

The background of the cover features a large, stylized Taijitu (Yin-Yang symbol) in shades of orange and yellow. A hand is positioned in the center, with fingers spread, appearing to hold or channel energy. The overall aesthetic is warm and energetic.

KEN COHEN

THE  
ESSENTIAL

# Qigong

TRAINING  
GUIDE

*Strong as the Mountain,  
Supple as Water*



## AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR

This book is designed to accompany and complement Ken Cohen's home study audio-visual program: *The Essential Qigong Training Course: 100 Days to Increase Energy, Physical Health, and Spiritual Well-Being*. Please demonstrate your appreciation for the hard work of the author, artists, and publisher by respecting the copyright and not scanning, duplicating, or in other ways copying these materials.

This program is offered for education and personal development only and is not intended to diagnose, prevent, or treat disease, nor to substitute for therapy by a licensed health-care professional. Please seek the advice of your physician before beginning any personal health care program. Educate your doctor about the benefits of qigong, and make him or her a partner in your progress. Health-care providers are encouraged to incorporate these methods in a complementary care program or, where appropriate, as tools for patient education.

Qigong is a method of self-care and is most effective when part of a healthy lifestyle. You will not benefit from qigong if you are indulging in an unhealthy diet, drinking too much alcohol, or using recreational drugs.

Though it should be obvious, please note that it is dangerous to practice the meditations on this program while driving. You may certainly listen to the CDs in your car in order to familiarize yourself with instructions, but it would be foolish to try to practice at that time. Meditation, and qigong in general, requires an environment free of distraction.



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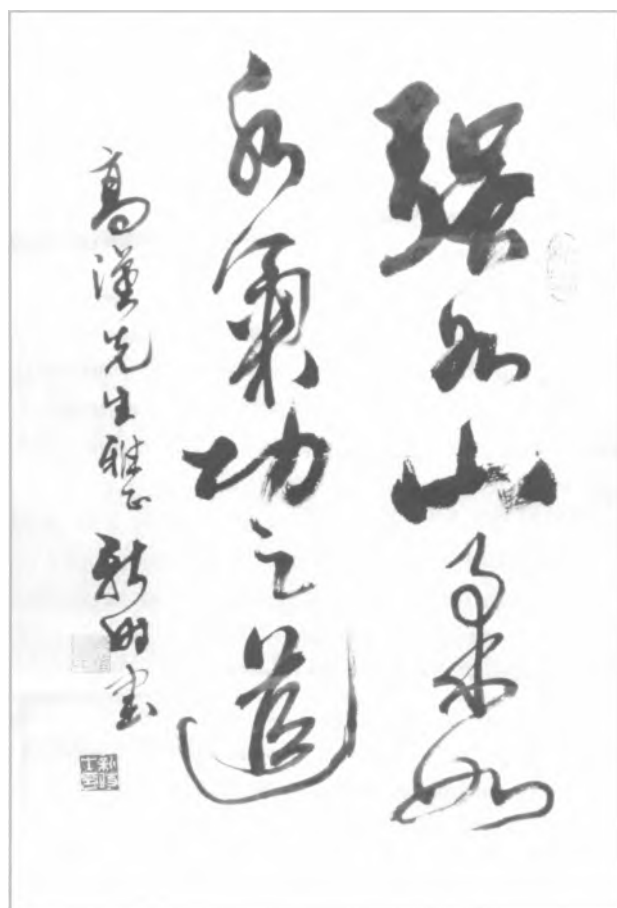
## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCING QIGONG: A TREE WITH MANY BRANCHES

Qigong, pronounced "chee gung," is a Chinese term consisting of two components. *Qi* means

life energy and breath, the essence of life. *Gong* has several meanings, including work, skill, or the benefits and merit gained from any activity. Qigong is thus "qi work." It is an ancient Chinese system of exercise and meditation that makes the mind and spirit tranquil, improves performance in sports such as the martial arts, and cultivates health, well-being, and long life. Thus, there are three major kinds of qigong: spiritual, sports, and healing.

### Spiritual Qigong: One with the Universe

Qigong is a spiritual discipline, inspired by ancient Chinese shamans, Taoists, and Buddhists, all of whom sought harmony and peace in the solitude of nature. Through qigong, spiritual seekers learn to unify the qi within their bodies with "primordial breath of Heaven and Earth," the spirit and energy of the universe. Because of their connection with these forces, qigong students are able to replenish themselves when vitality is low. Qigong also increases artistic sensitivity and expressiveness. The qigong practitioner feels as though Nature uses his or her eyes to see herself. The pine tree expresses its life, its qi, through the painter's brush or the poet's words. A great painting, like a great poem, pulses with life energy. It has *qi yun* "qi rhythm."



There is also a very practical reason why Chinese monks have always promoted and practiced qigong. Qigong exercises prevent the physical stagnation and mental imbalance that may result from *excessive* meditation. According to Taoism, too much spiritual practice (*xing*) results in stagnation, atrophy, weakness, and delusional

states. For example, I once met a Chinese monk who had spent nearly two decades meditating in a cave. He was an expert at harmonizing internal qi but had lost the ability to have a harmonious conversation with a friend. He was not enlightened but, rather, obsessed with himself. Buddhists, who disparage fundamentalism, would say that he "stunk of Zen."

On the other hand, too much exercise (*ming*) and not enough meditation dulls the mind and spirit. For optimal health, we need body and spirit, exercise and meditation, awareness of the inner world and the outer. In other words, health requires balance and moderation. The goal of qigong may be summarized as *xing ming shuang silt*, "spirit and body equally refined and cultivated." Cultivate your whole being, as you would cultivate a garden—with attention, care, and even love.

### The Way of Sports: Golfing Anyone?

Qigong is a powerful way to improve every aspect of sports performance. The various exercises and meditations increase strength, stamina, speed, flexibility, coordination, sensitivity, and precision. A martial artist who practices qigong is able to anticipate and avoid his opponent's strikes and has more power in his punch. A qigong tennis player is lighter on her feet and spots holes in her partner's defense. A swimmer uses qigong to improve coordination and loosen the muscles for longer and quicker strokes. I have trained golf pros who increased their drive by fifty yards after only a few months of qigong. Qigong teaches the supple waist and whole-body-coordinated-power (*zheng ti jin*) necessary for sports excellence. A more powerful qigong routine can give an athlete the competitive edge.

In addition, athletes who practice qigong are less likely to suffer broken bones, bruises, or other sports-related injuries. And if an injury occurs, the qigong practitioner recovers more quickly. Of course, there are limits to toughness and resilience. Because of better bone density, if a qigong student falls on the ice or is tackled in Football, he is less likely than an untrained person to be injured. However, this does not mean that he can repel bullets or should take illogical risks. During the Boxer Rebellion, no amount of qigong made the Chinese martial artists invulnerable! A qigong person accepts his or her mortality.

### Healing Qigong: The Importance of Practice

There are two kinds of healing qigong: **Personal Healing Qigong**, the best known aspect, prevents illness, improves health, and is a powerful and enjoyable way for healthy people to enhance their vitality and well-being. With more than 100 million practitioners, personal healing qigong is the most widely practiced form of complementary and alternative medicine in the world. It is also the most scientifically tested.

The other kind of healing qigong, called **External Qi Healing** (*Wai Qi Liao Fa*), is a kind of Chinese Therapeutic Touch in which the healer attempts to assess the qi of a patient, client, or partner and to project healing qi through his or her hands to restore balance. The healer holds her hands near the patient's body and makes various therapeutic gestures, such as circling the hands in the air or "tapping," as though sprinkling qi onto the patient through the finger tips. Principles and techniques from External Qi Healing work well with other healing therapies, such as massage therapy or acupuncture. A masseur who knows how to project qi through his hands is much more effective than one who does not have this skill.

Personal practice and experience are the basis of EQH. An energy healer cannot heal a patient unless he or she can feel the qi. EQH is more than a technology; it is as much art as science.

In this book, when I speak of "qigong," you may assume that I am referring to Personal Healing Qigong. However, because Personal Healing Qigong and External Qi Healing are based on the same philosophy and principles of posture, breathing, and mindfulness, most of the information will be relevant to both disciplines.



Ken Cohen practicing qi healing

## Repair, Restore, Rejuvenate

Experimental evidence demonstrates that qigong may be an effective adjunct in the treatment of chronic pain, asthma, arthritis, diabetes, headaches, gastrointestinal disorders, chronic fatigue, and, very importantly, cancer and heart disease—the two major killers of our time. In spite of the miracles of medical science, our

ability to prevent or cure these two epidemics has been deadlocked for more than sixty years.

