afternoon.” In a week, those two lines will tell you more about your practice than a score for how well you meditated.

For a fuller explanation of the five parts of each seal, I recommend Kuji-In for Everyone. If the connection between movement, breathing and meditation interests you, continue with Qi-Gong and Kuji-In. It develops the Qi-Gong exercises and the philosophy behind these nine practices. When you put the book down, form one seal and give it your attention. Let something you learned in this sitting find its way into your day.