

Simply Relax

Maybe it is time to slow down and get in touch with yourself. Sometimes we get going in the fast lane to the point of collapse.

We think “busy and bright” is good and that “silent and subdued” is boring. That thought can keep us flooring the gas pedal even when the tank is empty and we are running on fumes. Then we lurch to a stop and wonder what happened. At the first sign that you need to simplify, ease off and cut back. Any other course is detrimental and will cause problems for those around you.

Relaxing the breath is one way to come back home to your center. If you find that you are holding your breath, perhaps out of unconscious anxiety, notice what you are thinking, then **relax** your breath and let go of the thoughts. This lessens the grip of the fixated mind and relaxes the body too. Whatever you are doing- working, shopping, driving, or even brushing your teeth, make it a habit to check in with your breath. There is no need to judge success or failure, just acknowledge what is going on and how your body feels. The whole point is to pay attention and **relax**. You will soon see how this will help lighten situations and release stress.

We tend to fight our need to slow down, perhaps believing we will miss something or be overlooked or unacknowledged. Appreciating the need to retreat takes maturity and the capacity to see that going with the flow of nature, not against it, should be our highest priority. Now is a good time to experiment with practicing patience and to learn to trust that life provides without having to struggle to make it happen. This does not mean giving up your responsibilities. Whatever you might have brushed aside as insignificant or a nuisance should not be overlooked. Consider everything with balance. Pay attention to right timing and be ready to constantly adjust, even if it means withdrawing.

Make peace with vulnerability by incorporating the remembrance of life's transitory nature into all that you do. The wise Chinese sage Lao-Tzu wrote, "**Practice not doing and everything will fall into place.**" That sounds so easy, yet without humility it is more difficult. Respecting how delicate and precious this life is engenders humbleness and the willingness to live in accordance with the ways of Source.



Qigong

Qigong history

Qigong is movement that uses breathing to develop energy. It is a set of self-healing exercises that originated 1000's of years ago in China. It combines movement, visualization and meditation to maintain health and bring balance to the mind, body and spirit. The word “qi” may be translated as vital energy and “gong” as exercise or practice. Practicing qigong regularly can improve your general health and well-being. The exercises help improve breathing, balance, and flexibility while allowing the mind to become quite and the body more relaxed. It improves spinal health, which the Chinese consider the superhighway on which the qi runs. It is recommended that 15 to 30 minutes of exercise be done daily and 10 to 20 minutes meditating. Practice the qigong exercises and meditations in a relaxed, natural way, listening to your body and never extending beyond your limits.

Qigong Principals

- 1 - relax - lightly touch forehead and let thoughts drift away
- 2 - experience - emptiness and fullness (in and out breath)
- 3 - keep movements even and slow
- 4 - be aware of balance, when the weight is shifted
- 5 - root from the hips, legs and feet
- 6 - keep focus on the dantien - all movement flows from there in a complete unit
- 7 - generally inhale whenever arms are pulled inward or contracted and exhale when the arms are stretched, raised or pushed forward - this breathing is done with focus on the dantien, imagining the breath moving through the dantien

Wu Ji (which means absolute nothingness) - Starting and resting position

- 1 - Stand straight, feet parallel, together and flat on the floor
- 2 - Knees should be slightly bent and the hips tucked in
- 3 - Balance and center (clear your mind)
- 4 - Relax and smile
- 5 - Keep your head up and look forward with eyes open - imagine a thread connecting the top of your head to the sky. This allows the chin to drop slightly.
- 6 - Shoulders are relaxed and arms should hang loosely by your side with the palms facing the thighs and the fingers slightly curved
- 7 - Breathe in and out in a relaxed, regular manner
- 8 - The tip of your tongue should lightly touch the roof of your mouth to connect the 2 trunk meridians
- 9 - Breathe softly through the nose

Dantiens

According to Chinese theory, there are 3 important points in the body, known as the dantiens, which means areas for essential energy. The upper dantien is located between the eyebrows, the middle dantien is at the solar plexus and the lower dantien is about one and one half inches below the navel. Our bodies are a bridge between the earthly and heavenly energies - we should constantly be assimilating energy from both Yang (heaven) and Yin (earth) - that will join at the dantien if the chi is properly directed. These dantiens store qi. Stored qi flows around the body and can be felt as warmth or tingling. As we start to practice qigong, you will focus on the energy in the lower dantien.