Mortality rates from heart disease have fallen one to two percent per year—perhaps from earlier detection and subsequent lifestyle adjustments—but arterial disease is more widespread than ever. According to United States government statistics, by age *twenty*, there are signs of cardiovascular disease in half of the American population.

The age-adjusted mortality rate for cancer has remained the same since the 1940s; one third of all Americans will contract cancer during their lifetime. Yet, we do not have to wait for God to roll the dice. In fact, a hopeless and helpless attitude can fuel tumor growth and cause the arteries to harden more quickly. Through qigong practice, we can take control of our health. Although life is always a gamble, and no therapy is certain, qigong can shift the odds in favor of a long and healthy life.

Qigong is based on the premise that the human body is an energy system. As long as it has energy or qi, it is alive; when energy is gone, it is dead. This makes good scientific sense. A living cell has an electric charge; differences in electric potential allow nutrients to flow in and out of the cell and messages to pass through the nervous system. Like a computer, the electrical signaling system can become corrupted through "incompatible programs"—pollution, poor diet, stress. Or the electric signals and information they carry may become fragmented and ineffective as a simple consequence of aging. The body's "wiring" becomes frayed and circuits are broken after long-term use. Qigong is like a computer repair utility that optimizes the body's energy, shifting data to make it more accessible. It also mends the "wiring" (the nervous system) and restores

the body's original "system." This system is the body's healing program, the body's innate ability to repair itself.

Our ancestors probably had a better ability to heal themselves than modern people. Yes, they had stresses, but a saber-toothed tiger attacks only for a moment. Ancient peoples were not subject to the prolonged stress of air, water, land, noise, and light pollution, or overcrowding and poverty. Anthropologists have documented that Paleolithic peoples were taller, stronger, and had more competent immune systems than their civilized descendants. The system that qigong restores is not the one from childhood, but the one from humanity's childhood, an ancient genetic code for health that remains largely dormant in the modern world.

Put in Chinese terms, qigong exercises and meditations improve health because of three effects on the qi, the life energy. Qigong:

- Cleanses the qi of impurities, pathogens, and toxins.
- Gathers the qi, creating a reservoir of healing vitality in the body.
- **Circulates** the qi, opening places of stagnation and blockage, where the energy channels are dammed. As qi moves, it becomes clearer and healthier, like a rapidly flowing mountain stream. Healthy qi is distributed to areas of disease or distress.

These qualities are not just theoretical. The qigong practitioner learns to actually sense energy in the body. He or she is able to detect when qi is turbid, depleted, excessive, or stagnant, and knows what to do to balance or correct the condition. One of the greatest benefits of qigong is that illness is sometimes detected while it is still *sub-clinical*, that is, before

it has reached such a serious stage that it shows up in a medical examination. In a sense, cancer is cured before, by medical definitions, one even has it. The qigong practitioner experiences a profound shift of identity; she experiences herself as an energy being, in harmony with the energy of nature and life. She senses any break in the flow of energy within or between self and nature. She has the tools to remedy a "disturbance in the Force." (Thanks to *Star Wars* for this term. When the movie was released I was so excited—a Hollywood production about qi!)



## How Many Kinds of Qigong Are There?

Every now and then I encounter a student who confidently informs me, "I have already learned qigong." Imagine that! More than seven thousand styles of qigong, most requiring at least a year or two to master, and here is an immortal who has learned them all! But the mistake is easily forgiven. As in any field of research, the more you study, the more you realize how little you know. It is easy to be an "expert" when you are a beginner.

Qigong students generally learn one or two styles. A professional teacher may know dozens of styles, a pharmacopoeia of techniques that may be tailored to the needs, interests, and talents of the student. The styles are sometimes named for what they do, for example: Bone Marrow Cleansing Qigong, Healing Sounds Qigong, Muscle Transforming Qigong, Harmonizing with the Seasons Qigong, Intelligence Qigong, Invigorating Qigong, Coiling Qigong, Relaxation Qigong. Some qigong styles are named after their real or legendary founders, for example Taoist Monk Chen Xiyi's Sleeping Qigong, Peng Zu's Longevity Qigong, Eighteen Buddhist Monks Qigong.

Qigong systems may reflect their places of origin, such as Mount 0 Mei Qigong, Mount Wudang Qigong, Shaolin One Finger Zen, or Tibetan Qigong. It is also common for a qigong system to be named after an animal, martial art, or aspect of culture: Soaring Crane Qigong, Snake Qigong, Xingyi Martial Art Qigong, Eight Brocade Qigong.

The famous slow-motion exercise, T'ai Chi (more correctly spelled Taiji Quan 太極拳) is an example of a qigong system that is based on a philosophical principle. T'ai Chi means the balance and harmony of complementary

opposites: up and down, right and left, inside and outside, open and close, warm and cool, tension and relaxation, active and passive, masculine and feminine. T'ai Chi is a unique and beautiful style of qigong that blends spirituality, sports conditioning, and healing.

Qigong is like a great river that stretches from the mythic past to the present, fed by three streams: spirituality, sports, and healing. It continues to evolve. Variations on classical systems or entirely new styles are always emerging based on the creativity and insight of practitioners.

## Qigong in Legend and History

Qigong is as old as Chinese civilization. *The Spring and Autumn Annals*, written in 240 B.C. describes a legend that is linked to the history of qigong. All of China was once covered by flood waters. Stagnant waters produced disease and plague, and the people called upon their gods for help. The God-Emperor Yu used his mystical power to cause the rain to subside. He danced on the land with a bear-like gait and used a magic pole to etch deep into the earth's surface a pattern that looked like the Big Dipper constellation. The waters flowed into the newly formed river beds; the constellation of sacred rivers delineated the ancient provinces of China.

As the flood ended, people reasoned that just as stagnant water breeds disease, so stagnant energy in the body creates the conditions that feed illness. Exercise can stimulate and move the energy of life. It can clear the body's energy channels, or meridians, of obstructions to health. Emperor Yu moved like a bear because he knew that animals and natural forces can inspire people to move with grace and power.

Qigong-like postures are found on ancient rock art throughout China. We see pictographs

and petroglyphs of people imitating the frog, fish, bird, and sheep in gesture, posture, and dance. As early as three thousand B.C., Chinese tribal people donned animal masks, and under the leadership of a bear-masked shaman, imitated the animals in a ritual winter dance to drive away evil forces. Warriors and soldiers imitated the bear to cultivate strength and courage, the snake for flexibility and stealth, the eagle for speed and precision, and the tiger for power. Not surprisingly, the most ancient word for doctor in Chinese is a picture of a feathered, dancing shaman. These various animal gestures became the foundation of healing qigong exercises.

Archaeologists discovered one of the earliest references to qigong (called *dao-yin*, "leading and guiding the energy," in ancient times) in an inscription on twelve pieces of jade from approximately 500 B.C. It describes how breathing causes the qi to gather and descend to an energy reservoir in the lower abdomen. Once the qi becomes tranquil and stable, it "sprouts" and spreads all the way to the crown of the head. From this same period, there are records of a qigong-like "Crane Dance," sometimes performed at court to magically confer longevity or as a symbol of the ability to transcend death.

In Chinese literature, the word "dao-yin" first appears in a famous book of philosophy, the *Ke-yi* (Constrained in Will) Chapter of *Zhuang Zi* (369-286 B.C.).

The first illustrated book of dao-yin, the *Dao-Yin Illustrations* dated 168 B.C., shows people in animal-like postures that are remarkably similar to qigong exercises practiced today. Interestingly, the illustrations present figures from all walks of life—peasant and nobleman, disabled and healthy, male and female, young and old — suggesting that qigong was not the domain of an educated elite but was practiced by or at

least suitable for everyone. Next to each figure is the name of the disease that the exercise was intended to treat.

The second century A.D. "father of Chinese medicine," Hua Tuo also drew on the healing example of nature to create his famous qigong system, the Five Animal Frolics, based on the movements of the Crane, Bear, Monkey, Deer, and Tiger. The Crane is the most relaxing of the Frolics. The Bear is for strength, especially in the bones, legs, and waist. The Monkey teaches suppleness and flexibility. The Deer develops grace and vitality. The Tiger cultivates power and focus.

