

Way of Chi Kung - Ken Cohen

"Expelling the old energy, drawing in net going "inner achievement, " or most commonly as dao-yin "leading and guiding the energy." Dao-yin can also be translated as "guiding the qi and extending the limbs," thus referring to two of the primary components of self-healing. Breathing and exercise.

Probably the earliest qigong-like exercises in China are the animal dances of ancient Chinese shamans. During the Zhou Dynasty (1028-221 B.C.), there was a popular New Year's ritual known as the Great Exorcism (Da No). A shaman would wear a bearskin over his head, with four golden eyes, as though seeing in the four directions. Dancing through the village, followed by a procession of villagers wearing masks of the zodiacal animals (Dragon, Horse, Tiger, etc.), he drove out pestilence and demons. Similar animal dances are recorded on rock art panels throughout China. Some of these include uniform, preset dance patterns performed by many people at once. Others depict a combination of animal postures and military drills, providing possible evidence of an early link between animal movements, qigong, and the martial arts.

Individual qigong postures and entire styles are modeled after animals. Typical qigong posture names cited by the Taoist philosopher Huai Nan Zi (d. 122 B.C.) include: Bathing Duck, Leaping Monkey, Glaring Owl, and Turning Tiger. From qigong systems developed within the last few centuries come: Lion's Roar, Monkey Hanging from the Tree, Coiling Snake, Old Bear in the Woods, Flying Crane. The qigong student cultivates animal skills: balance, suppleness, grace, and strength. Most important, through qigong practice, we hope to embody the health, hardiness, and vitality of the animals. In Hawaii, the most powerful healers are known as Kahuna Ha, "Masters of the Breath." The sacred healing breath, ha, can be absorbed at posser places in nature (heiau), through dance (such as the hula), and deep breathing exercises. Some Kahunas learn how to store healing energy in the heart. Then, when the healing energy is projected through laying on of hands, the ha is colored by the healer's love and positive thoughts. In traditional Hawaiian counseling and mediation, all parties in a conflict first calm their minds by breathing deeply. This helps them to be less reactive and to find a better solution. The ha can also be transferred from a healer to a patient by blowing directly on the patient's body. When a kahuna Ha is near death, he/she may transfer lineage and power by breathing the ha onto a student or family member. The Hawaiian word Aloha, often used as a respectful, heart also means "love." Love is the "meeting face-to-face" (alo) of the breath of life (ha). If a tree's roots are in good soil, then it will grow. If we neglect the roots and only prune the branches, the tree will die. Or if we try to build a temple too quickly or too high working with the upper dan tian before the lower-then the temple will topple over. This is why qigong emphasizes the primacy of rooted standing, breathing, and body awareness. Body source of the breath. When we calm the body, the mind can expand without limit. Of the five zang, the spleen has a particularly close connection with qi. The spleen extracts qi from food and fluids. This refined qi is brought up to the lungs, where it mixes with breath qi, producing the qi that flows in the meridians. (The turbid, impure parts of food qi descend toward the colon for elimination.) According to the Five Element Theory, the spleen corresponds to the Earth element. It is the fertile ground that supplies nourishment for the body. For this reason, spleen disorder weakens the blood and qi and makes us more susceptible to disease. Jing, qi, shen he yi, "Sexual energy, qi, and spirit unified." These three forms of energy are known as the Three Treasures. Sexual energy and spirit are yin and yang forms of qi, respectively. The former is earthy and is associated with the most intimate form of physical contact. The latter, spirit, is yang and heavenly, linking human beings with the divine. When the term qi is used in contrast to these two, then qi is considered neutral, at the midpoint between the positive and negative pole. It is neither yin nor yang in itself, yet is capable of functioning in either capacity. The word "jing" was originally a pictogram of the germ of a grain, probably wheat or rice. The same character was later given an extended meaning, germ of life, life essence, sexual energy, the most refined, quintessential form of anything. An herbal jing is a concentrated extract. Jing gold is refined, pure gold. In qigong, jing is the most yin form of qi. It tends to flow downward, like water, moving toward the genitals and finding expression in fluids related to reproduction: semen, sperm, vaginal lubricants, ova, menstrual blood. All of these are physical manifestations of jing. However, jing, like the other treasures, is essentially a subtle energy Qi is air, but it more than air. In a similar way, jing is sperm, but it is more than sperm. Jing is sometimes said to flow or gather even if there is no change in associated physical substances. Jing is yin relative to other forms of body energy. Yet, jing itself has yin sexual fluids. The Yang aspect is saliva. Although saliva is physically composed of digestive enzymes and protective antibodies, it is energetically linked to sexuality. In sexual qigong partners are advised to swallow each other's saliva as part of foreplay or as a way to exchange sexual qi during intercourse. Increasing the reserve of jing stimulates hair growth. The hair also has a tendency to return to its original color. Qigong master Yu An-Ren was imprisoned for several years during his incarceration; the center of his head developed a spot of gray, which quickly spread, until all of his hair turned silver. At the same time, his spine began to hunch over. His resting heart rate was 90-100 beats per minute, jumping to 120 if he climbed a flight of stairs. On his release, Yu began to practice qigong intensively in order to regain his health. Now at age fifty-seven, he has a full head of black hair, a straight, flexible spine, and a resting heart rate of seventy. Jing has three external sources. It is inherited from parents, derived from the purified, refined parts of food, and, in Taoist sexual yoga, can be given to and absorbed from one's sexual partner. In ancient times, the sages inspired the people with drumming and dancing in order to Shen is associated with the heart and liver. When these organs are healthy, the mind may have a tendency to be restless. French Sinologist Catherine Despeux defines shen in her traitlet' Alchimie et de Physiologie Taoiste (Treatise on Taoist Alchemy and Physiology): "Shen is spiritual and psychic energy, the divine part of one's being, and has an essentially luminous nature." Shen is the light of the eyes. It is conserved and increased when we turn the eyes within, practicing introspection and meditation. Shen energy is lost when we spend too much time looking outside, preoccupied by either external events or our ideas about them. Disturbed, muddled, or mad states of mind are diseases of shen. In Western terms, shen can be thought of as the energy of the nervous system, and thus the most highly charged and electrical of the three treasures. It is impossible to find spirit without integrating the experience of the body. This idea is reflected in perhaps the most famous qigong maxim: "Refine the jing to create qi; refine qi to create shen; refine shen and return to the Void." Subtle energies are based on denser ones, in the way that steam rises from boiling water. If you wish to develop your mind, pay attention to the body. If you wish to develop your spirit, pay attention to the mind. The Void, the state of empty, clear mindedness, remains both the goal and the source of practice. We don't achieve the Void, we "return" to it. The Void is your original mind, an inner purity that has never been clouded by concepts and images.

