

What is Qigong?

Neva Howell

Qigong is an amazing energy producing Chinese movement technique that many doctors now recommend for relaxation, reducing stress and even helping the body to heal when sick. Regular Qigong practice can reduce pain, stress and the effects of sickness from the body.

Qigong combines focused concentration with simple movements and balanced breathing in a controlled way. It's simplicity makes it easy to learn and easy to do for most people. Qigong works with the body's energy or "Qi" (Sometimes called "Chi", which is pronounced "Chee"). In Chinese Medicine, there is only one cause of illness and that is congestion. Any practice or method which increases the flow of lifeforce energy, also naturally helps relieve congestion and therefore, is beneficial to health.

According to Doctor Richard Gerber "It is believed that by moving Qi through the body, you can heal yourself of many ailments." Dr Gerber is the author of "Vibrational Medicine: New Choices for Healing Ourselves" as well as "Vibrational Medicine for the 21st Century".

How does Qigong help one feel better?

When Qi, or lifeforce energy is blocked within the body system, according to the Chinese model, then the body eventually manifests some physical imbalance or sickness. This is because congestion of Qi results in a build up of Qi where it may not be needed or wanted, much like water will dam up a river and flood over into surrounding areas. On the other side of the energy imbalance scenario, certain parts of the body do not receive sufficient Qi. There is an imbalance of energy flow and it effects the entire system eventually, usually resulting first in fatigue or general tiredness and then ultimately, in illness.

One great value of Qigong is that it helps the body remove blocks and increase the flow of energy throughout the system. When it flows freely and evenly, Qi energy helps the body heal and restore itself naturally, efficiently, and consistently.

One may learn Qigong any number of ways, through courses and classes. As with any skill, working with a recognized Master of that skill increases effectiveness in utilization of the skill. Working with a Qigong Master can assist you in learning simplified exercises to improve your health and well-being, in the shortest amount of time and with the highest rate of success.

If you speak with those who practice Qigong on a regular basis, some of their personal stories may seem to border on miraculous but it's simply the nature and natural function of the human body to regain health and vitality, if it is given the tools to do so and Qigong gives the body, mind and Spirit the energetic support that is needed to realign with health in a natural way.

If you feel that adding qigong to your daily regimen might be something you wish to explore, may I suggest Spring Forest Qigong? I encourage you to read about this remarkable tool for wellness and also the amazing man who shares the teaching with the world, Master Chunyi Lin.

Let the wisdom of the ancients bring healing and balance into your modern world through the ageless and magical practice of Qigong.

What is Qigong?

On the surface, most Qigong looks similar to Tai Chi. Most use natural, physical movements with coordinated breathing, visualization, and mental concentration, just like Tai Chi. So how are they different? Well, the basic truth is: Tai Chi is actually just one form of Qigong!

The term Qigong (pronounced "chee gung" - sometimes spelled "chi kung") literally means "energy practice." It refers to a family of practices for health, fitness, energy development, and stress relief.

Qigong includes more than just movement exercises like Tai Chi. It also includes standing and sitting meditations, massage, therapeutic healing techniques, and other health and energy-building practices. Qigong is also sometimes referred to as "Chinese yoga."

Qigong practices range from the easy-to-learn to the complicated. The easy-to-learn forms, however, are often the most powerful. Since the easy forms have fewer movements, and because the movements are repeated a number of times, they allow us to focus on specific health, fitness, and stress relief issues, producing deep levels of healing. In other words, what makes them easy-to-learn is also what makes them powerful.

A Brief History of Qigong

Resources For Patients, Practitioners & Students

Yang, Jwing-Ming

The history of Chinese Qigong can be roughly divided into four periods. We know little about the first period, which is considered to have started when the "Yi Jing" (Book of Changes) was introduced sometime before 1122 B.C., and to have extended until the Han dynasty (206 B.C.) when Buddhism and its meditation methods were imported from India. This infusion brought Qigong practice and meditation into the second period, the religious Qigong era. This period lasted until the Liang dynasty (502-557 A.D.), when it was discovered that Qigong could be used for martial purposes. This was the beginning of the third period, that of martial Qigong. Many different martial Qigong styles were created based on the theories and principles of Buddhist and Daoist Qigong. This period lasted until the overthrow of the Qing dynasty in 1911; from that point Chinese Qigong training was mixed with Qigong practices from India, Japan, and many other countries.

Before the Han Dynasty (Before 206 B.C.)

The "Yi Jing" (Book of Changes; 1122 B.C.) was probably the first Chinese book related to Qi. It introduced the concept of the three natural energies or powers (San Cai): Tian (Heaven), Di (Earth), and Ren (Man). Studying the relationship of these three natural powers was the first step in the development of Qigong.

In 1766-1154 B.C. (the Shang dynasty), the Chinese capital was located in today's An Yang in Henan province. An archeological dig there at a late Shang dynasty burial ground called Yin Xu discovered more than 160,000 pieces of turtle shell and animal bone which were covered with written characters. This writing, called "Jia Gu Wen" (Oracle-Bone Scripture), was the earliest evidence of the Chinese use of the written word. Most of the information recorded was of a religious nature. There was no mention of acupuncture or other medical knowledge, even though it was recorded in the Nei Jing that during the reign of the Yellow emperor (2690-2590 B.C.) Bian Shi (stone probes) were already being used to adjust people's Qi circulation.

During the Zhou dynasty (1122-934 B.C.), Lao Zi (Li Er) mentioned certain breathing techniques in his classic "Dao De Jing" (or Tao Te Ching) (Classic on the Virtue of the Dao). He stressed that the way to obtain health was to "concentrate on Qi and achieve softness" (Zhuan Qi Zhi Rou).(*1) Later, "Shi Ji" (Historical Record) in the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods (770-221 B.C.) also described more complete methods of breath training.

About 300 B.C. the Daoist philosopher Zhuang Zi described the relationship between health and the breath in his book "Nan Hua Jing." It states: "The men of old breathed clear down to their heels..." This was not merely a figure of speech, and confirms that a breathing method for Qi circulation was being used by some Daoists at that time. During the Qin and Han dynasties (221 B.C.-220 A.D.) there are several medical references to Qigong in the literature, such as the "Nan Jing" (Classic on Disorders) by the famous physician Bian Que, which describes using the breathing to increase Qi circulation. "Jin Kui Yao Lue" (Prescriptions from the Golden Chamber) by Zhang Zhong-Jing discusses the use of breathing and acupuncture to maintain good Qi flow. "Zhou Yi Can Tong Qi" (A Comparative Study of the Zhou (dynasty) Book of Changes) by Wei Bo-Yang explains the relationship

of human beings to nature's forces and Qi. It can be seen from this list that up to this time, almost all of the Qigong publications were written by scholars such as Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi, or physicians such as Bian Que and Wei Bo-Yang.

From the Han Dynasty to the Beginning of the Liang Dynasty (206 B.C.-502 A.D.)

Because many Han emperors were intelligent and wise, the Han dynasty was a glorious and peaceful period. It was during the Eastern Han dynasty (c. 58 A.D.) that Buddhism was imported to China from India. The Han emperor became a sincere Buddhist; Buddhism soon spread and became very popular. Many Buddhist meditation and Qigong practices, which had been practiced in India for thousands of years, were absorbed into the Chinese culture. The Buddhist temples taught many Qigong practices, especially the still meditation of Chan (Zen), which marked a new era of Chinese Qigong. Much of the deeper Qigong theory and practices which had been developed in India were brought to China. Unfortunately, since the training was directed at attaining Buddhahood, the training practices and theory were recorded in the Buddhist bibles and kept secret. For hundreds of years the religious Qigong training was never taught to laymen. Only in this century has it been available to the general populace.

Not long after Buddhism had been imported into China, a Daoist by the name of Zhang Dao-Ling combined the traditional Daoist principles with Buddhism and created a religion called Dao Jiao. Many of the meditation methods were a combination of the principles and training methods of both sources. Since Tibet had developed its own branch of Buddhism with its own training system and methods of attaining Buddhahood, Tibetan Buddhists were also invited to China to preach. In time, their practices were also absorbed.

It was in this period that the traditional Chinese Qigong practitioners finally had a chance to compare their arts with the religious Qigong practices imported mainly from India. While the scholarly and medical Qigong had been concerned with maintaining and improving health, the newly imported religious Qigong was concerned with far more. Contemporary documents and Qigong styles show clearly that the religious practitioners trained their Qi to a much deeper level, working with many internal functions of the body, and strove to obtain control of their bodies, minds, and spirits with the goal of escaping from the cycle of reincarnation.

While the Qigong practices and meditations were being passed down secretly within the monasteries, traditional scholars and physicians continued their Qigong research. During the Jin dynasty in the 3rd century A.D., a famous physician named Hua Tuo used acupuncture for anesthesia in surgery. The Daoist Jun Qian used the movements of animals to create the Wu Qin Xi (Five Animal Sports), which taught people how to increase their Qi circulation through specific movements. Also, in this period a physician named Ge Hong mentioned in his book *Bao Pu Zi* using the mind to lead and increase Qi. Sometime in the period of 420 to 581 A.D. Tao Hong-Jing compiled the "Yang Shen Yan Ming Lu" (Records of Nourishing the Body and Extending Life), which showed many Qigong techniques.

From the Liang Dynasty to the End of the Qing Dynasty (502-1911 A.D.)

During the Liang dynasty (502-557 A.D.) the emperor invited a Buddhist monk named Da Mo, who was once an Indian prince, to preach Buddhism in China. The emperor decided he did not like Da Mo's Buddhist theory, so the monk withdrew to the Shaolin Temple. When Da Mo arrived, he saw

that the priests were weak and sickly, so he shut himself away to ponder the problem. He emerged after nine years of seclusion and wrote two classics: "Yi Jin Jing" (or Yi Gin Ching) (Muscle/Tendon Changing Classic) and "Xi Sui Jing" (or Shii Soei Ching) (Marrow/Brain Washing Classic). The Muscle/Tendon Changing Classic taught the priests how to gain health and change their physical bodies from weak to strong. The Marrow/Brain Washing Classic taught the priests how to use Qi to clean the bone marrow and strengthen the blood and immune system, as well as how to energize the brain and attain enlightenment. Because the Marrow/Brain Washing Classic was harder to understand and practice, the training methods were passed down secretly to only a very few disciples in each generation.