Hua Tuo said that just as a door hinge will not rust if it is used, so the body will achieve health by gently moving and exercising all of the limbs. Or as one of my colleagues once remarked, paraphrasing Hua Tuo, "The reason the teeth fall out rather than the tongue, is that the tongue is always moving!" The modern Chinese actress, Guo Lin, attributed her remission from uterine cancer to her practice of the Five Animal Frolics. (Note: I was one of the First Five Animal Frolics instructors in North America and have been teaching it since 1978. A video of the Five Animal Frolics is available from the qigong Research and Practice Center, listed in the Resources at the end of this book.)

Much of the early history of qigong will never be known because it was never written down. Taoist and Buddhist monks and martial arts masters passed the oral secrets to their most trusted students, those who had earned the knowledge after proving their moral character.

## A Qigong Timeline: Highlights in Qigong History

Note: The word "qigong" is modern. The original terms for qigong are *yang sheng* (nourishing life), *tu na* (expelling the old, drawing in the new), and, most commonly, *dan yin*, which may be translated "leading and guiding [the qi]" or "extending and contracting [the body]." The majority of ancient qigong works are found among the 1200 texts of the Taoist Canon (*Dan Zang*), the great compendium of classic Taoist literature.

500 B.C. inscription on a jade tablet:

To circulate the qi (*xing qi*)  
Swallow it so that it will gather  
If it is gathered, it will expand into spirit (*shen*)  
When it expands, it will drop.  
When it drops, it will become stable.  
When it is stable, it will be solid.  
When it is solid, it will sprout.  
When it sprouts, it will grow.  
When it grows, it will return.  
When it returns, it will be heavenly.  
The heavenly is revealed in the rising of qi;  
The earthly is revealed in the sinking of qi.  
Follow this and you will live (*Shun zi sheng*).  
Oppose it, and you will die (*Ni zi si*).

c. 350 B.C. Five Phases of Change Theory developed by the philosopher Zou Yan, also the period of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi (founders of Taoist philosophy), beginnings of Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine (the classic textbook of Chinese medicine).

c. 300 B.C. Guan Zi (a classic of Taoist philosophy), from the section on Nei Ye (Inner Work, a precursor to the modern term nei gong, a synonym for qigong):

When the four limbs are aligned  
And the blood and qi are tranquil  
Unify your intent (*yi*) and  
concentrate your mind.  
Then your ears and eyes will not be  
swayed by lust;  
What seemed far away [the Tao] will  
be close by.

c. 240 B.C. *Lu Shi Qun Qiu* (Spring and Autumn Annals) records that a great flood once engulfed the earth. The people realized that just as stagnant waters breed disease, so stagnant blood and breath cause illness in the body. Exercise was practiced to stimulate circulation and prevent disease.

168 B.C. The *Dao-yin Tu* (Dao-yin Chart) discovered in 1973, a silk manuscript excavated at Ma Wang Dui (Tomb of King Ma) near Changsha, the capital of Hunan Province, China. This important text is the first major chart of Dao-yin (qigong) postures. There are 44 figures, several of which have captions describing the therapeutic effect. The exercises were probably prescribed by a physician, perhaps in formulas combining several exercises for specific illnesses. The figures are young and old, male and female, from all walks of life—showing that dao-yin was practiced by a broad spectrum of the society. Thirteen of the postures are named after birds and beasts; there are several figures in horse stance. We see the first example of themes that remain throughout the history of qigong.

c. 190-265 A.D. Hua Tuo developed the Five Animal Frolics to "promote digestion, improve circulation, and prevent illness." He called his art a form of dao-yin. The Five

Animal Frolics is the first recorded system of dao-yin that is still practiced today. (See Hua Tuo's biography in the *History of the Later Han Dynasty*, Hou Han Shu.) Chinese literature does not record detailed instructions for the Frolics from this period. The earliest instructions are found in the *Yang Sheng Dao Yin Fa* (Dao Yin Method for Nourishing Life), 1506.

320 A.D. The *Biro Pr/Zi* (Master Who Embraces Simplicity) of Ge Hong. Important source for alchemy, medicine, and longevity techniques; mentions various forms of dao-yin based on the crane and tortoise.

456-536 Tao Hongjing, Taoist alchemist and author of *Yang Sheng Yan Ming Lu* (Record on Longevity and Nourishing Life). The six chapters in his work describe:

1. Precepts relating to the quest for immortality
2. Diet
3. Precepts, prohibitions, and prayers to avoid calamities
4. Ways of cultivating the qi to cure illness
5. Dao-yin and self-massage
6. Sexual yoga

His text has the first reference to the Healing Sounds (*Liu Qi Fa*, Six Qi Method, taught in this program on the DVD "Qigong: Traditional Chinese Exercises for Healing Body, Mind, and Spirit")

538-597 Zhi-yi, the founder of Tian Tai School of Buddhism presents an important sixfold classification of illness (Taisho edition of Chinese Buddhist Canon 1911 8A: I06A-109B):

1. Illness caused by discord among the four elements
2. Due to imbalanced diet
3. Caused by incorrect meditation
4. Caused by demons that enter the viscera (cites efficacy of exorcists)
5. Maladies of Mara, especially perverse thoughts
6. Caused by misdeeds in past lives or the present life

The method of therapy varies according to the type of illness being treated. Medicines are given for 1-2. Mindfulness of breathing and insight meditation are prescribed for 3. Here Zhi-yi also mentions the importance of fixing the mind on the dan tian (energy centers) and practicing the Six Qi Method. Illnesses caused by demons (4-5) are treated with mantras, incantations (*dharani*), and magic. Karmic illness is treated through introspection and counseling (especially confession and repentance).

581-682 Sun Simo, along with Hua Tuo, is one of the "gods" of Chinese medicine. His *Qian Jin Yao Fang* (Precious Medical Formulas) includes a medical theory based on four elements (earth, water, fire, air), various forms of dao-yin, sexual yoga, and references to the Six Qi Method.

895-989 Chen Xiyi, great Daoist recluse from Mount Hua, one of the creators of the Taiji Diagram (the famous yin-yang symbol, as seen on the Korean flag) and originator of the following dao-yin systems: Taiji Ruler, Twenty-four Seasonal Dao-yin Method, Six Harmonies-Eight Methods.

1151 Zeng Cao states that the Eight Brocade Exercise was inscribed on stone by Lu

- Dong-bin (8th Century, one of the Eight Immortals), recorded in the *Xiu Zhen Shi Shu* (Dao Zang 260).
- 1881 Publication of the *Nei Gong Tu Shuo* by Wang Zuyuan. First diagrams and description of the Yi Jin Jing (Muscle/Tendon Change Qigong) and the Seated Eight Brocades in a popular work. The Yi Jin Jing is often attributed to Bodhidharma (died c. 475 A.D.). However, Joseph Needham believes that the exercises were probably created in the 16th Century. (*Science and Civilization in China*, Vol. V, Pt. 5, p. 166) There is no evidence that Bodhidharma, the Indian monk who established Chan (Zen) Buddhism in China, practiced any form of qigong or martial arts. Qigong and martial systems have been falsely attributed to him because antiquity lends an aura of authenticity and authority. A master's prestige increases if he can say, "I didn't create this technique; it is a direct transmission from Bodhidharma!"
- 1844-1962 Zhao Zhongdao, descendant of the Song Dynasty Imperial family and Master of Taiji Ruler (a famous style of qigong). Beginning in 1954, Zhao was the first to teach Taiji Ruler publicly.
- 1879-1973 Hu Yaozhen, master of Taoism, martial arts, qigong, and Chinese medicine. Qigong instructor of renowned Taiji Quan Master Feng Zhiqiang. Author of *The Five Animal Frolics and Strengthening Qigong* (Chinese language only). Hu standardized the terms qigong, active qigong (*Wong gong*), and passive qigong (*jing gong*). In the early 1950s, Hu and his colleague, Liu Guizhen, were the first to teach qigong in hospitals and thus promote the idea of healing or medical qigong (*yi gong*).
- 1886-1963 Wang Xiangzhai, founder of Yi Quan, master of Standing Meditation, major influence on qigong evolution.
- 1936 A work by Dong Hao is published in Hangzhou, *Special Therapy for Tuberculosis: Qigong*. This is the first book to categorize "qigong" as a medical discipline.
- 1955 A qigong sanatorium is founded in Tangshan, Hebei Province. Within a year, two qigong training centers are established in Hebei.
- 1957 A qigong sanatorium opens in Shanghai.
- 1959 The Chinese Ministry of Public Health sponsors a national qigong conference in Beidaihe, Hebei Province.
- 1966-1976 The Cultural Revolution. Taoism is branded *fan long*, "counter-revolutionary," because of its history of fostering independent thinking and revolution. Spiritual beliefs and disciplines are suppressed. Numerous qigong practitioners are thrown in jail. Qigong is illegal until the early 1980s.
- 1976 Ken Cohen founds the Academy of Chinese Healing Arts in Montreal, Canada. 1977, the Academy moves to Berkeley, California; 1981 established in Colorado as the "Taoist Mountain Retreat" and "Qigong Research and Practice Center," offering the first qigong Teacher Training Program in North America.
- 1980 Dr. Qian Xuesen, an M.I.T.-trained nuclear physicist, advises the editors of China's *Nature Journal* to "use science and technology to study human potential" by researching Chinese

medicine, qigong, and exceptional functions of the human body. Shortly thereafter, the ban on qigong is lifted.

