In addition to the psychic centers, there are 12 pathways of energy at the surface of the body called *meridians* (refer to Chapter 18). The 12 pathways take their names from the specific inner organs to which they correspond. The development of the T’ai Chi postures and movements are related to these meridians in the human body. The transition from one posture to the next, combined with breathing, reflects the flow of energy through these meridians.

The importance of breathing techniques has long been stressed in Chinese medicine as a means of preventing illness, prolonging youth, and achieving longevity. The rationale behind this is that the air we breathe contains many other essential elements besides oxygen, such as iron, copper, zinc, fluorite, quartz, zincite, and magnesium, and that the combination of exercise and breathing provides an efficient and effective method of taking these precious elements in and getting rid of wastes and poisons. It is believed that the breathing techniques of abdominal or “inner” breathing facilitate the flow of energy throughout the body. Inhalation “stores” energy while exhalation “releases” energy.

As previously mentioned, the classic methods of T’ai Chi combine movement with breathing. The movements are performed to assist and guide the circulation of vital energy (ch’i) through the 8 channels and 12 meridians. The mind consciously “lifts” the energy during inward breathing from the solar plexus region, which is considered the central energy source of the body. During