After the priests practiced the Muscle/Tendon Changing exercises, they found that not only did they improve their health, but they also greatly increased their strength. When this training was integrated into the martial arts forms, it increased the effectiveness of their techniques. In addition to this martial Qigong training, the Shaolin priests also created five animal styles of Gongfu which imitated the way different animals fight. The animals imitated were the tiger, leopard, dragon, snake, and crane.

Outside of the monastery, the development of Qigong continued during the Sui and Tang dynasties (581-907 A.D.). Chao Yuan-Fang compiled the "Zhu Bing Yuan Hou Lun" (Thesis on the Origins and Symptoms of Various Diseases), which is a veritable encyclopedia of Qigong methods listing 260 different ways of increasing the Qi flow. The "Qian Jin Fang" (Thousand Gold Prescriptions) by Sun Si-Mao described the method of leading Qi, and also described the use of the Six Sounds. The Buddhists and Daoists had already been using the Six Sounds to regulate Qi in the internal organs for some time. Sun Si-Mao also introduced a massage system called Lao Zi's 49 Massage Techniques. "Wai Tai Mi Yao" (The Extra Important Secret) by Wang Tao discussed the use of breathing and herbal therapies for disorders of Qi circulation.

During the Song, Jin, and Yuan dynasties (960-1368 A.D.), "Yang Shen Jue" (Life Nourishing Secrets) by Zhang An-Dao discussed several Qigong practices. "Ru Men Shi Shi" (The Confucian Point of View) by Zhang Zi-He describes the use of Qigong to cure external injuries such as cuts and sprains. "Lan Shi Mi Cang" (Secret Library of the Orchid Room) by Li Guo describes using Qigong and herbal remedies for internal disorders. "Ge Zhi Yu Lun" (A Further Thesis of Complete Study) by Zhu Dan-Xi provided a theoretical explanation for the use of Qigong in curing disease.

During the Song dynasty (960-1279 A.D.), Chang San-Feng is believed to have created Taijiquan (or Tai Chi Chuan). Taiji followed a different approach in its use of Qigong than did Shaolin. While Shaolin emphasized Wai Dan (External Elixir) Qigong exercises, Taiji emphasized Nei Dan (Internal Elixir) Qigong training.

In 1026 A.D. the famous brass man of acupuncture was designed and built by Dr. Wang Wei-Yi. Before that time, the many publications which discussed acupuncture theory, principles, and treatment techniques disagreed with each other, and left many points unclear. When Dr. Wang built his brass man, he also wrote a book called "Tong Ren Yu Xue Zhen Jiu Tu" (Illustration of the Brass Man Acupuncture and Moxibustion). He explained the relationship of the 12 organs and the 12 Qi channels, clarified many of the points of confusion, and, for the first time, systematically organized acupuncture theory and principles.

In 1034 A.D. Dr. Wang used acupuncture to cure the emperor Ren Zong. With the support of the emperor, acupuncture flourished. In order to encourage acupuncture medical research, the emperor built a temple to Bian Que, who wrote the Nan Jing, and worshiped him as the ancestor of acupuncture. Acupuncture technology developed so much that even the Jin race in the distant North re-

quested the brass man and other acupuncture technology as a condition for peace. Between 1102 to 1106 A.D. Dr. Wang dissected the bodies of prisoners and added more information to the Nan Jing. His work contributed greatly to the advancement of Qigong and Chinese medicine by giving a clear and systematic idea of the circulation of Qi in the human body.

Later, in the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279 A.D.), Marshal Yue Fei was credited with creating several internal Qigong exercises and martial arts. It is said that he created the Eight Pieces of Brocade to improve the health of his soldiers. He is also known as the creator of the internal martial style Xing Yi. Eagle style martial artists also claim that Yue Fei was the creator of their style.

From then until the end of the Qing dynasty (1911 A.D.), many other Qigong styles were founded. The well known ones include Hu Bu Gong (Tiger Step Gong), Shi Er Zhuang (Twelve Postures) and Jiao Hua Gong (Beggar Gong). Also in this period, many documents related to Qigong were published, such as "Bao Shen Mi Yao" (The Secret Important Document of Body Protection) by Cao Yuan-Bai, which described moving and stationary Qigong practices; and "Yang Shen Fu Yu" (Brief Introduction to Nourishing the Body) by Chen Ji Ru, about the three treasures: Jing (essence), Qi (internal energy), and Shen (spirit). Also, "Yi Fan Ji Jie" (The Total Introduction to Medical Prescriptions) by Wang Fan-An reviewed and summarized the previously published materials; and "Nei Gong Tu Shuo" (Illustrated Explanation of Nei Gong) by Wang Zu-Yuan presented the Twelve Pieces of Brocade and explained the idea of combining both moving and stationary Qigong.

In the late Ming dynasty (around 1640 A.D.), a martial Qigong style, Huo Long Gong (Fire Dragon Gong), was created by the Taiyang martial stylists. The well known internal martial art style Ba Gua Zhang (or Ba Kua Chang)(Eight Trigrams Palm) is believed to have been created by Dong Hai-Chuan late in the Qing dynasty (1644-1911 A.D.). This style is now gaining in popularity throughout the world. During the Qing dynasty, Tibetan meditation and martial techniques became widespread in China for the first time. This was due to the encouragement and interest of the Manchurian Emperors in the royal palace, as well as others of high rank in society.

From the End of Qing Dynasty to the Present

Before 1911 A.D., Chinese society was very conservative and old-fashioned. Even though China had been expanding its contact with the outside world for the previous hundred years, the outside world had little influence beyond the coastal regions. With the overthrow of the Qing dynasty in 1911 and the founding of the Chinese Republic, the nation began changing as never before. Since this time Qigong practice has entered a new era. Because of the ease of communication in the modern world, Western culture now has great influence on the Orient. Many Chinese have opened their minds and changed their traditional ideas, especially in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Various Qigong styles are now being taught openly, and many formerly secret documents are being published. Modern methods of communication have opened up Qigong to a much wider audience than ever before, and people now have the opportunity to study and understand many different styles. In addition, people are now able to compare Chinese Qigong to similar arts from other countries such as India, Japan, Korea, and the Middle East.

I believe that in the near future Qigong will be considered the most exciting and challenging field of research. It is an ancient science just waiting to be investigated with the help of the new technologies now being developed at an almost explosive rate. Anything we can do to accelerate this research will greatly help humanity to understand and improve itself.

From the book entitled "Qigong for Arthritis", YMAA Publication Center, Jamaica Plain.

A Chi Kung (Qi Gong) Primer

Resources For Patients, Practitioners & Students

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Introduction

Chi Kung (Qi Gong) means literally, "Energy Cultivation," and refers to exercises which improve health and longevity as well as increase the sense of harmony within oneself and in the world. There are thousands of such exercises. In fact, anything you do with the intention of benefiting your energy can be considered Chi Kung. All Chi Kung contains common principles - mind, eyes, movement and breath. Another way to express this is - the mind is the presence of intention, the eyes are the focus of intention, the movement is the action of intention, the breath is the flow of intention. These are the "secrets" of Chi Kung - and they are often taught at the beginning of training. Of course it takes years of exploring these ideas in practice to begin to truly grasp their significance.

Kung Fu (Gung Fu) means "Progress Achieved through Discipline." Discipline means learning through action. The word discipline in English is related to the word disciple - one who learns. In the West the idea of Kung Fu is commonly thought of only in terms of martial arts. In fact the term applies to any activity in which paying attention and practicing to improve are important - in other words just about any worthwhile aspect of life.

Chi Kung is actually a specific example of a larger category of exercises called **Nui Kung (Nei Gong)** (literally - "Inner Cultivation"). Nui Kung encompasses a large variety of practices including standing, seated, moving, static and even dreaming exercises. "Internal" martial arts such as Tai Chi Chuan (Tai Ji Quan), Ba Kua (Pa Gua) and Hsing I (Xing Yi) are also included within this general category. In their advanced levels Nui Gong exercises cultivate access to energies commonly outside of the human experience. Obviously, if it is possible for humans to access these energies, they cannot truly be outside of human experience, perhaps only outside of commonly perceived consensual reality. Advanced sets of Nui Kung exercises focus on different specific aspects of experience, including altering states of consciousness, opening to universal energies, and manifesting unusual abilities and powers. Many of these advanced exercises included within Nui Kung are considered dangerous if taught to the unprepared and all of them must be treated with respect to avoid possible difficulties resulting from their practice.

Healing with Chi

Recent articles have emphasized the use of Chi energy for healing others. This is referred to as "External Chi Healing," (External Qi Kung) or Chi Sao. Chi energy is directed through the hands or eyes towards the patient. Often, "miraculous" improvements in health are cited as a result of a Chi Kung practitioner working with an ill person. External Chi healing is historically one of the main applications of Chi energy cultivation.

If you are going to cultivate Chi and apply it in healing work with others there are important precautions to heed. The most important of these is to remain clear of personal attachment to the process. Nothing will deplete energy faster than seeking ego gratification with the "power" of your healing work. Fortunately for most, these tendencies usually get worked out early in the process, particularly if they are working with a teacher who is themselves clear.

There are also numerous levels and depths of this healing ability. Certain healers using externally-directed Chi seem to have better effects with some illnesses than others. Ultimately it may be that to truly master the art of directing Chi in the healing process you must develop a wide spectrum of abilities and be able to apply them in a variety of types of imbalances in body, emotions, mind, soul and spirit.

The Path of Qi Gong

The ultimate goal of all Qi Gong is harmonious existence and action in all situations. This level of achievement approaches Mastery. The elements that characterize this level of experience include: curiosity, ease in action, clarity of focus and intention, perseverance, non-attachment, resilience, openness, creativity, responsiveness and fluid balance. Also, Mastery shows not in someone knowing everything, but rather someone willing to continue learning regardless of their level of achievement.

Finally, although you may find books or teachers professing to teach you the secrets of Chi Kung and the power of it's applications, it always comes down to what you, yourself are willing to practice and experience. The layers are there for you to explore when you make yourself available for the learning. At the same time, it doesn't hurt to learn whatever you can from those who have stepped through the doors before you. In the words of the Zen poet, Basho, "Do not seek to follow in the footsteps of the men of old, seek what they sought."