1987 Dr. Qian is named chair of the Chinese Science and Technology Association. He issues a statement, "Qigong is modern science and technology—high technology—absolutely top technology." The Chinese Department of Education orders universities to develop qigong training courses and programs.

1999 Falun Gong, a religious organization that promotes qigong, is prohibited in China; all related books, videos, and pamphlets are burned. Practitioners are detained, tortured, and sentenced to as much as 18 years in prison. On September 23, 1999, the Chinese Health Ministry issues laws that restrict *all* forms of qigong. "General" and "health enhancing" qigong are allowed, but only among small, scattered, local, voluntary groups that have pre-registered with the government. Qigong schools are prohibited.

## Health Care Vs. Sick Care: How Qigong Differs from Western Medicine

Unlike western medicine, qigong techniques are not designed to cure a single illness. Rather, they restore systemic, overall wellness or combat a broad class of illnesses, such as respiratory, cardiovascular, or digestive disorders. Without appreciating this fact, it is easy for a western physician to become confused when he reads in various qigong textbooks that an exercise that treats digestive ailments is also helpful for arthritis and high blood pressure.

We need to remember that qigong is treating the disease host, the person, more than the disease. It

focuses more on restoring health than on combating pathology. Qigong healers and educators look at a person as a whole being in which every part of the body and mind affects every other, rather than devoting their attention only to the presenting symptom or to the part of the body that, according to medical tests, is diseased.

Western medicine is called *allopathic* because it commonly treats pathology with medicines that produce an opposite effect (cello, Greek for "other") to that of the disease. Thus, For high blood pressure, you take a medicine that lowers blood pressure. For excess stomach acid, you swallow an ant-acid. Bacterial infection requires an anti-biotic, a substance that destroys (anti) the life (bios) of the invading pathogen.

At first glance, it seems that qigong also promotes "medicines" that oppose disease symptoms. If a person has a hot, yang condition, such as an infection or fever, then gentle, cooling exercises may be recommended such as the Crane Frolic. IF a person has a cool, yin condition, such as low blood pressure or cold hands and feet, then dynamic and energizing exercises may be recommended, such as the Bear Frolic. However, the intent of the practitioner is not to combat disease, but rather to open blockages to qi flow and create energy balance and harmony.

Disease is equivalent to a dam in the body's life-stream, which creates too much "water" (energy or qi) on one side of the blockage, and too little water on the other. Through qigong practice, the dam is dissolved, and the water again flows, irrigating the body's fields. Or, to borrow an analogy from Qigong Master Hong Liu, if you bring a knotted rope to a western doctor, he or she cuts the knot out and then resections the rope together. If you bring the rope to a qigong master, he or she unties

the knot. This does not mean that surgery is unnecessary, but it does imply that we should always attempt to treat disease by the least invasive means possible.

Western medicine and qigong have different criteria of effectiveness. Western medicine is concerned with curing, a term that implies causing a measurable physiologic change: the tumor shrinks, the bacteria is destroyed, the arthritic knee is removed and replaced. Western medicine produces quick and often dramatic results.

Qigong may also cure disease; however its primary goal is *healing*, which means "making whole and harmonious." Qigong dates from a period before disease was measured or analyzed with scientific instruments. The calibrating instrument was the patient. If he or she felt better, happier, more in harmony and balance, then the therapy was deemed successful. However, unlike modern medicine, these results might not be felt immediately. Healing is a gentle, gradual, and cumulative process. Every day the qigong practitioner feels a little bit better.

We need both curing and healing. It is tempting to say that western medicine is best for acute disease, and qigong for chronic conditions (including aging!) Unfortunately, neither modality fits into such a neat box. The problem in relying exclusively on the qigong approach to health is that people can easily deceive themselves and believe that they are healthy when they are harboring serious disease. The human instrument is not always accurate at assessing its own health, although the more qigong you practice, the more accurate it becomes.

On the other hand, because western medicine relies on the advice of an "expert", patients learn to mistrust their own intuition and to assume that they cannot heal themselves. Responsibility is shifted into the hands of a physician who is

supposed to "fix" the problem. This attitude can result in some absurd behaviors, such as a man who was waiting in line at the ice cream shop who told me about his cholesterol problem and recent bypass surgery. He ordered a triple scoop! We need to take responsibility for our health, but to also realize that there are times when we need outside help. Qigong complements western medicine; it does not substitute for it.

Most patients do not relish the thought of a medical exam or therapy. Western medicine tends to be invasive of the body or of personal privacy. Patients do not feel refreshed or empowered by their insulin shot or pain medication, nor do they wait with joyous anticipation for the colonoscopy. Qigong, on the other hand, is enjoyable. Students will sometimes study with a single teacher for a decade or more. I have one student who has been attending my weekly classes for nearly twenty years. He knows the techniques as well as I, but he continues practicing with the group because it is so much ... well, fun—there's just no other word for it. I believe that the best motivation for practicing qigong is exploration of the hidden potentials of the body, mind, and spirit. No one has ever reached the end of such a study.

Enjoyable healing practices are more beneficial than healing practices that are boring, uncomfortable, or engaged in because of a "should"—*I should* go jogging; *I should* lift weights; *I should* practice yoga and qigong. Enjoyment induces the placebo effect, an expectation of positive results that actually helps foster those results. Scientific studies have shown that meditation, relaxation, and many other stress-reducing techniques are not effective unless accompanied by joy of life.

Qigong is nearly 100 percent safe and without side-effects. This does not mean that no danger exists. Any exercise may be harmful if it is

overdone or inappropriate—for example, you wouldn't do head rotations after a whiplash injury to the neck. But if you practice qigong gently, moderately, and intuitively, and follow your doctor's advice, adverse effects are extremely rare. Here, even the most skeptical physician must shamefacedly admit that his or her art cannot hold a candle to qigong. The *Journal of the American Medical Association* reports that in the United States, there are at least 100,000 hospital deaths per year as a result of adverse effects from medication. This figure only represents those patients who follow their doctors' orders and take medications correctly! Common surgeries also frequently produce unwanted or fatal side-effects, such as internal hemorrhage or blood clots. "The surgery was a success," the physician remarks, "but the patient died." Modern medicine is the fourth leading cause of death in the U.S., outranking diabetes.

The goal of conventional medical treatment is different from that of qigong. Physicians are trained to restore sick individuals to their previous state of health or to one that is considered average or "normal". To paraphrase the outstanding scientist Elmer Green, Ph.D., western medicine is not part of a health-care system, but a sick-care system. When a qigong practitioner has a sore-throat, his goal is not simply to return to a symptom-free state, but to continue on a road towards fuller potential, deeper self-awareness, and enhanced well-being. Health is not freedom from disease, but, rather, wellness and wisdom.

## Tuning the Human Instrument: Principles of Qigong Practice

Although qigong techniques take time to master, the principles are very easy to understand and can make an immediate difference in quality

of life. Qigong is based on the Three Tunings, that is three aspects of one's being that must be adjusted and harmonized, like tuning an instrument. Tune the Body (*Toro Shen*), Tune the Breath (*Tiao Xi*), and Tune the Mind (*Tiao Xin*).

Qigong begins by paying attention to the body. If the body is tense and the posture is poor, the breath cannot be slow or deep, and the mind cannot be tranquil. *The easiest way to change your mind is to change your body.* This is qigong's million dollar secret and the perfect antidote to stress.

In the modern world, there is no way to avoid stressful situations. If life is upsetting, the typical western approach is to develop a psychological coping strategy either on one's own or with the help of a therapist. Perhaps in the midst of a Los Angeles traffic jam, one needs to say to oneself, "This too shall pass," or "I have the strength to meet any challenge." If molehills are becoming mountains, they sometimes can be leveled by improving self-esteem. A person who has a strong sense of self-worth does not interpret everyday stresses as a threat to personal identity. The IRS agent is not a saber-toothed tiger. Death and taxes may be immutable, but they are not synonymous.

