

Why Qi gong?
By Saida Désilets, PhD

“Taoist System begins with a wide range of exercises that develop the physical body into an efficient and healthy organism, able to live in the world and yet stay free of the tensions and stresses of daily life.”¹

The ancient Chinese practice of qi gong has long been known for its rejuvenating and revitalizing effects on the body which makes it a perfect art for coping with modern day stress. What is the Taoist System of qi gong? How do these practices really work? And why would modern society choose to practice it?

“ Ancient Taoism is rooted in profound observation of naturally occurring universal processes and their effects on human nature.”² Ancient Taoist practitioners were scientists investigating how the body worked and related to its environment. They developed a system that was based on direct observation as well as trial and error versus on strict tradition or religious belief. It was found that humans were interconnected with the natural world in such a way that illness would occur if they were disconnected and vitality when they were connected. Therefore ancient Taoists used the natural world both to learn from and for healing.

¹ Page 3, Awaken Healing Light of the Tao by Mantak & Maneewan Chia

² Page 12, Awaken Healing Light of the Tao by Mantak & Maneewan Chia

What came from all of these observations? A Taoist System resulted over thousands of years of both observing and practicing. This system was passed on both through oral and written traditions. The basis of the system, also known as qi gong, is to return the body to its natural state of harmony and balance. Qi gong (qi meaning energy and gong meaning exchange or practice) or the practice of energy exchange includes literally thousands of different exercises and meditations. Each exercise or meditation has a specific purpose or result and therefore a practitioner would first need to know what the imbalance was and then choose the appropriate qi gong to re-create a harmonious state. Hence a practitioner would be his own master or would be a teacher or guide for others.

Having a guide or teacher of these practices is ideal, but how would one become one's own master? The Taoist system is designed to empower the practitioner to deepen their relationship to their own mind/body/spirit. Each meditation is very simple and requires actual practice in order to have effect. In fact five minutes per day has more cumulative benefits than one hour per week. "Taoism is a very simple and easy science. That is why it is still strong after more than 6, 000 years."³ Modern society is already overwhelmed by complexity, thus 'simple and easy' exercises make for qi gong's success and growing popularity.

What are these simple practices and how does one gain access to them? The foundational practices are the micro-cosmic orbit, the inner smile, the six healing

³ Preface, The Great Tao by Dr. Stephen T. Chang

sounds and the iron shirt qi gong. All of these practices work to balance and harmonize the body/mind/spirit of the practitioner. Globally there are thousands of books written on the subject of qi gong as well as many videos, audios, DVD's and live seminars. Choosing a system can seem overwhelming, yet the best route is to choose what seems easy to understand and apply, the simpler the better.

“ The basic foundation of Taoist practice is learning to conserve the physical energy within our bodies so that it will no longer scatter and weaken as a result of our worldly interactions.”⁴ One of the most powerful of the basics, the micro-cosmic orbit meditation, is also one of the most simple to learn and practice. It involves opening both the back meridian line known as the DU or Yang channel and the front meridian line known as the REN or Yin channel. These two channels, the YIN and YANG, create a powerful current of energy that aid to conserve the life force and circulate it.

Why does activating the YIN and YANG channels (the micro-cosmic orbit meditation) work to balance the body? Imagine these channels are like a super highway for your vital life force (chi). This 'roadway' or channel of chi can have blockages (like road blocks, pot holes, etc), which slow or stop the movement of energy. It is virtually impossible to have full vitality – driving your fancy car smoothly down the super highway – if these channels are blocked or un-

⁴ Page 3, Awaken Healing Light of the Tao by Mantak & Maneewan Chia

activated. So the meditation begins by moving energy slowly, point to point, until the channels are clean and clear. The secret to success with this practice is the placement of the tip of the tongue to the roof of the mouth; this action connects the YIN and YANG channels to form a complete circuit. Results of opening the orbit is observable through feeling more balanced, healthy and energized. Once the micro-cosmic orbit is open and new levels of vitality are experienced, the practitioner's enthusiasm will rise and his/her quest to know him/herself will deepen.