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Bruce Eichelberger has been practicing and teaching the Oriental healing arts for over thirty years. He is a licensed acupuncturist and herbalist practicing in Tahoe City, California. Bruce teaches workshops and seminars on a variety of subjects related to healing and health care and is the author of the Home Acupressure System.? His practice is focused on treating each person as a unique individual. Only by eliminating the underlying causes of health problems can we return to a healthy state of balance and function.

Yan Xin Qigong

Yuqiu Guo, Dr. Ac.

Introduction

Qigong is Chinese medical meditation, and Dr. Yan Xin is the leader of its most popular form. Of the estimated 160,000,000 people worldwide now doing qigong, perhaps a third are following Dr. Yan's basic nine-step method. Yan Xin qigong is one of the least physically active and most mentally active of the some 150 approaches that exist. For a basic primer on qigong, see my article in *Tone Magazine* (July / August 1995).

As qigong diffuses from China to the West, we are witnessing a now familiar turn of events. In the 1970s the Chinese began to 'export' acupuncture to North America in a big way. At first, Western scientists claimed that acupuncture did not work, that stories of people undergoing surgery with only acupuncture anaesthesia were impossible and false. Before long they began to admit that acupuncture did work, but they labelled it a 'placebo effect.' Gradually, some came to understand that, instead, acupuncture does have scientifically observable effects. For example, it enhances production of naturally occurring morphine-like substances called endorphins and enkephalins that moderate pain. Now qigong is invading the West in a big way, and the cycle is repeating itself.

Looked at from a purely Western perspective, qigong is a form of positive thinking. It combines meditation, breath control and gymnastics (Porkert w/Ullmann 1982: 106). There are breathing exercises, muscular exercises involving both tension and relaxation, and meditation. Qigong induces a whole-body relaxation response (see Benson w/Proctor 1984: 100-01). One clinical research fellow at the Harvard Medical School has written: "A one-hour session of Qi Gong combines aerobic, isometric, and isotonic exercise with the relaxation response, meditation, guided imagery, and probably several unrecognized behavioral techniques. It evokes simultaneously almost every behavioral intervention known to Western medicine" (Eisenberg w/Wright 1985: 227-8).

The Qigong Tradition

The practice dates back beyond the earliest recorded history. We still have pictorial writing on artifacts referring to qigong from seven thousand years ago (Wozniak, Wu & Wang 1991: ii). There is archaeological evidence suggesting that qigong may date back as far as a million years. Qigong predates the martial arts, and all of what we now know as religion as well. It blossomed fully during the period of the Warring states. The very early Yellow Emperor's *Classic of Internal Medicine* (1972) treats it at length. Chinese Taoists were early advocates of qigong, but Indian Buddhists have influenced its later practice.

Secular qigong is firmly in the Chinese tradition. Probably all of China's most important ancient scholars, philosophers and religious leaders practiced qigong, including Confucius, Lao Ze and Mencius (Eisenberg w/Wright 1985: 208-11). Despite claims in *Tone Magazine* (Leung 1995: 6), the qigong approach now sweeping the West, Yan Xin qigong, is not primarily a "Buddhist path." One may of course pursue qigong as a Buddhist path, as the Ottawa [Canada] Qigong Association is doing with excellent results. The International Yan Xin Qigong Association, however, is intentionally secular, as are most of its local chapters. Dr. Yan Xin often tells audiences that practicing qigong should be a regular part of everyday secular life, "just like brushing your teeth."

In addition to being a health-promoting practice, qigong is an ancient philosophical system. According to Dr. Yan, its basic purpose is to promote the harmonious integration of human beings with the universe (Wozniak, Wu & Wang 1991: i). The medical premise is that people's lives and bod-

ies can come to be at odds with the cosmic forces that surround us, and of which we are apart. In doing qigong, we therefore align ourselves with the earth's magnetic field (and we should sleep in beds so aligned as well).

Qigong helps restore the harmony of ourselves, of our beings, in nature and with nature.

This cures an enormous range of the illnesses and diseases that plague our species. One student finds his arthritis suddenly disappear, another notices that her visual acuity has improved, a third finds a chronic pain has vanished. A fourth is surprised to find himself driving more courteously (UAQA). all sense what it means to be happier, more alive, more at home on the planet. We all have latent potential abilities that qigong can help us realize. Qigong is a consciousness-raising activity par excellence.

Doing Yan Xin Qigong

A person practicing Yan Xin qigong may appear to be sitting quietly and perhaps thinking of nothing. This is both true and untrue. The person is listening but not really listening, thinking but not thinking in the normal sense, imagining but not imagining, aware of the surroundings but not too aware. Such is the qigong meditative state. Smiling and good wishes are important qigong techniques. Although sitting quietly, a beginner is trying to breathe deeply, slowly and regularly -- and counting each breath. At first it takes a lot of effort to exert harmonious control over the diaphragm, chest walls, throat, tongue and nasal passages. The beginner is also pushing virtually to the breaking point the human capacity to imagine.

At first the imagination is not up to this task. One must simultaneously imagine a flow of energy, information, light, colors, sounds and even fragrances entering the body through the top of the head. This infusion of qi, one imagines, all rushes out and down from the forehead. It passes through the nose down to one's open palms opposite the navel. It then passes in to the seat of qi, a point deep within the pelvis some two inches below the navel. Students gradually learn to focus upon this vital center or 'dan tian' point, and to sense the qi as localized warmth or heat. It takes much longer, months or years in fact, to learn to activate the channels and move qi around the body through will power alone.

In step one, the novice qigong meditator has a lot to imagine. Try to visualize a fire or bright light in the dan tian area, above which is water, on top of which is a blossoming red lotus flower. The flower opens and closes with one's breathing. As one inhales, the pores of the skin also open to take in energy / information from the universe. This all travels to the flower. Gradually the internal light intensifies and lights up the internal organs, especially the heart. The heart contracts as one inhales and relaxes as one exhales. The meditator eventually changes hand positions to hold a large imaginary fruit that glows and spins and changes size as one breathes.

How Qigong Works

A basic purpose of these activities is to impose a disciplined and rhythmic pattern on one's body. We impose willed control over breathing, normally an involuntary function of the parasympathetic nervous system. Doing so helps bring the body into phase with the larger rhythms of daily life, the cycles of the days and the seasons. Most diseases are irregularities and dysfunctions. Put the body into phase and flow with the universe, and the qi will flow more freely. Freely flowing qi can eliminate irregularities and dysfunctions. Qigong permits a person to gain some control over autonomic functions. The exercises produce 'autonomic learning' that modulates and rectifies the flow of the life force (Porkert w/ Ullmann 1982: 106- 7). This form of biofeedback does not require machines.

We have lost the ancient way of living in quiescence and tranquillity. Qigong helps to bring this back. Beyond the basic imagination exercises, when we have a fever we think of the sea, bamboo leaves, or the cool forest floor. If we are restless we think of the blue sky, cool and serene moonlight, etc. (Yan 1994b: 6) Being in phase with the cosmic environment greatly strengthens the body, and it strongly helps to produce an optimistic and happy attitude toward life. Central to the philosophy of qigong is the understanding that we must cultivate moral and physical strength together to prolong life, develop human potential and help others. A cardinal rule of Yan Xin qigong is to treat others with compassion. When one family member practices qigong, the others benefit.

The regulation of thoughts, breathing and posture all help to reduce the mind/body's neural activity. Qigong practice strengthens the body's electrical and biochemical signals, and the structure and sensitivity of the receptor cells. This quieting of the body permits physiological and biochemical functions to regain their healthy flows. This cures specific ailments, but it also strengthens one's overall biological field or bioenergy, drastically cuts down the number of free radicals and minimizes their damage at the cellular level. That prolongs life.

Qigong meditation works best by far in the company of a group. While one must regularly practice alone at home, this is not enough. When people come together to practice qigong, they put their biological fields in proximity. These fields begin to resonate with one another, and so to multiply the benefits of practice for each person. For this to happen requires two things. First, ill people must truly want to get rid of their diseases. Second, they must cultivate the positive, open and optimistic attitude necessary for resonating in harmony with the field.

Sceptical Westerners sometimes mistake this openness to change for a 'placebo effect.' In a placebo-effect situation, the subject is fooled into thinking a therapeutic treatment is happening when it is not. The open optimism necessary for success in qigong is much different. In the case of the placebo effect, belief produces a consequence, a self-fulfilling prophecy or at least the mistaken perception of improvement. When people doing qigong agree to resonate in harmony, this is a prerequisite to success. Good, real and lasting effects follow. Dr. Yan Xin calls this necessary precondition for success "synchronous resonance" (Wozniak, Wu & Wang 1991: 81).

It does help to play a trick with one's mind when doing qigong to treat some specific problem. So long as one's mind is focused on a specific problem of ill health it is not possible to enter fully into the deep qigong state in which lasting healing can occur. One must therefore learn to forget about the problem and look only for general benefits. If the cosmic forces of the universe are to do their healing task, we must be fully open to receive them.

Advancing More Deeply into the Process

As one advances more deeply into qigong practice, and into the qigong state, significant physiological changes occur. Consumption of oxygen decreases. The lung's capacity to absorb oxygen greatly increases. So does the lung tissue's oxygen storage capacity. The white blood cell count goes up dramatically. Dr. Yan Xin writes that doing qigong "improves micro-circulation of the cerebrum and this cannot be obtained through any other kind of practice. The brain's deeply layered cerebral cells are enriched with sufficient blood by doing qigong" (Wozniak, Wu & Wang 1991: 43). This oxygen enrichment of the brain is an important key to many qigong effects.

After practicing for several months, one who does qigong faithfully will begin to experience spontaneous physical movements. As the Chinese doctors like to say, "life has to move." Paradoxically, only when the mind becomes calm and serene does one's bioenergy become strong enough to produce spontaneous movements. The first appearance of spontaneous movements represents sig-

nificant progress along the qigong learning curve. One cannot seek them out. They must come along spontaneously, in their own good time.

Advancement in qigong follows a natural course. One should strive to stay relaxed, calm and in good spirits. It is especially important to be and remain on good terms with family members. Some bad feelings, pains or excessive spontaneous movements are likely to occur. These may represent mental discord, pessimism or a lack of family support. Everyone will at times feel uncomfortable, upset, angry or depressed. Everyone will experience sorrow, unfair treatment or a guilty conscience. When these happen, try to overcome them with good works, internal resolve and a positive attitude (Wozniak, Wu & Wang 1991: 86).