As one ball touches the other, there is one linked process. He sought not see a separation of events: ball A hitting ball B, then, ball B moving. Instead, there was a continuous hit-move action. Discrete causes and effects are illusions of the dissecting intellect. The qigong master realizes that life is change and relationship; there are no simple explanations. In any case, the Chinese man reminds his friend, simple explanations. In any case, the Chinese man reminds his friend, "Never mind how they move, just get the eight ball in the side pocket!" There is an enlightening Buddhist parable about a man who is shot with an arrow. The doctor comes along, but before the doctor removes the arrow, the man wants to know, "Who shot the arrow! What is the arrow made of? Where was it shot from?" Altogether the doctor is asked more than a hundred questions. The buddha says, "This man will die before the arrow is removed." The only sensible way to analyze qi is in terms of correlates. In the same way that thunder is a correlated of lightning, but is not the same as lightning, so electrical, biochemical, bioluminescent,

volitional, and probably some as yet unmeasured phenomena are correlates of qi. The concept of “correlates” allows a scientist to discuss healing without offending the mystic. The electrical currents that control healing and repair are extremely sensitive to external electromagnetic fields (EMFs). Electromagnetic pollution permeates our world in the form of household appliances, computers, radio, radar, and an extensive grid of electric wires and cables. Artificial electromagnetic fields generated by such equipment might be interpreted as information by the human nervous system, and so interrupt the body’s ability to scavenge cancer cells, heal broken bones, or keep hormonal levels in balance. Normal biologic processes might be inhibited or exaggerated. The body is still the greatest mystery of all. Noted author and expert on Chinese religion, the late John Blofeld, said, “Yes, qigong can cultivate powers: Invisibility—that means going unnoticed in a crowd; Astral Travel—knowing that the real Self is everywhere; Levitation—taking yourself lightly.” In the end, the complexity of qigong becomes a way to recapture simplicity and innocence. When you have one, you have many. What is it?” Paul wondered about this profound statement, undoubtedly the essence of qi-power. Don’t ask too many questions. Just practice.