“Specific goals of this level are to learn how to heal oneself, how to love oneself, and how to love others.”⁵ Complementary to the micro-cosmic meditation is the inner smile meditation. This practice is a little more complex, yet once understood, very easy to execute. The inner smile meditation involves just simply smiling inwardly. To the average person this can seem both strange and unfamiliar, however, the act of smiling makes this meditation both fun and easy to learn. It starts by taking the practitioner's busy and questioning mind through the physical system of the body. All the organs and glands as well as each system: digestive, nervous, lymph, etc. are explored thoroughly. Smiling energy and intention are sent into each body part until a sensation of relaxation or warmth is experienced. Doing this meditation regularly a practitioner normally starts experiencing a greater connection to his/her body and can easily self-monitor for possible imbalances. All of this is attained by the simple act of smiling genuinely to oneself.

⁵ Page 3, Awaken Healing Light of the Tao by Mantak & Maneewan Chia

Since both of the first two practices, the micro-cosmic orbit and the inner smile meditations, are geared to directing one's attention inwardly, is there a practice that also acknowledges the external? The six healing sounds is both an inner and outer focused practiced. They are based on the power of sound vibration as a healing modality. Sound carries energy, hence the six healing sounds externally release stagnant qi (energy) found in the internal organs. This concept is easier accepted when observing these sounds in every day life; for example when a person is very impatient they often release the heart sound 'Haaawww'. Humans naturally know how to discharge excess 'stress' energy and Taoist simply tapped into that universal body wisdom.

How do these sounds work to release stress? Stress, in Taoist understanding, is simply energy that is trapped, blocked or stagnant. This congested energy builds pressure in a corresponding organ, which in turn expresses itself as an emotion connected to stress: impatience, fear, anger, sadness, or worry. By utilizing one's inner focus to connect with the imbalanced organ and its associated sound vibration, one can externally release the trapped energy. This release creates space in the organ for it to now express its true virtues: love, gentleness, kindness, courage and openness. The six healing sounds thus works both as a purification and meditative process, making this a very effective tool for modern practitioner's to quickly and easily monitor and re-balance themselves.

“The Taoist approach follows the way of nature; we do not try to force the student to adapt to one method. Instead, we have many different methods to suit the nature, capacity, and needs of each student.”⁶ Following the Taoist system of being versatile, the first three practices as well as the iron shirt qi gong provide the practitioner with a wide variety of different and effective ways to return to a state of balance. Imagination plays a key role in learning of all these practices.

How does iron shirt qi gong differ from the other three practices? Iron shirt qi gong is a standing meditation that uses correct bone, tendon/ligament alignment to enable the body to receive more external chi and to also open the existing channels within the body. It does this by a series of different postures which all focus on aligning the body in such a way that greater balance, strength and vitality can be cultivated. These postures also help the practitioner feel more rooted or anchored as well as more detached from the external chaos of our times. It is common for iron shirt practitioners to feel renewed vitality and joy.

How does one incorporate all of these practices into an actual routine? The beauty of qi gong is that a little goes a long way. It doesn't matter what you practice so long as you spend your practice time becoming aware of your mind/body/spirit. This is essentially the lesson in all qi gong practices. The key to successful qi gong is both awareness of the entire self and one's breath. Once

⁶ Page 340, Awaken Healing Light of the Tao by Mantak & Maneewan Chia

these elements are in place, one can practice qi gong throughout the day, no matter what the circumstances are.

What is the importance of ancient qi gong practices in modern society? With increased levels of stress and decreased levels of healthy air/water/land, qi gong enables people to strengthen themselves so to cope more effectively with life. Modern times are exciting and fast paced, the result of which can create higher degrees of stress response in the body. By practicing qi gong a person can effectively balance the external stimuli with internal peace and harmony. Therefore one can reap the benefits of living with the demands of modern society, while maintaining a high quality of life.

“Invisible yet ever-present, Tao permeates the world with the very breath of life, and those who learn how to harmonize themselves with Tao may harness that power to enhance and prolong their own lives.”⁷ Without one’s health and peace of mind, none of the riches and success of the world can be fully enjoyed. Thus the role of qi gong in modern times is to help us maintain our quality of living while allowing us to fully participate in today’s fast-paced demands. By investing just as little as 5 minutes per day, a practitioner can create a harmonious life for him/herself as well as release others from the burden of caring for them. People become more self-sufficient physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

⁷ preface, *The Tao of Health, Sex and Longevity* by Daniel P. Reid