Strong spontaneous movements may at first feel frightening, but those who have strong movements without internal discord have a great advantage. They will be able to achieve a stronger state of qi after guidance and instruction. Dr. Yan says: "... after one reaches a certain level in qigong, one depends heavily on virtue and good deeds to get more Qi and energy" (ibid.:79).

After a lot of practice, one will begin to sense the activation of a small qi channel. This channel runs from the top of the head down the front of one's chest, between the legs, up the spine back to the top of the head. Activating one's qi will make a person feel "sore, numb, hurt, cold, cool, warm, hot, floating, sinking, big, small, dizzy, etc. (Wozniak, Wu & Wang 1991: 39). This is another major advance along the qigong learning curve. With sufficient practice, one may eventually become able to move one's qi at will anywhere inside the body. A person's own willpower can then effect miraculous cures. Once the flow of qi can reach the site of disease or illness, the cure can be astonishingly rapid.

Conclusion

Western science leaves off its study of life's energy at the inanimate level of chemicals. But life has another entire level of organization above that of the cells, tissues and organs. What is it that controls cell replacement, tissue regeneration and metabolic energy? The Chinese call it qi. We can train this vital life force itself to keep regenerating our good health for many, many years (Dong & Esser 1990:18). Every great ethical system upholds virtue for highly practical reasons. What goes around comes around.

Wrongdoing against others may result in some immediate gain, but our minds will indelibly record our guilt, while our bodies will record such behavior by becoming twisted. If we harm others, this act will block the free flow of qi within our own bodies. It is very dangerous to continue immoral activities once one has begun to practice qigong. Dr. Yan says that crimes, sins and simple wrongdoing record themselves as signals in the body. These signals interfere with qigong progress (Yan 1994a: 8). Yan Xin writes: "Within the higher realm of qigong there is a rule: do not try to harm others or you will harm yourself. Virtue is very important. Without it, one's qi will decrease or be totally lost" (Wozniak, Wu & Wang 1991: 75).

If one wants to advance one's qigong practice, it will become necessary to admit the wrongs we have done against others and to take action to correct these wrongs. Ultimately, good health requires peace of mind. Let me repeat that Yan Xin qigong does not require any particular religious commitment. Whatever religion you practice or do not practice, qigong can work to improve the length, well being and quality of your life.

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The Twenty-Four Rules for Chi Kung Practice

Resources For Patients, Practitioners & Students

Yang, Jwing-Ming

When I began studying Qi Gong (Chi Kung), one of my classmates who had been at it for a while, said that when it comes to feeling your Qi moving within your body, it will take two years to feel anything, and five years to believe it.

While taking two years to feel the Qi wasn't exactly right, the essence of his comments are still very true. Qi Gong is a path, not a destination, and along that path are many signposts that you will pass. Feeling the Qi, believing you feel the Qi, learning to direct it with physical movements, learning to direct it with just your mind's intent, directing it somewhere in the future, in the past, etc... are all steps along a never ending path.

The article that follows is designed to prepare you for a life of discipline, not instant gratification. The only true gratification that comes from doing Qi Gong is to enjoy the activity while your doing it, no matter what your level. Gratification that is dependent on obtaining any sort of power will only get in the way of the most sacred of all side-effects of Qi Gong, and that is enlightenment itself. -al stone.

The Twenty-Four Rules for Chi Kung Practice

In this section we will list the twenty-four rules which have been passed down by generations of Chi Kung masters. These rules are based on much study and experience, and you should observe them carefully.

Don't be Stubborn about Plans and Ideas

This is one of the easiest mistakes for beginners to make. When we take up Chi Kung we are enthusiastic and eager. However, sometimes we don't learn as fast as we would like to, and we become impatient and try to force things. Sometimes we set up a schedule for ourselves: today I want to make my Dan Tien warm, tomorrow I want to get through the tailbone cavity, by such and such a day I want to complete the small circulation. This is the wrong way to go about it. Chi Kung is not like any ordinal-v job or task you set for yourself -- YOU CANNOT MAKE A PROGRESS SCHEDULE FOR CHI KUNG. This will only make your thinking rigid and stagnate your progress. EVERYTHING HAPPENS WHEN IT IS TIME FOR IT TO HAPPEN. IF YOU FORCE IT, IT WILL NOT HAPPEN NATURALLY.

Don't Place your Attention in Discrimination

When you practice, do not place your attention on the various phenomena or sensations which are occurring. Be aware of what is happening, but keep your mind centered on wherever it is supposed to be for the exercise you are doing. If you let your mind go to wherever you feel something "interesting" happening, the Chi will follow your mind and interfere with your body's natural tendency to re-balance itself Do not expect anything to happen, and don't let your mind wander around looking for the various phenomena. Furthermore, don't start evaluating or judging the phenomena, such as asking "Is my Dan Tien warmer today than it was yesterday?" Don't ask yourself "Just where is my Chi now?" When your mind is on your Chi, your Yi is there also, and this stagnant Yi will not lead the Chi BE AWARE OF WHAT IS HAPPENING, BUT DON'T PAY ATTENTION TO IT When you drive a car,

you don't watch yourself steer and work the pedals and shift gears. If you did, you'd drive off the road. You simply put your mind on where you want to go and let your body automatically drive the car. This is called regulating without regulating.

Avoid Miscellaneous Thought Remaining on Origins

This is a problem of regulating the mind. The emotional mind is strong, and every idea is still strongly connected to its origin. If you cannot cut the ideas off at their source, your mind is not regulated, and you should not try to regulate your Chi. You will also often find that even though you have stopped the flow of random thoughts going through your mind, new ideas are generated during practice. For example, when you discover your Dan Tien is warm, your mind immediately recalls where this is mentioned in a book, or how the master described it, and you start to compare your experience with this. Or you may start wondering what the next step is. All of these thoughts will lead you away from peace and calm, and your mind will end up in the "Domain of the Devil." Then your mind will be confused, scattered, and very often scared, and you will tire quickly.

Hsin (Shen) Should not Follows the External Scenery

This is also a problem of regulating the mind (Hsin). When your emotional mind is not controlled, any external distraction will lead it away from your body and to the distraction. You must train yourself so that noises, smells, conversations and such will not disturb your concentration. It is all right to be aware of what is happening, but your mind must remain calmly, peacefully and steadily on your cultivation.

Regulate your Sexual Activity

You should not have sexual relations at least 24 hours before or after practicing Chi Kung, especially martial or religious Chi Kung. The Essence-Chi conversion training is a very critical part of these practices, and if you practice Chi Kung soon after sex, you will harm your body significantly. Sex depletes your Chi and sperm, and the Chi level in the lower portion of your body is lower than normal. When you practice Chi Kung under these conditions, it is like doing heavy exercise right after sex. Furthermore, when your Chi level is abnormal, your feeling and sensing are also not accurate. Under these conditions, your Yi can be misled and its accuracy affected. You should wait until the Chi level regains its normal balance before you resume Chi Kung. Only then will the Essence-Chi conversion proceed normally and efficiently.

One of the major purposes of Chi Kung is to increase the Essence-Chi conversion and use this Chi to nourish your body. Once a man has built up a supply of Chi, having sex will only pass this Chi on to his partner. As a matter of fact, many Chi Kung masters insist that you should not have sex three days before and four days after practice. During sexual relations the female usually gains Chi while the male loses Chi during ejaculation. The woman should not practice Chi Kung after sex until her body has digested the Chi she has obtained from the man. There are certain Taoist Chi Kung techniques which teach men how not to lose Chi during sexual activity, and teach women how to receive Chi from the man and digest it. We will leave the discussion of this subject to Chi Kung masters who are qualified and experienced in it.

Don't be Too Warm or Too Cold

The temperature of the room in which you are training should not be too hot or too cold. You should practice in the most comfortable environment which will not disturb your mind and cultivation.

Be Careful of the Five Weaknesses and Internal Injuries

Five weaknesses means the weaknesses of five Yin organs: the heart, liver, lungs, kidneys, and spleen. When you realize that any of these five organs is weak, you should proceed very gradually and gently with your Chi Kung practice. Chi Kung practice is an internal exercise which is directly related to these five organs. If you do not move gradually and gently, it is like forcing a weak person to run 10 miles right away. This will not build up his strength, instead it will injure him more seriously.

For the same reason, when you have an internal injury your internal Chi distribution and circulation is already disturbed. If you practice Chi Kung your feelings may be misled, and your practice may worsen your problem and interfere with the natural healing process. There are certain Chi Kung exercises which are designed to cure internal injuries, but to use them properly you need to have a very good understanding of the Chi situation of your body.

Avoid Facing the Wind when Sweating

Don't practice in the wind, especially facing the wind. When you practice Chi Kung you are exercising either internally, or both internally and externally. It is normal to sweat, and since you are relaxed, your pores are wide open, if you expose your body to cold wind, you will catch cold.

Don't Wear Tight Clothes and Belt

Always wear loose clothes during practice because this will help you to feel comfortable. Keep your belt loose, too. The abdomen is the key area in Chi Kung practice, and you must be careful not to limit the movement of this area because it will interfere with your practice.

Don't Eat too Much Greasy and Sweet Food

You should regulate your eating habit while you are practicing: Chi Kung. Greasy or sweet food will increase your Fire Chi, making your mind scattered, and your Shen will stray away from its residence. You should eat more fruit and vegetables, and keep away from alcohol and tobacco.

Don't Hang your Feet off the Bed

In ancient times the most common place in Chi Kung practice was sitting on your bed. Since most beds were high, if you sat on the edge of the bed your feet would hang off the side of the bed above the floor. When you practice Chi Kung your feet should touch the floor. If they do not, all of the weight of your body will press down on the lower part of your thighs and reduce the Chi and blood circulation. Furthermore, when you practice you should not put your feet up on the table, because this position will also stagnate the Chi and blood circulation.

Don't Practice with a Full Bladder

You should go to the toilet before you start your practice. If you need to go during practice, stop your practice and do so. Holding it in disturbs your concentration.

Don't Scratch an Itch

If you itch because of some external reason, such as an insect walking on you or biting you, do not be alarmed and keep your mind calm. Use your Yi to lead the Chi back to its residence, the Dan Tien.

