

## Qi Gong Therapy and TCM: Oriental Medicine of the 21st Century

By Michael Winn

*Medicine in the west is undergoing a sea of change, as millions of people begin to explore energetic-based approaches to healing. Acupuncture has been in the vanguard of this revolution, but acupuncture itself is about to undergo "a second revolution" of its own as it begins to integrate the wave or powerful qi gong healing technologies that are rapidly becoming understood and used in the West.*

The practice of qigong is essentially Oriental medicine without needles. The qi gong craze is spreading like wildfire in the West because it is easy to learn, easy to do, and produces fast results, whether you need healing or are just a bliss junkie. It may be the greatest blessing ever for Oriental medicine. If tens of millions of Americans graduate from jogging and muscle-building to the more subtle practice of qi gong, they will become educated about qi flow. That means millions of more people will feel comfortable seeing and acupuncturist/herbalist to diagnose and help balance their qi. This is the real grassroots foundation of the revolution in energy medicine occurring in the West today.

### What is Qi Gong/Chi Kung therapy?

Qi Gong, or "chi kung," is the ancient Chinese art that means "mastering subtle energy." When applied to healing, there are two basic modalities. One is called "qi emission," in which a medical qi gong therapist often employs TCM style diagnosis to assess the energetic patterns in the patient. Qi Gong diagnosis may use pulses or off-the-body methods of scanning the patient's qi field. Then the qi gong healer may tap into either his personal or a universal energy field, which is then focused and radiated into the patient's body lying on a table or while sitting. This alters the energetic matrix of the patient's meridians, and causes their physical body to be reorganized or regenerated to be free of the original injury or illness.

The patient may feel a gentle warmth or tingling begin to flow in different parts of the body. Depending on the skill of the healer, it can be used with great success on anything from mild headache to broken bones to sexual dysfunction as well as chronic illness such as cancer and aids. When combined with acupuncture, qi is sent through the needles to regulate meridian flow, allowing for much faster and deeper healing than using needles without qi emissions.

This type of qi gong therapy is already part of standard TCM curriculum in mainland China. Students are given the option to take a three to four year program qi gong, tui-na/moxa or acupuncture. In China, a student might be tested for qi emission skill before getting a license. All the major hospitals in Beijing have separate Qi Gong departments that often take on and heal the most difficult cases that have not been cured by either drugs (western) or acupuncture/herbs (TCM) protocols.

A second approach is called "qi gong prescriptions" or "self-practice qi gong". The patient is taught how to do certain qi gong movements that will benefit his or her particular condition. There are many hundreds of different qi gong systems of movement. Some are specifically designed for different illnesses, i.e. a special anti-cancer walk or for joint disease, and others are meant for summer, winter, or the heart or lung meridian, etc. All are easily performed even by the elderly or by people in a weak condition. The patient usually feels improvement immediately and a general sense of well-being.

The more powerful methods of self-practice, known as "neigong," create "internal movements" of subtle energy by training the patient to use visualization of meridians, sub-vocal sound frequencies focused on the vital organs (the "sex healing sounds"), or by evoking emotional states (the "inner smile"). Patients can even be taught to redirect sexual energy from the genital area to stimulate the endocrine gland system, kidneys and the production of blood in the bone marrow.

Using qi gong prescription requires some discipline on the part of the patient, but because the patient is taught how to take responsibility for his or her own healing, it generally produces the most difficult and lasting results. Once patients learn to generate "chi" or "qi" within themselves, the results are not limited to self-healing. One may continue to practice the qi gong to achieve ever higher levels of wellness and spiritual awareness.

The Taoists are famous in China for their medical qi gong. They claim to use neigong to tap into the universal pool of pre-natal jing. This can be described as replacing the "acquired jing" from one's parents that is gradually spent, the depletion of which causes one to age. A high level practitioner of neigong is considered an "immortal," since death now becomes a voluntary event, not an unconscious process. There are many cases of people claiming to re-grow hair or teeth, repair diseased organs, or recover from near death conditions.

This focus on tapping into the universal pool of pre-natal jing defines one of the differences between "classical

qi gong" (largely suppressed by the Communists as being too spiritual) and "modern TCM qi gong." Classical qi gong might also focus more heavily on the Eight Extra Meridians and the role of the five vital organ shen (zhang fu spirits, or intelligences) that regulate the flow of qi in the five elements cycle. In Taoist neigong, there practices include the famous "Microcosmic Orbit" and the more secret "Fusion of the Five Elements." The five types of qi are fused into a "pearl" of concentrated or purified consciousness that has the power to dissolve deep physical or emotional trauma.

On a more basic level, all qi gong is so simple yet powerful that many energy healers use qi gong to repair themselves from "healer burnout."

## **A Typical Qi Gong Session**

If a patient is passively receiving "qi" from the healer, the key requirement is that he or she simply sits or lies down and, relax, keeps an open receptive attitude, and does not interfere with the process. Often the healer will first read the pulses on the wrist or neck, which reveal the condition of all the meridians and internal organs, not just the heart. Some healers may utter certain sounds to vibrate the internal organs or expel the "sick" or "perverse" qi that is causing the illness or psychosomatic symptoms. The healer will typically be able to feel inside their own body the exact problem in the patient's body. The healer can do this by resonating the qi in his body like a tuning fork that is ringing at the same frequency as the patient.