Qigong takes a different approach. The problem is not the stressful situation, but rather your reaction to it, a reaction that is energetically imprinted in your physiology. It does no good to say to yourself, "I will remain calm," if your body has spent the last ten years reacting to certain emotional triggers by tightening the shoulders, quickening the breath, and raising the blood pressure. Again, if you want to change your mind, change your body first. Qigong teaches you how to gain control over both ordinary tension as well as the subtle internal tensions that quicken the heart-beat, raise blood pressure, and increase the blood levels of stress hormones and age-promoting free radicals. In fact, to the extent that you cannot



control the external world, it becomes all the more imperative to control the internal one.

Qigong practitioners learn to control the stress response by practicing Tuning the Body, Breath, and Mind at least ten minutes every day. The Three Tunings calm the sympathetic nervous system's "light or flight" stress reaction—which the Chinese call excess yang, and activates the relaxation response of the parasympathetic system, which the Chinese consider yin. When the body is relaxed, you feel centered, calm yet alert, and capable of making good decisions. But speaking about relaxation is easy; doing it is more challenging. To *try* to relax is to become tense, like trying to float or trying to ride a bicycle. It's not a matter of trying, but of surrendering to the body's wisdom. Use intent, that is, mental focus, without straining. Find the balance between effort and effortlessness. Taoists call this "doing without doing" (wei wu wei).

To benefit from the Three Tunings:

**Make a commitment.** Decide that you will devote some time each day to your own well-being. You cannot be of service to others if you neglect yourself.

Remove jewelry. Take off any rings or other jewelry and eyeglasses, as these may interfere with qi flow.

**Pick a comfortable place to practice.**

Practice outdoors if the weather is pleasant or in a well ventilated, quiet, and naturally lit room (no glaring lights). If you are practicing indoors, face a window or towards a simple and non-distracting area of your home.

**Discourage interruptions.** Turn off your phone and answering machine.

**Dress for comfort.** Wear loose, comfortable clothing, and sneakers or flat-bottomed slippers or shoes. You may be barefoot if the ground is comfortable and warm.

**Watch what you eat.** The Three Tunings are best practiced at least a half-hour before a meal or at least two hours after a meal. Never drink cold liquids immediately before or after practice, as these can shock the body and prevent qi from circulating.

## Tuning the Body

Here's the procedure for Tuning the Body:

**Stand with the feet shoulder width apart.**

Let your arms rest at the sides of the body, holding them just a few inches away from the thighs. Your arms are relaxed, but not limp. (You may also practice the Three Tunings while seated on a stool or in a straight backed chair. Your legs are uncrossed, feet on the ground and hands resting comfortably in the lap. A seated position is advised if you have arthritis in the lower body or any medical condition that makes it inadvisable to stand for extended periods of time.)

**Keep your eyes open.** You should be looking straight ahead with the longest and widest possible gaze. Your eyes are soft and relaxed, not looking at anything in particular. Eliminate any tendency to squint, to open the eyes widely, or to stare intensely. Imagine that you are looking both inside and outside. Your inner eye is aware of your bodily sensations.

**Use minimum effort.** Imagine that you are standing so delicately that if a feather landed on your head, your knees would buckle because of the weight of the feather. If a fly landed on your shoulder, your shoulder would drop because of the weight of the fly.

**Sink your weight.** Let your weight sink down through your feet into the ground. Imagine that any tension is flowing downwards, like water flowing down a hillside. Your feet are rooted into the ground like a tree. To develop this rooted sensation, it is very important to consciously

relax the feet. Allow your weight to spread evenly through the feet, not leaning on your toes or heels, on the insides of your feet, or the outsides.

**Stay loose.** Imagine that all of the joints of your body are relaxed and open, never locked. To lock a joint is to close the space between the bones and create more wear and tear, leading to arthritis. According to Chinese medicine, locking a joint closes an energy gate and prevents qi from moving through adjacent meridians.

**Bend your knees.** It is especially important to keep the knees slightly bent at all times. The knees are your body's shock absorbers. They absorb the shock of walking on concrete or on any hard and unyielding surface. If you lock the knees when you step, you are jarring your lower spine, which increases back-pain and your chances of injuring the lower back.

**Unlock your elbows.** Similarly the elbows are subject to injury. Imagine lifting a very heavy object with locked elbows. Just the thought is painful.

**Keep your hips open.** How can you relax and open your hips if they are compressed by gravity? To relax your hips, you must use your mind. Imagine that your upper torso is gently lifted up and away from the legs and that you are creating more space in the hip joints. Allow all of the deep muscles that attach to the hips to become warm, open, and pliant.

**Let your mind relax your body.** Use your mind to relax other joints in the body: the toes, ankles, wrists, fingers, and shoulders. Your shoulder joints will open if you say to yourself, "My shoulders are sitting." They are relaxed down, neither slouched forward, nor pulled back.

**Release the chest muscles.** This happens when you relax your ribs and breastbone. Avoid either depressing the chest or puffing the chest up or out. Both interfere with breathing and

create imbalanced mental attitudes. Depressing the chest may create feelings of depression. Lifting the chest may make one feel uptight or egotistically proud.

**Keep your spine long.** The spine must be vertically erect. Use your mind to stretch it open and long. Imagine that your tailbone is anchored into the ground and your head is lifting gently away from it, as though pulled upwards from the crown, like a puppet on a string. Or imagine that your vertebrae are beads on a string; the string is delicately stretched to eliminate excess slack. Now there is more space between each bead.

**Pay attention to your mouth and tongue.** Your mouth is lightly closed, with the tongue touching the upper hard palate. This tongue position generates saliva, preventing the mouth from becoming dry. It also closes a gap between two major energy channels, one that ends at the palate, and another that begins at the tip of the tongue. Although qi can bridge the gap, by deliberately closing the circuit, you can help the qi current become stronger and clearer.

**Keep your belly relaxed.** This is very important. You cannot master qigong if you pull your belly up or in to make it appear flat. A tight abdomen interferes with breathing and sexual pleasure.

## Tuning the Breath

Take a good, deep breath. If you are like most Americans, you are probably sucking in your stomach and expanding your chest as you inhale. According to the traditions of East and West, this method of breathing is inefficient, shallow, and contributes to anxiety, hypertension, and angina (chest pain). Chest breathing causes muscles to spasm and decreases oxygen delivery to the cells. This can have especially serious effects on neurological

diseases, since the brain requires 20 percent of the body's available oxygen.

To learn how to *really* take a deep breath, you don't have to read a textbook on respiratory therapy; just watch a child breathing. When a child inhales, the belly expands; when he exhales, the belly retracts. This is the most natural and relaxed way to breathe. From a scientific viewpoint, to inhale, the diaphragm must drop, opening the lungs and pushing the abdomen out. This creates a vacuum that sucks air into the lungs effortlessly. To exhale, the diaphragm rises, contracting the abdomen and gently pushing air out.

Qigong takes diaphragmatic breathing one step further. Imagine that you have an energy sphere in your lower abdomen, about two to three inches below the navel and midway between the front and back of your body. When you inhale, it inflates like a balloon and pushes the lower abdomen out, while also exerting a very slight pressure on the lower back. Imagine that the lower back is also expanding. With practice, patience, and gentle perseverance, you will gradually begin to feel that the lower back expands at the same time as the belly. The movement is not as pronounced, but it is definitely there.

Belly-back breathing is called *dan tian* breathing. The dan tian is the field (tian) of the elixir (dan) of long life, an energy center in the lower abdomen where, through tranquil breathing, you plant and cultivate the seed of long life and wisdom.

To practice Tuning the Breath, you'll find Dan Tian Breathing particularly helpful. Here's the procedure:

Inhale slowly and deeply. With each inhalation, you should feel both your belly and back expanding.

Exhale fully. With each exhalation, gently intend that your belly and back contract.

Keep it slow. Because dan tian breathing is more efficient than thoracic (chest) breathing, you need less breaths per minute to deliver necessary oxygen to your cells. With regular practice, you can shift from the average resting respiratory rate of 17 breaths per minute down to 5 breaths per minute. This improvement usually occurs within the first few months of practice. Slow breathing slows down the brain waves and makes you more relaxed, tranquil, and intuitive.