Breathe a couple of times and gradually bring your consciousness back to your surroundings. Then you may scratch or think of how to stop the itching. However, if the itching is caused by Chi redistribution in the Chi Kung practice, remain calm and do not move your mind there. Simply ignore it and let it happen. Once it has reached a new balance, the itching will stop. If you scratch this kind of itch it means that your mind has been disturbed, and also that you are using your hands to interfere with the natural rebalancing of your body's Chi.

Avoid Being Suddenly Disturbed or Startled

You should avoid being suddenly disturbed or startled. However, if it does happen, calm down your mind. You must absolutely prevent yourself from losing your temper. What has happened has happened, and getting mad cannot change anything. What you should do is prevent it from happening again. Most important of all, though is learning how to regulate your mind when you are disturbed.

Don't Take Delight in the Scenery

It is very common during practice to suddenly notice something that is going on inside of you. Perhaps you feel Chi moving more clearly than ever before, or you start to sense your bone marrow, and you feel elated and excited. You have just fallen into a very common trap. Your concentration is broken, and your mind is divided. This is dangerous and harmful. You have to learn how to be aware of what is going on inside you without getting excited.

Don't Wear Sweaty Clothes

This happens mostly in moving Chi Kung practice, especially in martial Chi Kung training. When your clothes are wet from sweat you will feel uncomfortable, and your concentration will be affected. It is better to change into dry clothes and then resume practice.

Don't Sit When Hungry or Full

You should not practice Chi Kung when you are hungry or when your stomach is full. When you are hungry it is hard to concentrate, and when you are full your practice will affect your digestion.

Heaven and Earth Strange Disaster

It is believed that your body's Chi is directly affected by changes in the weather. It is therefore not advisable to practice Chi Kung when there is a sudden weather change, because your practice will interfere with your body's natural readjustment to the new environment. You will also be unable to feel and sense your Chi flow as you do normally. You must always try to remain emotionally neutral whenever you do Chi Kung; even if you are disturbed by a natural disaster like an earthquake, you must remain calm so that your Chi stays under control.

Listen Sometimes to True Words

You need to have confidence when you practice Chi Kung. You should not listen to advice from people who do not have experience in Chi Kung and who are not familiar with the condition of your body. Some people listen to their classmates explain how they reached a certain level or how they cured a certain problem, and then blindly try to use the same method themselves. You need to understand that everyone has a different body, everyone's health is slightly different, and everyone learns

differently. When the time comes for you to learn something new, you will understand what you need. Play it cool and easy, and always have confidence in your training.

Don't Lean and Fall Asleep

You should not continue your Chi Kung training when you are sleepy. Using an unclear mind to lead Chi is dangerous. Also, when you are sleepy your body will not be regulated and will tend to lean or droop, and your bad posture may interfere with the proper Chi circulation. When you are sleepy it is best to take a rest until you are able to regain your spirit.

Don't Meditate When You Have Lost Your Temper or are Too Excited

You should not meditate when you are too excited due to anger or happiness. Since your mind is scattered, meditation will bring you more harm than peace.

Don't Keep Spitting

It is normal to generate a lot of saliva while practicing Chi Kung. The saliva should be swallowed to moisten your throat. Don't spit out the saliva because this is a waste, and it will also disturb your concentration.

Don't Doubt and Become Lazy

When you first start Chi Kung, you must have confidence in what you are doing, and not start doubting its validity, or questioning whether you are doing it right. If you start doubting right at the beginning you will become lazy, and you will start questioning whether you really want to continue. In this case, you will not have any success and your practice will never last.

Do not Ask for the Speedy Success

This is to remind you that Chi Kung practice is time consuming and progress is slow. You must have patience, a strong will, and confidence to reach your goal. Taking it easy and being natural are the most important rules.

From the book entitled "The Root of Chinese Chi Kung, The Secrets of Chi Kung Training", YMAA Publication Center, Jamaica Plain.

The Twelve Primary Qi Channels

by Yang, Jwing-Ming

In this chapter we will briefly review the twelve primary Qi channels along with the eight extraordinary meridians. You should also know the organ's Yin and Yang. In our body, there are six Yang organs and six Yin organs. Each Yang organ is associated with a Yin organ by a special Yin/Yang relationship.

Paired Yin and Yang organs belong to the same phase in the Five Phases. Their channels are sequential to each other in the circulation of Qi, their functions are closely related, and disease in one usually affects the other. In Chinese medicine, the channel corresponding to the Yang organ is often used to treat disorders of its related Yin organ.

In the limbs, the Yang channels are on the external side of the limbs while the Yin channels are on the internal side. Generally speaking, the outsides of the limbs are more Yang and are more resistant and prepared for an attack, while the internal sides are more Yin and weaker.

The organs are further subdivided in order to distinguish the different levels of the Yin/Yang characteristics. The Yang organs are divided into Greater Yang (Taiyang), Lesser Yang (Shaoyang), and Yang Brightness (Yangming). The Yin organs are divided into Greater Yin (Taiyin), Lesser Yin (Shaoyin), and Absolute Yin (Jueyin). In the following discussion, all of the classifications will be shown in the title, for example: the Lung Channel of Hand Greater Yin.

1. The Lung Channel of Hand -- Greater Yin

The lungs (Yin) and the large intestine (Yang) are considered paired organs. They belong to Metal in the Five Phases, the westerly direction, the season of autumn, the dry climatic condition, the color white, the pungent taste, the rank odor, the emotion of sadness, and the sound of weeping. Their opening is the nose, and they govern skin and hair.

In Qigong practice, since the lungs belong to Metal, they are able to regulate heartburn. The heart belongs to Fire. Whenever the heart has excess Qi, deep breathing is able to lead the heart's fire to the lungs, and therefore cool the heartburn. When the weather is changing from damp, hot summer into dry and cool autumn, lungs are the first organ to sense the change. If your lungs are not able to readjust themselves to fit the new situation smoothly, you will catch a cold. The lungs access the outside world through your nose. The lungs are responsible for taking Qi from the air, and for the energy (Qi) state of the body.

Breathing is considered a strategy for leading Qi to the extremities such as skin and hair. When your breathing is regulated properly, you are able to strengthen your body's Guardian Qi and generate an expansive Qi shield to protect your body. You are also able to raise or lower your Qi state through your breathing. For example, when you are angry, deep breathing is able to calm your excited Qi state.

The lungs are sensitive to emotional changes, especially when you are sad or angry. They also control that part of the liquid metabolism which distributes liquid to the skin. Because the lungs are usually the first to be attacked by exogenous diseases, they are called the Delicate Organ. These diseases can also cause what is called the Non-Spreading of the Lung Qi. The main symptom of a problem with the lungs is coughing, which is a form of Rebellious Qi (since the lung Qi normally flows downward). If coughing is also accompanied by lassitude, shortness of breath, light foamy phlegm, and weakness in the voice, it is called Deficient Lung Qi. However, if the cough is a

dry one, with little phlegm, a parched throat and mouth, and Deficient Yin symptoms (such as night sweating, low grade fever, red cheeks, etc.), the condition is referred as Deficient Lung Yin.

2. The Large Intestine Channel of Hand - Yang Brightness

The lungs (Yin) and the large intestine (Yang) are considered paired organs. From Table 2-1 you can see that they belong to Metal in the Five Phases, the westerly direction, the season of autumn, the dry climatic condition, the color white, the pungent taste, the rank odor, the emotion of sadness, and the sound of weeping. Their opening is the nose, and they govern skin and hair. The main function of the large intestine is the metabolism of water and the passing of water. It extracts water from the waste material received from the small intestine, sends it on to the urinary bladder, and excretes the solid material as stool. Many disorders affecting this organ are categorized as spleen and stomach patterns. Certain abdominal pains are considered manifestations of a blockage of Qi or blood in the large intestine.

In Qigong, the Dan Tian in the lower abdomen is considered the residence of Original Qi. In order to keep this Qi at its residence, this area must be strong and healthy. The Qi circulating around the intestines must not be stagnant. When you practice Qigong you must learn how to regulate your breathing to smooth the Qi flow in the large intestine and the lungs. This will allow you to relax the front of your body and regulate the Qi flow in the other organs.

3. The Stomach Channel of Foot - Yang Brightness

The spleen (Yin) and the stomach (Yang) are paired organs. They belong to Earth in the Five Phases, the center, the season of long summer (the end of summer), the climatic condition of dampness, the color yellow, the emotion of pensiveness, the taste of sweetness, fragrant odor, and the sound of singing. Their opening is the mouth and they control the flesh and the limbs.

The Yin/Yang relationship between the spleen and the stomach is a particularly strong example of the relationship between organs. The stomach receives food while the spleen transports nutrients. The stomach moves things downward while the spleen moves things upward. The stomach likes dampness while the spleen likes dryness.

Though there are some patterns relating to deficiency of the stomach (many of these originate in the spleen), most stomach disorders are caused from excess. Stomach Fire gives a painful, burning sensation in the stomach, unusual hunger, bleeding of the gums, constipation, and halitosis.

Once saliva has begun the process of digestion, food passes to the stomach, located in the middle Sanjiao (middle triple burner) area. The stomach breaks down the food, and then passes it on to the intestines, where the essence is absorbed and converted into Qi, and circulated through the entire body.

The stomach is related to the emotion of pensiveness. When you are upset, the stomach will not function normally. In Qigong, regulating the mind is the first step to maintaining the stomach in a healthy condition. The type of food you eat is the second consideration. The proper amount and quality of food will help you to obtain high quality Qi to circulate in your body.

4. The Spleen Channel of Foot - Greater Yin

The spleen (Yin) and the stomach (Yang) are paired organs. They belong to Earth in the Five Phases, the central direction, the season of long summer (the end of summer), the climatic condition of dampness, the color yellow, the emotion of pensiveness, the taste of sweetness, fragrant odor, and the sound of singing. Their opening is the mouth and they control the flesh and the limbs.

The spleen is the main organ of digestion. Its function is to transport nutrients and regulate the blood (regulate means to keep it within the channels). It is responsible for the transformation of food into nourishment.

When the spleen is weak, the body will not be able to use the nourishment available in food. This will cause general lassitude, fatigue, and a pasty complexion. The upper abdomen is considered the province of the spleen. Deficient spleen Qi is shown by a sense of malaise or fullness in that area. Because it is required that the transportive function of the spleen distribute its Qi upward, weakness in the spleen will usually cause diarrhea. Spleen Qi is also regarded as the Middle Qi, and it is responsible for holding the viscera in place. Insufficiency of the Middle Qi will presage prolapsed stomach, kidneys, etc. In more serious cases, the spleen Yang Qi will be deficient, which is manifested in diarrhea, cold limbs, and abdominal pain that can be soothed by the warmth of frequent hot drinks.

