



Orchard Kung Fu

The Martial Way of Vitality



Are You Chasing Your Qi?

It is mildly ironic that, at the height of our culture's technological advancement, the populace is turning to the teachings of ancient mystics in order to re-connect with themselves, each other, and the surrounding environment. Part of people's attraction to taijiquan (tie-jee-chwan), yoga, and qigong (chee-gong) may be the depth to which the mind and senses are integrated with body movements. This three-way connection is extremely important to one's sense of completeness. Properly practiced qigong seamlessly integrates body, heart, and mind into a single unit enabling one to live a balanced and joyful life.

Qigong is a relatively new term used to describe an ancient practice. It is made up of two parts: 'qi' and 'gong.' Gong translates simply as 'refined skill.' Qi is not so simply translated. Some people translate 'qi' as breath, air, universal energy, or life force. The Chinese character for 'qi' is made up of parts that create an image of rice cooking in a stove while steam raises the pot lid. This alludes to the animating action of the 'invisible' steam. Qi can thus be thought of as the quality, or force, that exists within all things that imbues each thing, animate or inanimate, with its own particular essence.

Qigong is, therefore, the skill of developing one's essence. When one's essential being is stifled, or under tension, qigong theory says the qi is sluggish, or stagnant. When one's essence is expressed freely and without hindrance, it is said that the qi is abundant and flowing freely.

There are thousands of styles of qigong. All styles are based on the universally accepted principles of relaxed and grounded posture, diaphragmatic breathing, fluid and effortless movement, and fully awakened, yet tranquil, awareness. Different styles of qigong were created for different purposes. A style may have been designed as a therapy for a specific health problem, as a daily wellness practice, as a method of attaining spiritual enlightenment, or as a method of developing martial power.

A well-known clan of caravan guards from Sichuan Province, China preserved many traditional health and martial skills in their family art. The Li family used the term 'Wu ho' (woo-hoe) to describe their qi development theory. 'Wu ho' literally means 'no fire.' The fire referred to is the collection of 'burning desires' that we tend to use to justify our actions throughout life. 'No fire,' or Wu ho, refers to being able to direct one's actions with a calm mind in all situations.

Normally, we waste much energy by responding inappropriately to the conflicting desires generated by the three energy centres, or dantian (dan-dee-en), that direct our behaviour. The lowest energy centre is called the Jing Dantian. It is located in the abdomen at the urogenital plexus. This centre is associated with our inherent genetic potential, procreative drive, physical expression, and sense of sensuality. The Qi Dantian, in the middle of the body at the solar plexus, is associated with our emotions, circulation, communication, and breath. Our passion for all things emanates from this centre. The pineal gland, in the centre of the head, houses the Shen Dantian. This energy centre is associated with our cognition, intention, imagination and



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creativity.

The Daoist qigong taught by the Li family is expressly designed to align and unify the three dantians (Jing, Qi, and Shen) so they work together harmoniously. The particular details of any method can be overwhelming. There are innumerable postural adjustments, breathing instructions, methods of visualization, energy pathways to open, connections to make, movements to polish, and a tranquil mind to maintain on top of it all! The ancient saying, “The mind commands, the body moves, and the qi follows,” gives the secret to simplifying one’s qigong practice. In the final analysis, one must train so the intention-mind, or Yi (yee), clearly leads the heart-mind, or Xin (shin), and the energy, or qi, will manifest as needed and wherever it is needed.

Qigong theory also explains that qi will not flow if there is tension. This tension includes muscular tension, emotional tension, mental tension, and spiritual tension. Thus, the Li family places pre-eminent value on what they call the ‘Four Virtues’ in their practice of wu ho/qigong. By living the principles of Honesty, Humility, Patience, and Sincerity, the student is able to calm the passions of the Xin (heart-mind) and achieve emotional balance. If one truly lives the Four Virtues, one stops internally generating mental and emotional conflicts, and this lack of internal tension frees up energy, or qi, for more productive use. One stops operating from a fear-reactive basis and moves to a mindful-responsive basis of interaction.

It is well documented that mental and emotional stress, or tension, can lead to physical tension. Thus, clearing out conflict in the heart and mind by embracing Honesty, Humility, Patience, and Sincerity in every moment also reduces muscular tension. It is less well known that bodily tensions and distortions affect how you feel and think. For instance, it is very difficult to feel truly happy and free if you are hunched over and frowning, with your fingers, wrists and arms twisting into your chest. Conversely, it is difficult to feel truly morose with your head back, arms outstretched, and a huge smile upon your face.

Thus the Yi (mind) and the posture (body) combine seamlessly to calm the Xin (passion). Once the Yi and Xin are united, the spirit becomes indomitable and the body becomes filled with qi. In the Li family qigong, Quiet Sitting is the first method introduced. By just sitting, one develops a clear mind, the passions settle, the body relaxes, the posture straightens, the breath deepens, and the three dantian (energy centres) align. After learning to sit, the student learns standing and walking exercises that build upon and deepen the rich process of aligning the will, passion, and action initiated by the practice of the Four Virtues.

Clearly, chasing your qi is not the answer many people think it is. Merely focussing on developing magical qi, or breathing exercises, or escaping into meditation is not as helpful as the advertisements suggest. To truly develop internal energy, one must do the very hard work of using honest self-observation to eliminate the internally-generated illusions impeding one’s progress and skilfully balance the needs of one’s genetic potential, passion and will.

The good news is that with thirty to sixty minutes of daily practice, anyone may access better



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health, improved vitality, and peaceful clarity. Some of the well-researched health benefits of qigong include improvement in blood pressure, cerebral blood flow, posture, balance and respiration as well as a decrease in anxiety, depression, stress responsiveness, and sensitivity to pain. So sit, breathe, clear your mind and enjoy more quality in your life!

Article by Dr. Yancy Orchard published in Wholife Magazine.

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