Keep it long, deep, smooth, and even. The breath is long because it flows like a mountain stream without any artificial breaks or dams in the current. The breath is deep, like an infinitely deep ocean of power and vitality. The breath is smooth, like fine silk, not coarse like sandpaper. The breath is also even. You allow the inhalation and exhalation with equal grace and ease. You do not favor the right or left side of your body, the front or back. The breath stimulates qi to move evenly throughout the body.

Allow it to just happen. The most important aspect of breathing is an attitude of trusting the wisdom of the body. Do not pull the breath in; do not push it out. Surrender to the breathing process, and allow each breath to refresh and renew you.

## Tuning the Mind

Tuning the Body and Breath induces a state of quiet awareness of whatever presents itself, whatever is happening. You are not concentrating on anything in particular, but rather on the entire *field of perception and being*.

Ask yourself, "Can I be simple, innocent, and open, without either rejecting or prolonging any thought or sensation?" If a thought passes through your mind, just let it pass, like a cloud moving across the sky. This state of awareness is

called *disattachment*, because you are not mentally or emotionally stuck to any phenomena.

When the mind is disattached, unburdened by memory or expectation, you can be refreshed and renewed by each passing moment. In fact, the ability to be renewed moment by moment and to see life with fresh clarity is precisely what Buddhists call "enlightenment" or Taoists "unity with the Tao (Way of Nature)." The Buddhist *Diamond Sutra* says, "Awaken your mind without fixing it anywhere." In the Taoist classic *Da De Jing*, we read "Not naming (freezing the flow of life in conceptual boxes) is the beginning of Heaven and Earth."

You cannot *try to still* your mind; that would be like trying to calm turbulent water by pounding on it. You can only still your mind by accepting it and deciding to let it be. Then the waves of thought cease of themselves. When the surface of a lake is quiet and without waves, it becomes a mirror that reflects life whole, not in broken fragments. This means that mental quiet helps to eliminate prejudice and preconception so that you can see the outside world more accurately. As the water becomes more and more still, the depths are no longer stirred up and muddy; you can see clear to the bottom. Thus, a quiet mind is also able to perceive itself more accurately. It is self-aware and not preoccupied with material objects.

## How Do I Know It's Qi ?

You know you are successful at cultivating qi if, during or after practice, you feel any of the classic "Qi Sensations" (*Qi Gan*):

- Pleasant warmth, which is a sign of improved blood and qi circulation.
  - Tingling or a feeling of vibrating, pulsing energy, most commonly in the hands.
- Distinguish this from numbness, which is

a sign that you are practicing too long and that your extremities are falling asleep.

- Heaviness in lower body, lightness in the upper, as though you have become a tree with deep roots and tall branches that can easily sway in the breeze.
  - Expansiveness, a feeling that you are no longer limited to your body. Your energy and awareness extend into nature.
  - Tranquillity, centeredness, and stability.
- Qigong can give you greater confidence, awareness, and presence in everyday life.

## Slow Is Beautiful

The Three Tunings are in themselves an excellent qigong practice, but they are also the foundation of virtually any style of qigong. That is, whether you are practicing a qigong exercise designed to calm the mind, improve health, or increase the power of your football tackle, always begin with the Three Tunings. Once your instrument is tuned, you can learn the intricacies of qigong and begin to make beautiful music.

Don't try to learn too many styles. It is better to emphasize quality than quantity. A few notes played clearly are far more enjoyable than many notes played off-key. And as with music, slower techniques may look easier but actually require the most skill. Musicians worry most about performing the slow *andante* movement because it is here that mistakes are most glaringly obvious to both the audience and the musician. "Slow is beautiful," said the artist Rodin. But it takes great patience to achieve this beauty.

## Benefits and Dangers

After 100 days of qigong training, you are likely to experience any or all of the 12 Benefits of qigong.

## *The Twelve Benefits of Qigong*

**1. Well-being and improved health.** Qigong emphasizes whole body, whole system health. While it is true that qigong will often cure specific ills, this is not the primary reason for practice. Even if a disease cannot be cured, qigong improves quality of life and helps you find greater happiness. It is not only a matter of adding years to your life, but life to your years.

**2. Clear and tranquil mind.** When the mind is at peace, the whole universe seems at peace. World peace begins with you; it is your responsibility to find a peaceful heart and mind. Then you can heal and transform others just through your presence. I am not suggesting that you use meditation as a substitute for political action (such as voting), but rather, if you have tranquil mind, you will make better decisions and have the skill to know when to act and when to be still.

**3. Deeper, more restorative sleep.** Sleep is becoming more and more a challenge in our hectic, quick-paced, wired world. Qigong will help you find the deep relaxation and mental quiet necessary for sleep. However, qigong is not enough! You must also get sufficient aerobic and resistance exercise, eat well, not overwork, and be willing to enjoy leisure. Be a human being, not a human doing. As philosopher Lin Yutang once put it, "Since culture is a product of leisure, the sage is the one who loafs gracefully."

**4. Increased energy, including sexual vitality and fertility.** Qigong people have more energy. In Chinese terms, qigong can *fan lao huan tong*, "reverse aging and restore youthfulness." Part of this youthful quality is a feeling of sexual potency and both male and female fertility. Let me share an anecdote with you. I was taking a lunch break during a science conference and enjoying

a conversation with some of the attendees and with my daughter (then age 17), who was sitting next to me. An attractive young woman walked over to my table and extended her hand, I presumed to shake hands. When I grasped her hand, she sandwiched it between her two and, looking warmly in my eyes, said, "Thank you so much for getting me pregnant." My daughter exclaimed quizzically "Dad?!" She knows her dad is "weird", but not immoral. The woman explained, "Oh, you may not remember me, but I was at this conference last year and complained about my inability to become pregnant. Both my husband and I had been tested, but the doctors could find nothing wrong. You recommended some qigong exercises, and now I have a healthy boy!" If anything makes me want to continue teaching qigong for the rest of my life, it is testimonials like this.

**5. Comfortable warmth.** Qigong is great for cold hands and feet. Circulation improves, and the body generates more internal warmth when it is cold. I heard of a famous qigong master who used to teach his classes outdoors in Tokyo, even in the winter. If a student got too cold, he or she had only to grasp the master's hand, a natural hand warmer! Until you reach this stage, if cold weather makes you uncomfortable, you may wish to take advantage of a Japanese secret. During cold winter days, keep a scarf wrapped around your lower abdomen, under your jacket. You have probably heard that it is good to wear a warm hat because heat escapes from the head. True. However, you can also increase internal heat by keeping the body's energy furnace (the abdominal dan tian) warm.

**6. Clear skin.** The skin, like the intestines, is an organ of elimination. According to Chinese medicine, as your qigong improves, your body eliminates toxins, and the skin becomes clear,

smooth, and youthful. Qigong is excellent for the complexion.

7. Happy attitude. There is an old Tibetan saying, "You can tell a Yogi by his or her laugh." I believe the same is true of a qigong master. Although there are certainly serious, obsessive, and even morose qigong teachers, correct and moderate qigong practice usually creates an optimistic and joyous disposition. Deep learning brings humility before the great unknown (the Tao) and the vast amount still to be known. The more you know, the more you know that you don't know, and the less seriously you take yourself.

8. More efficient metabolism. Digestion improves, and hair and nails grow more quickly. Students commonly remark that after a few months of qigong, they need to use their nail clippers twice as often. The traditional explanation is that the body is throwing off dead cells more quickly. Would you like to hear some Taoist mystical trivia? When a Taoist master dies, his or her body disappears in a flash of light, and all that is left is hair, nails, and clothes. Or so the story goes.

9. Greater physiological control. This means that aspects of the body that were imbalanced or out of control begin to normalize, for example, breathing rate, heart rate, blood pressure, hormone levels, and states of chronic inflammation or depletion. "Control" means greater control over the body's functions, generally not by conscious effort but naturally from within, as a side effect of qigong practice. As biological functions normalize, you become more flexible and resilient. One of my colleagues put it this way, "If I want to fast for a few days, no problem! If I want to enjoy a feast, no problem! I can sleep peacefully for eight hours or, when necessary, I can miss sleep for a night without ill effects."

10. Bright eyes. The qigong master's eyes are said to glow in the dark, like a cat's. The eyes also appear "bright" because the spirit and soul are luminous and the heart is open.