If any of the above symptoms are accompanied by bleeding, especially from the digestive tract or uterus, it is called Spleen Not Controlling the Blood.

Cold and Dampness Harassing the Spleen is a manifestation characterized by a pent-up feeling in the chest and a bloated sensation in the abdomen, lassitude, lack of appetite and taste, a feeling of cold in the limbs, a dark yellowish hue to the skin, some edema and diarrhea or watery stool. The cold and dampness prevent the spleen from performing its transforming and transporting functions. This leads to a great disturbance in water metabolism and is one of the origins of Phlegm.

In Qigong training, one of the final goals is to regulate the Qi flow to its original (normal) level in the five Yin organs. Among them, the spleen is the last and the hardest organ to regulate. It is believed that if you are able to regulate the Qi in your spleen to a normal and healthy level, you will have grasped the key to health and longevity.

5. The Heart Channel of Hand - Lesser Yin

The heart and the small intestine are paired organs. The heart is considered Yin, and the small intestine is considered Yang, balancing this paired channel. These two organs correspond to Fire in the Five Phases, the southerly direction, the summer season, the climatic condition of heat, the color red, the emotion of happiness, the sound of laughter, the taste of bitterness, and the odor of burning. Their point of entry is the tongue, they control the blood vessels and are reflected in the face.

Almost all of the problems and disorders of the heart are associated with weakness. The four major types of heart weakness are Deficient Heart Qi, Deficient Heart Yang, Deficient Heart Blood, and Deficient Heart Yin.

The main functions of the heart are associated with the spirit and the blood vessels. The heart governs the blood vessels and is responsible for moving blood through them. It also stores the spirit, and is the organ usually associated with mental processes. Therefore, some forms of emotional distress, dizziness, palpitations, shortness of breath, and lack of vitality are common symptoms of heart ailments. Deficient Heart Qi is symbolized by general lassitude, panting and shallow breathing, and

frequent sweating. If the face is swollen and ashen gray or bluish-green, and the limbs are cold, it is called Deficient Heart Yang. The symptoms of restless ness, irritability, dizziness, absentmindedness, and insomnia are typical signs of Deficient Heart Blood. In Deficient Heart Yin cases, developments with a flushed feeling in the palms and face, low grade fever, and night sweating will occur.

The symptom of Heart Excess arises from an excess of Heart Fire. This is manifested by fever, occasionally accompanied by delirium, a racking pulse, intense restlessness, insomnia or frequent nightmares, a bright red face, a red or blistered and painful tongue, and often a burning sensation during urination. The latter symptom is the result of Heat being transferred from the heart to the small intestine, which interferes with the small intestine's role in metabolism and the body's management of water.

In Qigong society, it is believed that the mind is associated with the heart, and that it is also directly related to the spirit. The term heart (Xin) is usually used to represent the emotional mind or ideas. The Middle Dan Tian at the solar plexus is considered the residence of the Fire Qi. This Fire is used to nourish the brain and the spirit (Shen) at its residence, the Upper Dan Tian or third eye. In Chinese medicine it is said that the heart is the temple of the spirit because it supplies Fire Qi and can nourish the spirit without limit.

Generally speaking, the heart is very sensitive during the summertime: The heart is a Yin channel, and when the summer Yang comes it can increase the heart's Qi level and cause problems. Emotional disturbances, such as excitement from happiness, are considered harmful to the heart as well, especially during the summer time. Qigong emphasizes regulating the heart in the summer.

6. The Small Intestine Channel of Hand - Greater Yang

The heart and the small intestine are paired organs. The heart is considered Yin, and the small intestine is considered Yang, balancing this paired channel. These two organs correspond to Fire in the Five Phases, the southerly direction, the summer season, the climatic condition of heat, the color red, the emotion of happiness, the sound of laughter, the taste of bitterness, and the odor of burning. Their point of entry is the tongue. They control the blood vessels and are reflected in the face.

The major function of the small intestine is to separate waste material from the nutritious elements in food. The nutritious elements are then distributed throughout the body and the waste is sent on to the large intestine.

The small and large intestines are located in the Lower Dan Tian. In order to store the Original Qi converted from Original Essence, the abdomen must be healthy and the Qi circulation in the area of the intestines must be smooth and natural. The best way to reach this goal is through abdominal breathing exercises. One such exercise is to lead the Original Qi upward following the heart and small intestine Qi channels to cool down the heart Fire.

7. The Urinary Bladder Channel of Foot - Greater Yang

The kidneys (Yin) and the urinary bladder (Yang) are paired organs. They correspond to Water in the Five Phases, the winter season, the cold climatic condition, the southerly direction, the color black, the emotion of fear, the taste of salt, the smell of decay, and the sound of groaning. Their sensory organ is the ear. Their opening is the urethra. They control the bones, marrow, and brain, and their health is reflected in the hair of the head.

The main function of the urinary bladder is to transform fluids into urine and excrete it from the body.

In Qigong, the urinary bladder has never enjoyed serious attention. However, its pairing partner the kidney is one of the most important organs - one with which all Qigong practitioners are concerned and train most often. The reason for this is simply that the kidneys are the residence of the Original Essence.

8. The Kidney Channel of Foot - Lesser Yin

The kidneys (Yin) and the urinary bladder (Yang) are paired organs. They correspond to Water in the Five Phases, the winter season, the cold climatic condition, the southerly direction, the color black, the emotion of fear, the taste of salt, a rotten smell, and the sound of groaning. Their sensory organ is the ear. Their opening is the urethra. They control the bones, marrow, and brain, and their health is reflected in the hair of the head.

The kidneys store Original Essence (Yuan Jing) and are therefore responsible for growth, development, and reproductive functions. They play the primary role in water metabolism and control the body's liquids, and also hold the body's most fundamental Yin and Yang.

Because the kidneys are the repositories of the basal Yin and Yang of the body, any disorder, if sufficiently chronic, will involve the kidneys. More significantly, a disease of the kidneys will usually lead to problems in other organs. Methods of strengthening the kidneys are therefore used by both medical and Qigong societies to increase or maintain vitality and health. The symptoms of Deficient Kidney Yang or Yin are typical symptoms of the disorder, and will appear to a certain extent as Deficient Yang or Yin patterns in any organ.

It is easy to understand and memorize the symptoms of Deficient Kidney Yin if one learns the correspondences of the kidneys and remembers that Yin represents the constructive, nourishing, and fluid aspects of the body. Usually, the lower back is weak and sore, there is ringing in the ears and loss of hearing acuity, the face is ashen or dark, especially under the eyes. It is common to feel dizziness and thirst, and to experience night sweats and low grade fevers. In addition, men have little semen and tend toward premature ejaculation, while women have little or no menstruation.

Deficient Kidney Yang symptoms are significantly associated with loss of energy or warmth. Similar to Deficient Kidney Yin, there is commonly ringing in the ears, dizziness, and soreness in the lower back. However, the soreness is characterized by a feeling of coldness, lassitude, and fatigue. Weakness in the legs can be noticed. In men, there is a tendency toward impotence, and in both sexes, clear and voluminous urine or incontinence.

Usually, Deficient Kidney Yin generates similar disorders in the heart and liver, while Deficient Kidney Yang disturbs the functions of the spleen and lungs. The progression could be in the opposite direction. When this pattern is associated with the lungs, it is called "Kidney Not Receiving Qi," a type of wheezing characterized by difficult breathing, mainly during inhalation. In addition to the Deficient Kidney Yang symptoms, this condition is also manifested by a faint voice, coughing, puffiness in the face, and spontaneous sweating.

The kidneys perform an important role in the metabolism of water. If these functions are disrupted, the condition of Deficient Kidneys will lead to Spreading Water. In Qigong practice, essence (Jing) is considered the most original source of human vitality. Qi is converted from essence, and this Qi supplies the entire body and nourishes the brain and spirit. It is believed by both Chinese medical and Qigong societies that the kidneys are the residence of Original

Essence. In order to protect your inherent essence, you must strengthen your kidneys. Only when your kidneys are strong will you be able to keep your essence at its residence. Therefore, keeping the kidneys healthy has become one of the most important subjects in Qigong.

Maintaining the kidneys in a healthy state includes protecting the physical kidneys from degeneration, and maintaining a smooth and correct level of Qi flow. In order to reach this goal, the diet must be considered. For example, too much salt is harmful to the kidneys, and eating too much eggplant will weaken the kidneys. In addition, the condition of the body is also important. Such things as over working without proper rest will increase tension on the kidneys and make the Qi flow stagnant. In winter, the kidneys will have more tension than in summer. Due to this, the Qi flow is more stagnant in the wintertime than in the summertime. Consequently, back pain problems increase in the winter.

In order to protect the kidneys, Qigong practitioners have studied the relationship of the kidneys to nature, food, and even to emotional states. They have developed massage techniques and specific exercises to increase Qi circulation in the kidneys during the winter. Since the health of the kidneys is related to the emotions as well, learning how to regulate the mind in order to regulate the Qi has become one of the major training goals in Qigong.

9. The Pericardium Channel of Hand - Absolute Yin

The pericardium (Yin) and the triple burner (Yang) are paired organs. They are said to correspond to the "Ministerial Fire," as opposed to the "Sovereign Fire" of the heart and small intestine. Though the pericardium has no separate physiological functions, it is generally mentioned with regard to the delirium induced by high fevers.

The regulation of Qi in the pericardium is considered a very important subject in Qigong. It is believed that the heart, the most vital organ in your body, must have a proper level of Qi circulation in order to function normally. The Qi level of the heart can be raised easily to an abnormal state by illness, emotional disturbance, exercise, or injury. The function of the pericardium is to dissipate the excess Qi from the heart and direct it to the Laogong cavity (P-8), located in the center of the palm. From Laogong, the excess Qi will be released naturally and hence, regulate the heart's Qi level. The Laogong cavity is used in Qigong massage to reduce the body's temperature during a fever. You can see that the purpose of the pericardium is to regulate the Qi in the heart through the Laogong cavity. You should understand that in Qigong it is believed that there are five centers (called gates) where the Qi of the body is able to communicate with the surrounding environment, and, consequently, regulate the Qi level in your body. Two of these five centers are the Laogong cavities, and two others are the Yongquan cavities (K-1), used to regulate the Qi in the kidneys. The fifth one is your face. The face is connected and related to many of your organs. Whenever any of your organ Qi is not normal, it shows on your face.