Breathing

The ancient Chinese believed that air contains vital energy and to inhale brings life force into our bodies, therefore it is very important that we breathe properly. Very few of us recognize this fact and therefore typically breathe shallowly. When we do not fully inhale and exhale, the body is not allowed to fully oxygenate the body and eliminate the carbon dioxide. Babies naturally breathe correctly, but as we get older we tend to breathe higher up in our lungs. Abdominal breathing is used in qigong. This means breathing from the stomach. According to Chinese theory, the energy associated with breathing should circulate between the abdomen and the nose.

- a - Take a deep breath and relax into this stance.
- b - Gently bring your hands to the front of the body, overlapping the palms with left on top for ladies and right on top for men. Place your palms about 2" below your navel.
- c - Breathing through your nose, inhale deeply allowing the stomach and lungs to expand, pushing your hands out. Exhale slowly, causing the stomach and whole body to relax. Repeat this 6 times, concentrating on the steady movement of air and the relaxing of the body.
- d - Enhance your concentration by visualizing a golden light entering the dantien (stomach) as you breathe in and gray smoke being expelled as you breathe out and relax. Repeat this 6 times.
- e - Become aware of possible sensations such as warmth or tingling in the stomach area or hands. This is the movement of Qi.
- f - Rub your hands together and gently massage your face and neck.

Next stage of breathing - breathe in through the nose, but think of your breath coming into the body through the lower dantien, then to the perineum (point in the middle at the bottom of the torso), up the spine and out the nose on the exhale while the chi flows down the front, back into the dantien.

Meridians

Meridians are the energetic pathways in your body along which the qi travels. These pathways are invisible to the eye. Meridians can become blocked as a result of poor health choices, resulting in stagnation in the flow of qi around the body. There are 12 major meridians that link the internal organs. Qi circulates among them in a specific way. Blocks can be opened using acupuncture or acupressure.

Qi may be experienced as tingling, warmth, itchiness or feeling of an electrical current running through your body. You also may see colors or visions. These are natural sensations and you should let them happen without becoming attached to them. Other sensations may include coldness, a cool breeze or even pain in an old injury. These are signs that healing

is occurring. During practice, if you get sleepy you should rest and complete the exercises later.

If none of these sensations occur, do not be concerned, the qi is still working and as you continue to practice your sensitivities will increase and you will notice some of the things previously described.

Meditation

Meditation starts with concentration. A simple beginning meditation is concentrating on abdominal breathing. In qigong the focus is on the sensing of the qi, feeling it travel around your body and learning how to move it in prescribed ways so that your whole body is energized. This leaves your mind calm and your body healthy and strong. During meditation you may feel the qi moving in your body and it may be experienced as tingling, tickling, heat or heaviness. It may even be experienced as colors.

Simple Meditation Example

- 1 - Sit on a chair such that the spine is straight and lightly close the eyes.
- 2 - Systematically relax each part of the body starting at the feet. Do this by mentally addressing each body part and requesting that it relax.
- 3 - Next, focus on your breathing, simply following the breath instead of trying to control it.
- 4 - Imagine during the inhales a fluid golden light entering the stomach and mentally being directed through the body to the feet, hands and head.
- 5 - Scan the body, noticing any tension. Send the liquid light back to those areas allowing for a gentle release.
- 6 - Refocus on breathing into the stomach. Taking 3 long inhales and exhales, think - I am grounded in my body and to the earth.
- 7 - Gradually open your eyes, move your limbs and stretch.

Qigong warm-up instructions

Start with warm-ups. This heats the muscles and joints and increases blood circulation. Warming up daily will improve flexibility and balance and reduce the amount of tension that builds up in the body. The following exercises are designed to awaken energy flow. Do all movements slowly and without strain. They should feel completely natural. Only move to the extent that your body will allow without causing any pain.

- 1 - Slow gentle pounding on trunk and extremities, knocking on the meridians and stimulating the flow of energy. It is an easy, gentle swinging motion with the weight shifting from one leg to the other.

Arms swing freely with no tension or strain, fist held loose, lightly pounding on the trunk, lower to upper and back down. You should be hitting up the mid-line on the front and the spine in the back.

- 2 - Next pound on the shoulders, across to the neck and then back out.