11. Intuition and creativity. I believe that intuition and creativity generate each other and come from the same source, an awakened brain and being, an ability to think with the gut, to feel with the mind. Our society stresses compartmentalization, a specialized education, family life separate from work, church separate from state. We spend much of our lives living in compartments—home, school, workplace, and car. Qigong teaches us to reclaim the wholeness of who we are. Instead of fitting into a neat box, we are willing to exercise our intuition and creativity, to "boldly go where no person has gone before."

12. Spiritual effects. Advancement in qigong is often accompanied by a variety of spiritual experiences. For example, synchronicity, meaningful coincidences, become more common. When the qi is abundant, clear, and flowing, the senses perceive and are permeated by a sweetness, as though a divine nectar perfumes the skin and is generated in the mouth. Some students see a radiance or aura around people. Be thankful for such experiences but do not become egotistical about them; neither awe nor excitement are necessary. You are indeed special, but no more special than every person. Each individual, like each flower in a field, has a unique beauty.

As I mentioned earlier, qigong is safe as long as you practice moderation, follow good common sense, and listen to your health care provider's advice. Nevertheless, during the first few months of practice some students may experience the following temporary unpleasant phenomena,

signs that your body is adjusting to a new and better energy level:

### Common Temporary Reactions

**Itching.** The skin may itch as it discharges old and unneeded qi.

**Trembling.** Trembling occurs because your energy circuits are carrying a higher current. Or trembling may be a sign that you are using excess effort or awakening muscles that have not been exercised for a long time. When trembling occurs, pay attention and relax. If it continues, stop your practice and resume later or the next day.

**Nausea.** You have more nerve cells in your abdomen than in the spinal cord. As you awaken your mind and body, your digestion may feel different for a few months. The stomach may gurgle; you may burp or fart more often. This is only temporary.

Remember that Chinese medicine (acupuncture and herbs) are excellent adjuncts to qigong practice. To accelerate your progress in qigong, you may wish to occasionally get an acupuncture "tune up" from a licensed practitioner.



## CHAPTER 2 ORGANS, ELEMENTS, AND THREE TREASURES: FUNDAMENTALS OF QIGONG PHILOSOPHY

According to qigong philosophy, you have the ability to gather, store, or lose energy, qi. By practicing qigong, you gather more energy and prevent it from "leaking" out. Qi, like electricity, is in every cell of the body. Yet certain areas of the body have the capacity to store more energy. Like batteries that provide power to the rest of the body, these areas include:

- The internal organs
- The dan tian in the lower abdomen, the body's principal energy center, as well as the dan tians in the chest and between the eyebrows (the "third eye")

Health depends on keeping the "batteries" fully charged and maintaining a calm and relaxed mind and body. Relaxation opens the meridians so that the qi can flow smoothly. If a river is full of nutrients but the water is dammed and unable to feed the smaller streams, then the fish in these streams will starve. Similarly, even if you have abundant qi, if you are uptight and rigid, the qi will, over time, become more and more turbid.

The body is composed mostly of water, and like water, it is healthiest when it flows. Flow is an internal state—energy moving smoothly to wherever it is needed. It is also a state of harmony with nature—a flow between inside and outside. And in qigong, flow is quality of

movement. Movements that flow like water are the deepest expression of who you are and are the most beneficial to health.

### The Internal Organs

Oriental medicine divides the internal organs into two categories known as yin and yang. The liver, heart, lungs, kidneys, spleen, and pericardium are yin viscera (*zang*) and relatively solid. They produce, regulate, and store various forms of qi. The gall bladder, small intestine, large intestine, bladder, and stomach are considered yang. Yang organs (*fu*) are relatively hollow. They receive and transmit food and fluids.

There is one other rather unusual yang organ called the "triple heater," unrecognized in Western medicine. Triple heater (sometimes called triple burner) refers to a function rather than a substance, like "blood circulation" rather than "the heart." It controls the balance of warmth and energy in three regions of the body: the upper burner from the head to the chest, the middle burner around the solar plexus, and the lower burner in the lower abdomen. Or, according to some authorities: upper burner from base of the neck to solar plexus (respiration), middle burner from solar plexus to navel (digestion), and lower burner from navel to pubis (elimination). The upper burner is compared to a mist (like vapors from the lungs), the middle to a foam (digestive churning), the lower to a swamp (excretions).



Of the yin and yang organs, the yin are the most important. This makes good sense. We can live without all or part of our gall bladder, small intestine, large intestine, bladder, and stomach. By contrast, health is seriously compromised if any of the yin organs are damaged—liver, heart, lungs, kidneys, spleen, pericardium. Yin, we could say, is the basis of yang just as the mother and Mother Earth are the bases of life.

Taoist philosophy provides interesting insight into the important role of the yin organs. The word for yin organ, *zang*, also means "reservoir" or, as a verb, to hold, to contain." Thus the *Taoist Canon* is known as the *Dao Zang*, "the Reservoir of Tao." In Taoism, the *zang* are considered reservoirs of both spiritual and healing qi. According to He Shang-Gong, 2nd Century Taoist philosopher, the liver contains the *hou* (yang soul); the lungs, the *po* (yin soul); the heart, the *shen* (spirit); the kidneys, *the jing* (sexual essence); and the spleen, the *zhi* (will, volition). He Shang-Gong warns, If the viscera are damaged, the spirits will flee."

The Taoist cultivates internal organ health (or repairs any damage) in order to preserve the spirits. The alchemist Tao Hongjing (6th Century) warns that advanced meditations are effective only if one is in good health. In the *Zhen Gao* (Declarations of the True), he gives the example of an adept who engaged in alchemy for many years, all in vain, until one day an immortal spirit appeared and explained that none of the adept's meditations were bearing any fruit because his body was ill.

If the organs are damaged, the spirits flee. Conversely, if the spirits flee, the organs suffer. Thus in many styles of qigong meditation one visualizes the spirits of the organs as animals, gods, planets, or colored light fixed or sealed in their respective organs. (One of the terms for

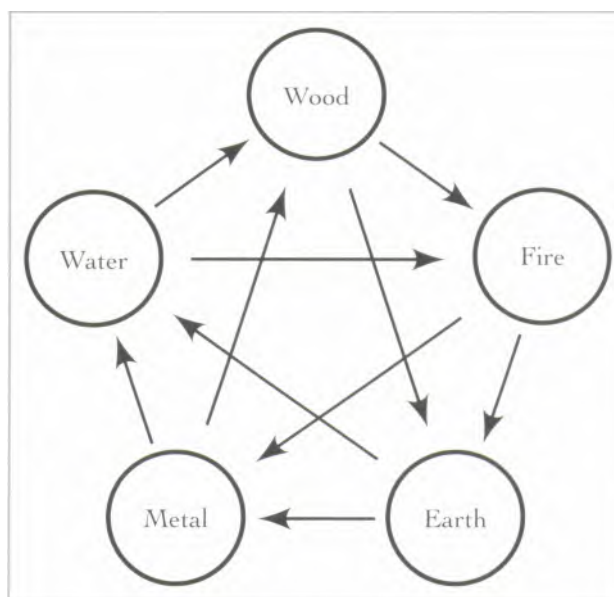
Daoist Meditation is *cun si* "fixing thought.") Several of these meditations are included on the audio CDs accompanying this program.

Just as yang complements yin, so various internal organs come in pairs. Liver and gall bladder are related. The health of one effects the health of the other. Similarly, the following organs are paired: heart-small intestine, spleen-stomach, lungs-large intestine, kidneys-bladder.

## Wu Xing: The Five Elements

The periodic table of Taoism is relatively simple. There are five elements (*wu xing*): wood, fire, earth, metal, water. Various combinations of these five elements account for all phenomena. Actually, "five elements," although a common translation, is not quite accurate. *Wu xing* really means five moving forces, or five phases of change and transformation. Many authors simply call them the "five phases."

To understand the five phases let's examine their interactions. In the Cycle of Creation



The Five Element, showing the Cycle of Creation (outer arrows), and the Cycle of Destruction (inner arrows).

(or Growth) (*Xiang Sheng*), wood creates or generates fire, fire creates earth (ashes), earth creates metal (minerals extracted from the earth), metal creates water (becoming molten or condensing water from the atmosphere), and water grows wood. Thus it is a cycle, one phase creating the next.

In the **Cycle of Destruction (or Dissolution, Restraint, and Control)** (*Xiang Ke*), wood penetrates and destroys earth, earth absorbs and destroys water, water puts out fire, fire melts metal, and metal chops wood.