10. The Triple Burner Channel of Hand - Lesser Yang

At least as far back as the 3rd century A.D., in the "Classic of Difficulties" (Nan Jing) the triple burner was regarded as "having a name but no form." In the "Inner Classic" (Nei Jing), the triple burner was considered an organ that coordinated all the functions of water metabolism. In other traditional documents, the burners were considered three regions of the body that were used to group the organs. The upper burner includes the chest, neck, and head as well as the functions of the heart and

lungs. The middle burner is the region between the chest and the navel, and includes the functions of the stomach, liver, and spleen. The lower burner spans the lower abdomen, and the functions of the kidneys and urinary bladder. Therefore, the upper burner has been compared to a mist which spreads the blood and Qi, the middle burner is like a foam which churns up food in the process of digestion, and the lower burner resembles a swamp where all the impure substances are excreted.

Regulating the Qi to a normally "smooth-flow" state is one of the main Qigong training methods for maintaining health. It is normally done through Wai Dan exercises, and it is believed that the Qi must flow around internal organs smoothly in order for them to maintain their normal functions. This means that in order to keep Qi flow smooth and the organs healthy, you must first learn how to regulate and relax muscles that are holding and related to a given organ. External movements also exercise internal muscles. One of the most common external exercises is regulating the triple burner by lifting your hands up above your head and then moving them down slowly. These up and down arm movements extend and relax the internal muscles and thereby increase Qi flow.

TOP

11. **The Gall Bladder Channel of Foot - Lesser Yang**

The liver (Yin) and the gall bladder (Yang) are paired organs. They correspond to Wood in the Five Phases, the direction east, the spring season, the climatic wind, the color green, the emotion of anger, the taste of sourness, the goatish odor, and the sound of shouting. Their point of entry is the eyes. They control the sinews (muscles and joints), and their health is reflected in the finger and toe nails.

The main function of the gall bladder is storing and excreting the bile produced by the liver. Together with the heart, the gall bladder is responsible for decision-making. The main disease related to the gall bladder is a disorder affecting the flow of bile, usually caused by Dampness and Heat. This is commonly manifested by pain in the region of the liver, an oppressive sensation of fullness in the abdomen, and yellowish eyes, skin, urine, and tongue.

The gall bladder has never enjoyed serious attention during Qigong training. Its paired partner the liver however, has received much more attention.

12. **The Liver Channel of Foot - Absolute Yin**

The liver (Yin) and the gall bladder (Yang) are considered paired organs. They correspond to Wood in the Five Phases, the direction east, the spring season, the climatic condition of wind, the color green, the emotion of anger, the taste of sourness, the goatish odor, and the sound of shouting. Their point of entry is the eyes. They control the sinews (muscles and joints), and their health is reflected in the finger and toe nails.

The main task of the liver is spreading and regulating Qi throughout the entire body. Its unique character is flowing and free. Therefore, depression or frustration can disturb the functioning of the liver. In addition, the liver is also responsible for storing blood when the body is at rest. This characteristic, together with its control over the lower abdomen, makes it the most critical organ in regards to women's menstrual cycle and sexuality.

Depression or long-term frustration can stagnate the liver's spreading function and result in continuing depression, a bad temper, and a painful, swollen feeling in the chest and sides. If this condition worsens, it may cause disharmony between the liver and the stomach and/or spleen. This disorder is symbolized by the "rebellion" of Qi in the latter organs, whereby Qi moves in the opposite

direction than is normal. For example, the stomach Qi normally descends, so rebellious Qi means hiccupping, vomiting, etc. In the case of the spleen, the Qi ordinarily moves upward, so rebellious Qi in this organ means diarrhea.

Depression of the liver Qi is the main cause of many women's disorders, including menstrual irregularities, swollen and painful breasts, etc.

One of the most important responsibilities of the liver is the storage of blood with intended emphasis upon nourishing and moistening. Whenever the liver blood is deficient, the liver will not be able to handle the function of moistening. This is generally shown as dry and painful eyes with blurred or weak vision, lack of suppleness or pain in moving the joints, dry skin, dizziness, and infrequent or spotty menstruation. If the Deficient Liver Yin has become serious, the conditions Rising Liver Fire or Hyper Liver Yang Ascending occur. These occurrences are evidenced in ill-temper, restlessness, headache, vertigo, red face and eyes, and a parched mouth. If the liver Yin is so deficient that it is incapable of securing the liver Yang, many of the symptoms appear as disorders of the head. Weakness in the lower joints may also be manifested.

The liver is one of the five Yin organs whose Qi level the Qigong practitioner wants to regulate. Since the liver and the gall bladder are directly connected, when the liver's Qi is regulated, the Qi circulating in the gall bladder will also be regulated. Many methods have been developed for regulating the liver Qi. Wai Dan Qigong works through the limbs. For example, when the arms are moved up and down, the internal muscles surrounding the liver will be moved and the Qi around the liver will be circulated smoothly. In Nei Dan Qigong, it is believed that the liver is closely related to your mind. It is also believed that when your mind is regulated, the Qi circulation in the liver will be normal and therefore the liver will function properly.

Important Points

1. The spleen, liver, and heart are the organs with the most direct relationship with the blood. The spleen filters the blood (modifying the blood's structure), the liver stores the blood, and the heart moves it. Any problem associated with the blood will involve at least one of these organs.
2. The liver and the kidney are closely related. Their channels cross in many places. The liver stores blood; the kidney stores essence. These substances, both of which are Yin, have a considerable influence on the reproductive functions.
3. The heart (upper burner, Fire) and the kidney (lower burner, Water) keep each other in check and are dependent upon one another. The spirit of the heart and the essence of the kidneys cooperate in establishing and maintaining human consciousness.
4. The spleen's digestive function is associated with the distributive functions of the liver. Disharmony between these two results in various digestive troubles. The transportive and digestive functions of the spleen (also called the Middle Qi) depend upon the strength of the kidney Yang.
5. Although the lungs govern Qi, Qi from the lungs must mix with essence from the kidneys before Original Qi can be produced. The lungs govern Qi, the liver spreads Qi, and the kidneys provide its basis.

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The Eight Extraordinary Qi Vessels

Yang, Jwing-Ming

The eight extraordinary Qi vessels and the twelve primary Qi channels (meridians) comprise the main part of the channel system. Most of the eight vessels branch out from the twelve primary channels and share the function of circulating Qi throughout the body. These vessels form a web of complex interconnections with the channels. At the same time, each has its own functional characteristics and clinical utility independent of the channels. Traditional Chinese medicine emphasizes the twelve primary organ-related channels and only two of the eight vessels (the Governing and the Conception vessels). The other six vessels are not used very often simply because they are not understood as well as the other channels, and there is still a lot of research being conducted on them. Although they were discovered two thousand years ago, little has been written about them. There is a lot of research on the extraordinary vessels being conducted today, especially in Japan, but the results of one researcher often contradict the results that another has achieved.

On this page we would like to compile and summarize the important points from the limited number of available documents. Since references from original Chinese sources are very scarce, and references from Western textbooks are tentative, esoteric, or in disagreement with one another, I have used my own judgement in selecting ideas and details. Before reviewing these eight vessels, we will first define them and then summarize their functions.

What are the Eight Vessels?

The eight vessels are called "Qi Jing Ba Mai." Qi means odd, strange, or mysterious. Jing means meridian or channels. Ba means eight and Mai means vessels. Qi Jing Ba Mai is then translated as "Odd Meridians and Eight Vessels" or "Extraordinary Meridians (EM)." "Odd" has a meaning of strange in Chinese. It is used simply because these eight vessels are not well understood yet. Many Chinese doctors explain that they are called "Odd" simply because there are four vessels that are not paired. Since these eight vessels also contribute to the maintenance of homeostasis, some times they are called "Homeostatic Meridians." French acupuncturists call them "Miraculous Meridians" because they were able to create therapeutic effects when all other techniques had failed. In addition, because each of these channels exerts a strong effect upon psychic functioning and individuality, the command points are among the most important psychological points in the body. For this reason, they are occasionally called "The Eight Psychic Channels."

These vessels are:

1. Governing Vessel (Du Mai)
2. Conception Vessel (Ren Mai)
3. Thrusting Vessel (Chong Mai)
4. Girdle Vessel (Dai Mai)
5. Yang Heel Vessel (Yangqiao Mai)
6. Yin Heel Vessel (Yinqiao Mai)
7. Yang Linking Vessel (Yangwei Mai)
8. Yin Linking Vessel (Yinwei Mai).

General Functions of the Eight Vessels

1. Serve as Qi Reservoirs:

Because the eight vessels are so different from each other, it is difficult to generalize their characteristics and functions. However, one of the most common characteristics of the eight vessels was specified by Bian Que in his "Nan Jing." He reported that:

The twelve organ-related Qi channels constitute rivers, and the eight extraordinary vessels constitute reservoirs.

These reservoirs, especially the Conception and Governing vessels, absorb excess Qi from the main channels, and then return it when they are deficient. You should understand however, that because of the limited number of traditional documents, as well as the lack of modern, scientific methods of Qi research, it is difficult to determine the precise behavior and characteristics of these eight vessels. They can be understood on a number of different levels, and they perform different functions and contain every kind of Qi such as Ying Qi, Wei Qi, Jing Qi, and even blood.

When the twelve primary channels are deficient in Qi, the eight vessels will supply it. This store of Qi can easily be tapped into with acupuncture needles through those cavities connecting the eight vessels to the twelve channels. The connection cavities behave like the gates of a reservoir, which can be used to adjust the strength of the Qi flow in the rivers and the level of Qi in the reservoir. Sometimes, when it is necessary, the reservoir will release Qi by itself. For example, when a person has had a shock, either physically or mentally, the Qi in some of the main channels will be deficient. This will cause particular organs to be stressed, and Qi will accumulate rapidly around these organs. When this happens, the reservoir must release Qi to increase the deficient circulation and prevent further damage.

2. Guard Specific Areas Against 'Evil Qi'

The Qi which protects the body from outside intruders is called "Wei Qi" (Guardian Qi). Among the eight vessels, the Thrusting vessel, the Governing vessel, and the Conception vessel play major roles in guarding the abdomen, thorax, and the back.