- 3 - Now, stimulate the meridians in the extremities. Using one hand, lightly pound from the waist up to the shoulder, down the inside of the arm, and up the outside of the arm, across the shoulder. Do the other side.

- 4 - Move on to the lower body. Lightly stimulate the kidneys by pounding on the back just below the ribs. Slowly bend over and continue stimulating down the back on the thighs, calves, down to the ankles. Bring the hands to the front and come up the inside to the groin area.

- 5 - Freely swing the arms, front to back. Use a little force as you swing to the back. Allow yourself to rock up on your toes.

- 6 - Circulate and lubricate the 3 major joints of the body, neck, waist and knees. First, with arms relaxed and palms turned toward the body, rotate the head clockwise and then counter-clockwise. Second, using the hands to support the lower back, rotate the hips, first one direction, and then the other. This is a great way to release toxins from the spine. Third, placing the hands on the knees, rotate the knees, doing this in both directions. Next rotate the knees in opposite directions, both knees moving out and then in, and then reverse.

- 7 - Lastly, standing on one foot with your hands on your hips, rotate the ankle both directions, and then loosely shake the foot. Do the other foot, too.

Eight Pieces of Brocade

Wu Ji position

Starting and resting position: Wu Ji

Stand straight, feet together and flat on the floor. Knees should be slightly bent and the hips tucked in. Balance and center (clear your mind). Relax and smile. Keep your head up and look forward with eyes open. Breathe in and out in a relaxed, regular manner. Shoulders are relaxed and arms should hang loosely by your side with the palms facing the thighs. The tip of your tongue should lightly touch the roof of your mouth to connect the 2 trunk meridians. Breathe softly through the nose.

Repeat the exercises 3, 6, 9 (or multiples of 3) times. Whatever number of repetitions is chosen for the first movement should be duplicated in each of the remaining exercises.

In doing these exercises, try to follow the movements with the mind or keep it on your breathing.

1 - Holding the Heavens - using both hands

a - Using your left leg, step a shoulders width to the side, toes facing forward. Slightly bend knees and let arms hang loosely by your side with palms facing the body and all fingers slightly curved.

b - Inhaling deeply, slowly raise both arms in a circular motion out to the sides and bring hands up beside your ears. Exhale.

c - Press the palms of both hands toward heaven above the head (arms are not straight) - inhaling as you move up - keep the wrists bent so your fingers point to each other and the fingers of the hands are 2 to 4 inches apart. Let your eyes follow your hands as they move up.

d - Exhale as you bring the hands back down to the ears.

When pushing up, imagine your internal energy moving up from the waist, up your spine and into your head. See the energy of heaven filling your lungs and whole being. When your hands move down imagine the energy moving from the heavens, to your head and lungs, down the front of the body to the dantien.

Health benefits - Internally it helps regulate and improve the heart, lungs, stomach, spleen and liver. It stimulates the internal organs in the upper trunk. It also stretches and relaxes muscles allowing the spine to realign and the soft breathing helps lower heart rate and relaxes the body.

2 - Drawing the Bow

a - Stand with your feet 1 and one-half shoulder-width apart and bend the knees slightly, allowing the body to drop into a horse riding stance.

b - Circle the arms to the left side, in front of the shoulder. The left palm should face forward with the fingers vertical, and right palm should face back with the fingers horizontal. Fold the right hand fingers into a loose fist and as the arms separate, turn the left palm 90 degrees, keeping all the fingers together except the thumb (creating an L shape).

c - Separate the arms, look to the left, aim the arrow at a target, and breath in deeply. You might want to imagine the target as achieving good health or releasing stress. The movement of the two arms should mimic the drawing of a bow string and arrow, aiming the arrow, and then release the fingers of the right hand to let the arrow fly. Make sure that the arms are in alignment with the shoulders and are parallel to the ground.

d - Breathe out when releasing the arrow and repositioning the hands for the next shot.

e - Reverse the motion, moving to the right to complete the set.

Health benefit: Opens the chest area and increases lung capacity. Also strengthens the muscles of the chest, back, arms, legs and hips. Stretching shoulders and biceps contributes to relaxing stiff and tense muscles. Horse stance strengthens the legs, knees and back. Imagining the arrow moving to the target improves concentration. Using both sides of the body can enhance coordination.