How is this abstract philosophy relevant to health and qigong? Each yin yang organ pair is related to a phase. Look at the chart on page 24. For example, liver and gall bladder are wood. Since wood generates fire, the energy of the liver and gall bladder generate the energy of the heart and small intestine. Fire creates earth; thus when heart and small intestine are healthy, the spleen and stomach are more likely to be healthy. The energy of one organ can also destroy or cut into the energy of another. Metal chops wood; an overactive lung can weaken the liver. Fire melts metal. If the heart is over-stimulated (perhaps because of emotional excitement), it may weaken the lungs.

All of the organs, like their related phases, are constantly interacting. Creation and destruction is how life works. You produce a biological substance, such as a hormone, enzyme, or neurotransmitter when it is needed (creation), it disappears when no longer needed (destruction). Imagine if you were constantly generating the neurotransmitter (mood chemical) that generates sadness. Not very pleasant! Similarly we want just the right amount of thyroid hormone, not too much, not too little.

The cycles of Creation and Destruction must be balanced. Then we have homeostasis, or, from the Chinese viewpoint, health, vitality, and

longevity. Because the five phases nurture and control each other, when you practice qigong for the internal organs, it is generally best to work on all of the organs rather than focusing exclusively on the particular one that is troubling you (for example an upset stomach). When one part is ill, the entire system is ill.

## Laws of Interaction

Qigong and Chinese medicine are closely related, and both recognize the importance of the Five Phases. Although this program does not require knowledge of Chinese Medicine, an understanding of basic Five Phase Theory can enhance your understanding and appreciation of both disciplines.

1. A deficient child creates a deficient mother. Supplement the mother to tonify the child. For example if the primary problem is weakness in the lungs (metal), then add qi to the spleen (earth creates metal).

2. Yin organs tend toward deficiency; yang organs toward excess (with the exception of the heart, which tends toward excess). It is generally best to supplement deficiency as the first stage in therapy. This is why qigong emphasizes exercises and meditations for the yin organs: the heart more than the paired small intestine, the kidneys more than the bladder, etc. (See the Healing Sounds exercise on DVD 1, chapter 5, Purifying the Qi: The Healing Sounds, and Healing Sounds meditation on CD 3 track 4, The Six Sound Secret.

3. When the yin organ is deficient, the paired yang organ tends toward excess, and vice versa. For example, if the kidneys are weak, the bladder may have a tendency towards infection. Thus, if you see your acupuncturist for a cough (lungs), don't be surprised at her diagnosis of "heat in the large intestine." (Treatment key: When the yin is

tonified, the yang is sedated. When the yang is tonified, the yin is sedated.)

4. A deficient organ causes the controlling organ to become excess. For example, wood destroys earth. Thus, if your stomach (earth) is weak, the gall bladder (wood) may be inflamed, blocked, or simply too yang.

5. When the deficient organ is tonified, the grandmother is sedated. The grandmother is the mother's mother. Let's say that you tonify, add qi, to the liver. Liver is wood. Water grows wood. Metal melts to create water. Metal (lungs) is the grandmother of wood (liver). When you tonify the liver, you sedate the lungs.

From this brief introduction, you can see how the internal organs effect each other. In the human organism, all processes are intertwined and interdependent.

The Five Phases correspond to more than elements and organs. They are a model that helps us to understand how emotions, sounds, climate, and many other kinds of phenomena interact. As an example, look at the second column in the Chart of the Five Phases. Metal is the "element" of the lungs and large intestine. These organs are related to the health of the nose, skin, and hair. To heal the lungs (or large intestine) imagine them filled with white Tight, or make the sound See-ah, or listen to the note G#. Metal, lungs, large intestine, and white are also related to the west direction (known as White Tiger in feng-shui), autumn, dry climates, and the pungent or spicy flavor. This means that some spicy food is good for your lungs. Because Venus is the planet of metal, you can fill the lungs with healing energy by imagining them absorbing

PHASE	METAL	WATER	WOOD	FIRE	EARTH
Yin Organ, Yang Organ	Lungs, Large Intestine, Bladder	Kidney, Bladder	Liver, Gall Bladder	Heart, Small Intestine	Spleen, Stomach
Orifice	Nose	Ears	Eyes	Tongue	Mouth
Tissue	Skin, Hair	Bones, Teeth, Flair	Tendons, Muscles, Nails, Nerves	Blood Vessels	Flesh and Muscles
Color	White	Dark Blue or Black	Green	Red	Yellow
Healing Sound	Lion-Seeah G# (Shang)	Bear-Chrooe D# (Yu)	Monkey-Shh A# (due)	Dragon-Heu C# (Zhi)	Owl-Hoo F# (Gong)
Direction	West	North	East	South	Center
Feng Shui	White Tiger	Black Tortoise	Green Dragon	Red Bird	Yellow Worm
Season	Autumn	Winter	Spring	Summer	Late Summer
Climate	Dry	Cold	Windy	Hot	Damp
Taste	Pungent	Salty	Sour	Bitter	Sweet
Planet	Venus	Mercury	Jupiter	Mars	Earth
Harmful Emotions	Anxiety, Sorrow	Fear	Anger	Joy, Shock	Pensiveness, Empathy
Qi Effect of Harmful Emotions	Constrict	Drop	Rise	Scatter	Knot
Virtue	Yi and Courage	Zhi (Wisdom)	Ren (Kindness)	Li (Orderliness and Peace)	Xin (Trust)

Ike Chart of the Five Phases

white light from Venus. Anxiety and sorrow constrict and damage the lungs; a feeling of courage and integrity heals them. As you practice visualizations on the accompanying CDs, you may wish to refer back to the chart. It will serve as a handy reminder of the meditations and may help you to make up your own!

Note: The Triple Heater (or Triple Burner), a Yang organ, and Pericardium, a Yin organ, do not fit into the basic Five Element classification. The Triple Heater healing sound is Xi (pronounced "See").

## The Three Treasures

Oxygen, like qi, is a source of energy; it must reach every cell. Certain areas of the body, requiring more oxygen than others, are more critical for health. The brain, for example, has a huge oxygen appetite, and even a brief period of oxygen deprivation can have serious consequences. Similarly, some parts of the body's subtle energy anatomy need more qi, such as the internal organs, which I have already discussed, and the three dan tian energy centers. These dan tian are located between the eyebrows ("upper dan tian"), in the center of the chest ("middle dan tian"), and in the lower abdomen, about three inches below the navel ("lower dan tian"). There are many other dan tian; I am only discussing the principal ones.

Each dan tian stores a slightly different form of qi. The upper dan tian is the abode of the yang, heavenly qi, called *shen*. This is the qi that accounts for spirituality, awareness, and intuition. In Taoist philosophy, shen may be further broken down into various components: intent (*yi*), will (*zhi*), soul (*bun, po*), and spirit (*shen*).

The middle dan tian stores the highly potent neutral qi, the energy of life that can

transform into either yin or yang forces and substances as needed. Qi includes the life-giving power of the breath (*zong qi*), the energy of food (*gu qi*), and the "original qi" (*yuan qi*) that we receive at conception from our parents and the universe.

The lower dan tian is the reservoir of the yin and earthy energy called *jing*, "life essence"—the germ of life, vitality, and sexual energy. Jing means a refined essence, for example the nutritional essence of food (*hua tian jing*) or the underlying genetic program that we inherit from our ancestors (*xian tian jing*).

Qigong helps to keep these "three treasures," jing, qi, and shen, balanced, in full supply, and capable of transforming one into the other. Shen is not better than jing, spirit is not better than sexuality. Higher up in the body does not mean higher in value. Rather, a whole human being honors all aspects of his or her being.

In the developing embryo, the three treasures are located in different positions than in the adult. The upper dan tian, "the third eye," stores jing. After birth, the jing settles in the lower dan tian and becomes the source of sexual vitality. Yet, it remains associated with the upper body and is essential for healthy brain functioning. The middle dan tian stores shen; shen rises after birth into the brain, yet spirit and spirituality remain important to the health of both the physical and emotional heart. The lower dan tian stores neutral qi; in the infant it rises to the middle chest-level dan tian. But, as qigong practitioners know and experience, the vital breath is always linked with the lower abdomen, its original home.

We have multiple sources for replenishing the three treasures, some external and some internal. Externally, jing, qi and shen are

nourished by sexual harmony and proper nutrition (jing), qigong (qi), and meditation (shen). Internally, there is a link between the health of the organs and one's supply of the three treasures. When the heart and liver are healthy, their energies combine to produce shen. When the lungs and kidneys are healthy, their energies combine to produce jing. When the spleen is healthy, it produces qi.