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Qigong in Perspective

excerpted from *Qigong for Health and Well-Being* by Master FaXiang Hou & Mark Wiley

Qigong refers to specific health exercises combining Buddhist and Taoist elements. Such exercises are viewed as techniques for regulating the body, the mind, and the breath, and involve movement and self-massage to effect changes in health.

More specifically, qigong is the art of exercising the jing (essence), qi (vital energy), and shen (spirit). The nucleus of qigong is the exercise of consciousness and vital energy. The goal of qigong, therefore, is to circulate, build, and balance qi throughout the body to promote physical and mental well-being.

As qigong is a cornerstone of the traditional Chinese medical model, it continues to be practiced by thousands throughout much of Asia today.

Qigong is a holistic therapy that exercises the body and mind and increases consciousness. Regular practice of qigong exercises aids in regulating the functions of the central nervous system. Along with exercising and controlling one's mind and body, qigong influences one's physical state in general, while improving one's pathological condition in particular.

Concurrently, the practice of qigong evokes latent powers within the human body, enabling the practitioner to use them to their fullest potential.

The Chinese believe that qigong practice increases the body's ability to adapt to and defend against the natural/physical environment in which we live.

Specifically, the practice of qigong exercises combines the practice of xing (shape-postures), yi (intention or concentration), and qi (vital energy). To

exercise the so-called genuine qi is to exercise the three treasures of the human body (jing, qi, and shen), so as to relieve pain, strengthen the body's constitution, improve intelligence, and prolong life.

Traditional Chinese doctors refers to xing, yi, and qi as the "three regulations."



Controlling the three regulations through various qigong practices is said to regulate the body's constitution, consciousness, and respiration, respectively. Such regulations are the main principle of the practice of qigong and the primary constituents of the maintenance of good health.

The varieties of qigong can be divided into four categories containing three areas each. As for a global categorization, there are Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian qigong practices.

Within these categories, there are three primary applications of qigong. In times past, qigong was used in conjunction with various Chinese martial arts. Practitioners would spend countless time memorizing the so-called deadly points along the meridian system, and the specific time of day and

month of the year during which each point was most effective. This was the prelude to using the secret "death touch" techniques, known as dimak, to maim or kill an opponent.

The primary use of qigong today is to improve one's health, thus extending life. This is known as medical or healing qigong, of which there are three subdivisions: (1) external therapy, whereby a Chinese doctor projects his own qi into a patient's body to effect a cure, (2) self-training, whereby a person chooses a qigong program and performs the exercises over a period of at least 100 days to improve his or her own health, and (3) a combination of external qigong treatments from a doctor and an individual's qigong training program.

Within the self-practice method, exercises are done in any combination of three ways: slow movements, meditation, and breathing exercises.

The third category is the use of qigong for various demonstrative purposes. Many qigong and martial arts masters today use this method for attracting new patients and/or students.

When practicing qigong, one must be sure not to separate one thing from another. The movements/postures, visualization/meditation, and proper breathing must all be done concurrently. It is not the actual movements or shape-postures that are difficult, but the correct performance of them in conjunction with the proper regulation of the breath and the flow of qi.

Proper breathing and control of the breath is perhaps the most important aspect of qigong. Through proper breathing, the organs of the body are strengthened, and



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*“There is no wealth to compare with
health of body,
no festivity to equal a joyful heart.”*

Apocrypha: Ecclesiasticus XXX, 16

their functioning is improved. Inhaling brings nourishment into the body and assists blood circulation and organ function. Exhaling serves to cleanse the body of harmful elements and wastes.

Breath control is necessary for the conduction of the qi. Vital energy is both mental and physical energy. Correct breathing allows the vital energy to flow naturally.

Students frequently ask such questions as “What should we practice?”, “When should we practice?”, and “How should we practice?” “There is so much to do and yet such little time”, they say.

And so, the question arises as to whether it is best to do more repetitions of selected exercises or to do fewer repetitions of a number of exercises.

The concept appears very Eastern, and probably very self-apparent to someone raised in an Asian culture. But individuals must simply attune to their bodies, know where trouble may possibly be forming, and exercise, eat, and breathe in a way that will help to prevent discomfort in that organ or area of the body.

That is not to say that one can totally prevent discomfort, for discomfort appears, at times, to be part of unblocking a meridian. We learn many exercises and techniques and must choose the appropriate time and way to utilize them. Practice alone will allow you to make such a decision.

Qigong involves sensing our own blockages and imbalances and attuning to the energies around us to normalize such imbalances and maximize energy flow internally and externally, to maximize our health and well-being.

During the practice of qigong you may feel various sensations in your body. The most common sensation experienced is an increase of body heat in one of the dantian areas. This occurs as qi is being cultivated and stored in this area.

An overwhelming sense of peace and comfort may envelop you as you practice or meditate. This, too, is normal and a positive indication that you are practicing correctly. Other sensations felt include a tingling sensation on the skin and an increase of saliva. Again, both are positive results of proper qigong practice.

Some uncomfortable sensations that the novice practitioner may experience during initial qigong practice include a general heaviness due to incorrect breathing, dryness of the mouth, unusual visual phenomena such as colors, lights, or steam, and dizziness. None of these sensations will last long or have a negative effect on the body. Continued proper practice of qigong will eventually make such sensations disappear.

The practice of qigong improves blood circulation and enriches the blood with more red blood cells. This increases the supply of oxygen to the tissues and promotes healthier tissues and organs. The greater supply of oxygen enables the heart to pump more slowly, yet still provide enough oxygen to the body. Imbalances such as high blood pressure and rapid heartbeat are made normal with prolonged, proper practice of qigong.

Qigong serves the whole body rather than one specific area, although this is possible through specific exercises. Qigong is also a way of attaining good health and peace of mind. Qigong calls on no external means, because it first of all exercises the internal organs and puts them into good running order and balance with each other.

Since qigong introduces nothing into the body and depends only on the body itself to create antibodies, it is the most natural and direct method of cure.

*Master FaXiang Hou will present “Qigong Energy”
at the 32nd Annual Yoga Research Society Conference,
November 4 & 5, 2006
at Thomas Jefferson University.*