3 - Separating Heaven and Earth

- a - Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, outside edge of the feet parallel to each other and arms hanging loosely by your side.
- b - Inhaling deeply, slowly raise both arms in a circular motion out to the sides and bring hands up beside your ears. Exhale. The 4 fingers of both hands should be together with the thumb extended (forming an L).
- c - As you inhale, raise your left arm above your head so it is fully extended, wrist horizontal over the head with the fingers pointing to the right. Drop the right arm by your side, thumb towards the back and palm horizontal to the ground.
- d - Exhale as you bring the hands back to the ears.
- e - Repeat on the other side to complete the set.

Health benefit: Brings energy to the middle area of the torso. Stretches the back muscles allowing them to relax and the spine to realign. Opens up the chest for deeper breathing.

4 - Looking Backward

- a - Stand straight, feet forward, hips dropped, knees not locked, and arms hanging loosely by your side.
- b - Looking forward, breathe in.
- c - While exhaling, slowly turn your head clockwise as far as possible, allowing your eyes to scan and when your head stops, let your eyes look down toward your heels. (Keep the torso as straight as possible.)
- d - Inhale deeply as you slowly return to the starting point.
- e - Repeat the exercise turning your head counterclockwise to conclude the set.

Health benefits: stretches the neck and eye muscles. Regulating and slowing the breath brings more oxygen into your blood.

5 - Looking for Hidden Treasure

- a - Step your feet apart one and one-half shoulder's width and the feet pointed forward. Lower your torso by bending your knees to an approximate 45 degree angle.
- b - With your hands parallel to the ground and the thumbs toward the back, place your hands loosely on the thighs.
- c - Rotate your torso clockwise 3, 6 or 9 times, allowing the tailbone to make small circles too. As you bend forward the body becomes parallel to the ground. Repeat going in the opposite direction.

Health benefits: Horse stance improves the condition of the legs and lower back. Bending and turning at the waist stretches the hips, stomach and lower back muscles. The spine is gently moved helping prevent stiffness. Chinese medical literature says that this exercise can help with heartburn.

6 - Touching the Earth

- a - Stand with your feet a shoulder's width apart, your back and knees straight, and arms hanging by your side, palms facing inward.
- b - Bring your hands to the front of the body and interlock the fingers.
- c - Breathing in, lift your hands to the heart, turning them outward and pressing up above the head. Arch backward slightly to emphasize the stretch.
- d - As you exhale, bring your arms down in front and, bending from the hips, allow your hands, palms down, to touch the ground. Shift to the left and touch the left toes, then to the right toes and back to center. Only bend forward as far as is comfortable, keeping the knees straight. With practice, your body should become more flexible.
- e - Swing back straight, separate the hands and let them float to the sides.
- f - Repeat

Health benefit: Stretches the back muscles and hamstrings. Inversion brings more blood to the upper part of the body. Gives you an opportunity to become grounded and connect with the earth - enables qi to flow in the lower back, hips and legs.

7 - Reaching out to Nature

a - Standing with your feet a shoulder's width apart, eyes focusing forward, bend your knees assuming the horse riding stance.

b - Make loose fists with your hands and raise them to just below your waist, with the palms facing up and the elbows pointing directly to the back.

c - Swing your left arm forward, rotating your fist palm down. At the same time, pull your right elbow back.

d - Using your left arm, make a large counterclockwise circle while opening and closing your hand. Imagine grabbing energy.

e - Let the arms swap places, allowing them to cork screw as they do.

f - Repeat these movements, alternately extending and retracting the arms. Allow the arms to glide back and forth.

g - After the 3, 6, or 9 repetitions on each side, gradually increase the speed, no longer collecting the energy.

h - Drop both arms to the sides and raise yourself from the horse riding stance.

Health benefits: Shoulders and wrist are exercised. Improves balance and coordination. Allows anger and tension to be released.

8 - Generating Waves of Energy

a - Stand with your feet a shoulder's width apart, arms hanging loosely at your sides, gazing straight ahead, shoulders relaxed and mind empty of thoughts.

b - Rise up onto the balls of your feet, hold, and then drop to your heels.

c - Repeat 9 times.

d - After completing this exercise, take a walk to allow the body to relax and benefit from these exercises.

Health benefits: opens blocked meridians and improves the circulation of qi through the whole body - improves blood flow to the internal organs and helps detoxify them and improve the immune system. Muscles and tendons in the legs, feet and ankles are stretched and exercised.