The healer usually passes his hands over different meridians, points, or vital organs and may or may not touch the body. Some may stamp their foot to activate earth chi or move their hands over the client's body to stimulate or sedate the flow of qi. Some healers utilize "wu si gong," or spontaneous qi gong. They emit a certain frequency of qi that activates the qi of the patient to being moving. The patient's body, usually in a relaxed standing position with eyes closed, may begin to undulate or seem to involuntarily dance or sing, rhythmically releasing physical, mental, or emotional tension that has been locked in the body for years (or from past lives). This is not hypnotic suggestion, as the client may choose to stop the releasing movement at any time.

If the client is learning to heal himself with qi gong exercises, he may learn the movements either in a class or have his customized for their specific condition privately. Some qi gong movements use the walking, sitting, or lying positions, but more are performed standing. All share the same underlying principles. The visible physical movements of the arms and waist are usually very gentle and circular in nature, and are often accompanied by rhythmic breathing methods and subtle shifts in body weight between the left and right foot or between the toe and heel. These rhythmic movements cause qi to flow through different movements and, in western terms, stimulate the lymphatic and immune system.

Many qi gong teachers in the west are only skilled in martial arts and are not trained in therapeutic uses of qi gong. They use them as a warm up to training for tai chi or other arts, and many of the same health benefits will accrue. But if your intention is to use the qi for fighting, it will not have the same benefits as doing the qi gong for healing.

## **History and Theory**

Drawings depicting qi gong movements have been found in Chinese tombs at least 3500 years old, with other references going back 5000 years or more. This makes it the grandparent of many eastern energy-based healing modalities such as acupuncture and acupressure, tuina (meridian) massage, chi nei tsang (deep organ massage). It probably guided the development of the internal martial arts such as Tai Chi Chuan and Ba Gua Chuan, and the many derivative Japanese/Korean healing arts such as shiatsu, Do-in, as well as the numerous martial spin-offs of Aikido, Judo, etc. Some historians speculate that qi gong even traveled into India where it became part of the repertoire of yoga and sacred temple dance training. There are hundreds of different styles of qi gong, which can seem overwhelming to the beginner.

The basic premise of qi gong is that everything is made out of qi, or life force, and that we can influence the movement of this qi in ourselves or in others in a myriad of ways. Modern visualization techniques for healing ("I see white tigers eating up my diseased cancer cells") only partially tap into the qi at the core of the mind-body interaction. Properly taught qi gong gives the practitioner an internal map of the energy pathways inside the body. These are activated to align the physical, emotional, mental, sexual, and spiritual aspects of qi so that all levels move together to create an entirely new alignment of energy flow in the body that can alter even the genetic unfolding of a person.

"Nei Gong," the more internal aspect of qi gong, may be the original and most powerful method of internal visualization and energy manipulation ever invented to cure illness. It is closely linked with the development of internal alchemy methods in China for achieving longevity and immortality, which involve setting up an internal

laboratory inside the body. The most advanced method uses the "fire" or heat and emotional energy of the heart, plus the "water" or sexual energy of the kidneys to interact and thereby "cook" the physical body into a blissful state of harmony.

Nei Gong differs radically from most eastern systems of meditation, which are focusing on emptiness or transcendental states of awareness. Nei Gong brings the subtle qi of the universe down into the physical body to transform it into radiant health. There is no desire to escape the physical plane; instead our body is seen as the physical manifestation of "Later Heaven." This philosophy makes Earth (our physical body) potentially as equally divine as Heaven (our formless spirit) within the all embracing Tao - once we allow our qi to circulate freely between the two.

## **Benefits & Limitations of Qi Gong**

In China, patients are often divided into two categories: acute and chronic. Those with acute conditions are sent for western treatment, and those with chronic conditions receive qi gong therapy. There have been thousands of studies done in China that verify the efficacy of using qi gong for virtually every type of chronic illness, from arthritis to cancer. Twenty-years studies in China show definitive reductions in mortality of 50 percent for high blood pressure, stroke, and related coronary diseases that are epidemic in the west. Qi gong can also be used for treatment of pain, often with faster results than acupuncture. This suggests that there are certain types of acute conditions that can be treated with qi gong, depending on the skill level of the practitioner.

The main limitation of qi gong is the skill of the healer of the willingness of the patient to practice. Acupuncturists are in the best position to introduce this healing modality into the west, and they can gradually increase their qi skills to complement their needle/herbal practice and TCM diagnostic knowledge. Learning to do so is both fun and rewarding for the acupuncturist

The current educational pattern in most acupuncture schools is much as it was in Tai Chi Schools twenty years ago: a little qi gong warm-up or elective course, and you're covered. But now, qi gong/neigong is unfolding its wings as both the predecessor of the later branches of Oriental medicine and as a pillar of TCM. Several acupuncture schools are offering Qi Gong degree-training programs.

The world is just now waking up to the fact that qi gong science is a vast network of arts and sciences that is just beginning to be understood and applied. Classical medical qi gong therapy is neat, rigorous, elegant, has well defined terminology. By blending Classical and modern TCM styles, a practitioner can have the experience of perfect mirroring between inner spiritual practice and outer healing practice.