3. Regulate the Changes of Life Cycles

According to Chapter 1 of "Su Wen," the Thrusting vessel and the Conception vessel also regulate the changes of the life cycles which occur at 7 year intervals for women and 8 year intervals for men.

4. Circulate Jing Qi to the Entire Body, Particularly the Five 'Ancestral Organs'

One of the most important functions of the eight vessels is to deliver Jing Qi (Essence Qi, which has been converted from Original Essence and sexual essence) to the entire body, including the skin and hair. They must also deliver Jing Qi to the five ancestral organs: the brain and spinal cord, the liver and gall bladder, the bone marrow, the uterus, and the blood system.

1. The Governing Vessel (Du Mai)

The Governing Vessel is the confluence of all the Yang channels, over which it is said to "govern." Because it controls all the Yang channels, it is called the "Sea of Yang Meridians." This is apparent from

its pathway because it flows up the midline of the back, a Yang area, and in the center of all Yang channels (except the stomach channel which flows in the front). The Governing Vessel governs all the Yang channels, which means that it can be used to increase the Yang energy of the body.

Since the Governing Vessel is the "Sea of Yang Meridians" and it controls or governs the back, the area richest in Guardian Qi (Wei Qi), it is also responsible for the circulation of the body's Guardian Qi to guard against external evil intruders. The circulation of Guardian Qi starts from Fengfu (Gv-IG), and moves down the Governing Vessel to Huiyin (LI-1). It is said that it takes 21 days for the Guardian Qi to flow from Fengfu to Huiyin, and 9 days from Huiyin to the throat, making it a monthly cycle.

According to Chinese medical science, Guardian Qi is Yang Qi and therefore represents the "Fire" of the body. Its quick and ubiquitous circulation keeps the fire going in the body and controls the loss of body heat. Guardian Qi is also inextricably linked with the fluids that flow outside the channels, in the skin and flesh. Consequently, through the breathing (under control of the lungs), Guardian Qi is responsible for the opening and the closing of the pores, and also controls sweating.

The Governing vessel is also responsible for nourishing the five ancestral organs, which include the brain and spinal cord. This is one of the ways in which the kidneys "control" the brain, as is said in Chinese medicine.

Because of their importance to health, the Governing vessel and the Conception vessel are considered the two most important Qi channels to be trained in Qigong, especially in Nei Dan. Training related to these two vessels includes: 1. How to fill them with Qi so that you have enough to regulate the twelve channels, 2. How to open up stagnant areas in these two vessels so that the Qi flows smoothly and strongly, 3. How to effectively direct the Qi to nourish the brain and raise up the Shen, 4. How to effectively govern the Qi in the twelve channels, and nourish the organs, 5. How to use your raised Shen to lead the Guardian Qi to the skin and strengthen the Guardian Qi shield covering your body.

In Nei Dan Qigong training, when you have filled up the Qi in these two vessels and can effectively circulate the Qi in them, you have achieved the "Small Circulation." In order to do this, you must know how to convert the essence stored in the kidneys into Qi, circulate this Qi in the Governing and Conception vessels, and finally lead this Qi to the head to nourish the brain and Shen (spirit).

2. The Conception Vessel (Ren Mai)

Ren in Chinese means "direction, responsibility." Ren Mai, the "Conception Vessel," has a major role in Qi circulation, monitoring and directing all of the Yin channels (plus the stomach channel). The Conception Vessel is connected to the Thrusting and Yin Linking vessels, and is able to increase the Yin energy of the body. This vessel nourishes the uterus (one of the five ancestral organs) and the whole genital system. It is said in the Nei Jing that the Conception and Thrusting vessels contain both blood and essence (Jing), and both flow up to the face and around the mouth. They contain more blood than essence in men, and thus promote the growth of the beard and body hair. Because women lose blood with their menstruation, they contain proportionately less blood and hence, no beard or body hair.

It was described in the Su Wen that both the Conception and Thrusting vessels control the life cycles every 7 years for women and every 8 years for men. It is the changes taking place in these vessels at those intervals that promote the major alterations in our lives.

In addition, the Conception vessel also controls the distribution and "dispersion" of Guardian Qi all over the abdomen and thorax via numerous small Qi branches (Luo). This vessel also plays an important role in the distribution of body fluids in the abdomen.

In Qigong society, this vessel and the Governing vessel are considered the most important among the Qi channels and vessels, and must be trained first. It is believed that there is usually no significant Qi stagnation in the Conception vessel. However, it is important to increase the amount of Qi you are able to store, which also increases your ability to regulate the Yin channels.

3. **The Thrusting Vessel (Chong Mai)**

One of the major purposes of the Thrusting vessel is to connect, to communicate, and to mutually support the Conception vessel. Because of this mutual Qi support, both can effectively regulate the Qi in the kidney channel. The kidneys are the residence of Original Qi and are considered one of the most vital Yin organs.

The Thrusting vessel is considered one of the most important and decisive vessels in successful Qigong training, especially in Marrow Washing. There are many reasons for this. The first reason is that this vessel intersects two cavities on the Conception vessel: Huiyin (LI-1) and Yinjiao (LI-7). Huiyin means "meeting with Yin" and is the cavity where the Yang and Yin Qi are transferred. Yinjiao means "Yin Junction" and is the cavity where the Original Qi (Water Qi, or Yin Qi) interfaces with the Fire Qi created from food and air. The Thrusting Vessel also connects with eleven cavities on the kidney channel. The kidney is considered the residence of Original Essence (Yuan Jing), which is converted into Original Qi (Yuan Qi).

The second reason for the importance of the Thrusting Vessel in Qigong training is that this vessel is connected directly to the spinal cord and reaches up to the brain. The major goal of Marrow Washing Qigong is to lead the Qi into the marrow and then further on to the head, nourishing the brain and spirit (Shen).

And finally, the third reason is found in actual Qigong practice. There are three common training paths: Fire, Wind, and Water. In Fire path Qigong, the emphasis is on the Fire or Yang Qi circulating in the Governing vessel and therefore strengthening the muscles and organs. The Fire path is the main Qi training in Muscle/Tendon Changing (Yi Jin Jing) Qigong. However, the Fire path can also cause the body to become too Yang, and therefore speed up the process of degeneration. In order to adjust the Fire to a proper level, Marrow Washing Qigong is also trained. This uses the Water path, in which Qi separates from the route of the Fire path at the Huiyin cavity (LI-1), enters the spinal cord, and finally reaches up to the head. The Water path teaches how to use Original Qi to cool down the body, and then to use this Qi to nourish the brain and train the spirit. Learning to adjust the Fire and Water Qi circulation in the body is called Kan-Li, which means Water-Fire. You can see from this that the Thrusting vessel plays a very important role in Qigong training.

4. **The Girdle Vessel (Dai Mai)**

The major purpose of the Girdle vessel is to regulate the Qi of the gall bladder. It is also responsible for the Qi's horizontal balance. If you have lost this balance, you will have lost your center and balance both mentally and physically.

From the point of view of Qigong, the Girdle vessel is also responsible for the strength of the waist area. When Qi is full and circulating smoothly, back pain will be avoided. In addition, because

the kidneys are located nearby, this vessel is also responsible for Qi circulation around the kidneys, maintaining the kidneys' health. Most important of all for the Girdle vessel is the fact that the Lower Dan Tian is located in its area. In order to lead Original Qi from the kidneys to the Lower Dan Tian, the waist area must be healthy and relaxed. This means that the Qi flow in the waist area must be smooth. The training of the Girdle vessel has been highly developed, and will be discussed in a later YMAA Book.

5. The Yang Heel Vessel (Yangqiao Mai)

While the preceding four vessels (Governing, Conception, Thrusting, and Girdle) are located in the trunk, the Yang Heel Vessel and the next three are located in the trunk and legs. (In addition, each of these four vessels is paired.) For millions of years, man has been walking on his legs, which perform much more strenuous work than the arms. I believe that it was because of this that, as evolution proceeded, the legs gradually developed these vessels to supply Qi support and regulate the channels. If this is true, it may be that, as time goes on and man uses his legs less and less, in a few million years these vessels will gradually disappear.

You can see from the way that the Yang Heel vessel intersects with other Qi channels that it regulates the Yang channels, such as the urinary bladder, the gall bladder, the small intestine, and the large intestine. The Yang Heel vessel is also connected with the Governing vessel. The Qi filling this vessel is supplied mainly through exercising the legs, which converts the food essence or fat stored in the legs. This Qi is then led upward to nourish the Yang channels. It is believed in Qigong that, since this vessel is also connected with your brain, certain leg exercises can be used to cure headaches. Since a headache is caused by excess Qi in the head, exercising the legs will draw this Qi downward to the leg muscles and relieve the pressure in the head.

Most of the training that relates to this vessel is Wai Dan. Wai Dan Qigong is considered Yang, and specializes in training the Yang channels, while Nei Dan Qigong is considered relatively Yin and emphasizes the Yin channels more.

6. The Yin Heel Vessel (Yinqiao Mai)

The Yin Heel vessel is connected with two cavities of the kidney channel. Therefore, one of the major sources of Qi for this vessel is the conversion of the kidney essence into Qi. It is believed in Qigong society that the other major Qi source is the essence of the external kidneys (testicles). In Marrow Washing Qigong, one of the training processes is to stimulate the testicles in order to increase the hormone production and increase the conversion of the essence into Qi. At the same time, you would learn how to lead the Qi in this vessel up to the head to nourish the brain and spirit (Shen). With this nourishment, you would be able to reach Buddhahood or enlightenment. From a health and longevity point of view, the raised spirit will be able to efficiently direct the Qi of the entire body and maintain your health.

7. The Yang Linking Vessel (Yangwei Mai)

The Yang Linking vessel regulates the Qi mainly in the Yang channels: the urinary bladder, gall bladder, triple burner, small intestine, and stomach channels. It is also connected with the Governing vessel at Yamen (Gv-15) and Fengfu (Gv-16). This vessel and the Yang Heel vessel have not been empha-

sized much in Qigong, except in Iron Shirt training where these two and the Governing vessel are trained.

8. The Yin Linking Vessel (Yinwei Mai)

The Yin Linking vessel has connections with the kidney, spleen, and liver Yin channels. The Yin Linking vessel also communicates with the Conception vessel at two cavities. This vessel is not trained much in Qigong.

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