Three Treasures

Jing	Qi	Shen
Energy sexual	Life	Spirit
Organ-Source		
Kidneys And Lungs	Spleen	Liver And Heart
Element		
Water	Air	Fire
Form		
Sexual Fluids, Saliva	Breath	Light And Spirit
Character		
Yin	Yin, Yang,	Neutral Yang
Movement		
Down	Down And Up	Up
Reservoir		
Lower Dan Tian	Middle Dan Tian	Upper Dan Tian
Circulatory System		
Bones	Meridians	Extra Meridians (TCM)*
Associated System		
Reproductive	Respiratory	Nervous Endocrine
Gate		
Genitals	Nose And Mouth	Eyes
Cultivation Practice		
Sexual	Qigong	Meditation

Qigong strengthens the heart muscle and increases the stroke volume, the amount of blood pumped per minute, so that more oxygen can be delivered to the tissues and more waste products carried away. It also causes the resting heart rate to drop. During more dynamic or demanding forms of qigong, heart rate will increase, but drop afterward. During meditative qigong practice, the heart rate will generally drop below normal, and then resume a slow, normal pace as you resume activity. Qigong also lowers high blood pressure. It is likely that relaxation and deep abdominal respiration cause the blood vessels to relax and dilate slightly, creating less resistance to blood flow and thus reduced blood pressure. The precise qigong methods of relaxation, have been found to be more effective in lowering both systolic and diastolic blood pressure than either simply resting or natural sleep.

Qigong increases the volume of blood flowing to the brain, hands, and feet, and in the small capillaries throughout the body. The deep relaxation one achieves during qigong practice causes the blood vessels to gently dilate, enabling them to carry more blood. Good circulation is extremely important for healthy brain functioning. Although the brain makes up only 2 percent of the body’s overall weight, it utilizes 20 percent of its available oxygen. A deficiency of oxygenated blood can predispose one to seizure disorders, migraine headaches, and psychological instability. Greater cerebral blood flow may account for higher intelligence scores among students practicing qigong compared with controls. It may also help to explain how qigong improves memory and retards senility among the aged. Brain cells may die off at a slower rate if they are better supplied with oxygen. It is important to note, however, that qigong’s salutary effect on memory may be due to a diminution of adrenal stress hormones in the blood. Some of these hormones bond to and cause deterioration in areas of the brain responsible for memory retention. There are many reasons qigong benefits digestion. Abdominal breathing massages the digestive organs. As the diaphragm drops and rises, the muscles involved in peristalsis (the pushing of food through the esophagus toward the stomach) are stimulated. Qigong master and scholar Dr. Jiao Guorui believes that weak peristalsis is strengthened and excessively strong contractions are reduced. It has been well-documented that qigong improves the appetite. This may be due to an effect on salivary and gastric enzymes, though experimental proof of this is still weak. Almost all qigong practitioners note greatly increased production of saliva both during and immediately after practice. It is possible that qigong practice also gently stimulates hydrochloric acid production in the stomach, so that optimal levels are maintained with advancing age. (Reduced hydrochloric acid levels and poorer digestion are usual signs of aging.) As blood circulation improves and students make necessary adjustments in diet and lifestyle, hemorrhoids often shrink or disappear. General bodily relaxation, so important in qigong, may account for the cure of psychosomatic digestive disorders and some types of ulcers. Many qigong techniques involve contracting the anal sphincter. This may improve the muscle tone of the smooth muscles involved in elimination and so also aid in the cure of hemorrhoids and constipation. Most of the evidence about qigong’s effect on ulcers is in the form of clinical observation rather than controlled research. Zhao Liming, a doctor of Traditional Chinese Medicine from Harbin, reported on the use of qigong in treating 1,278 ulcer patients:

Of the 190 cases of gastric ulcer, 154 recovered, 34 improved, and 2 were ineffective. Of the 955 cases of duodenal ulcer, 742 cured, 202 improved, and 11 were ineffective. For the whole group, the recovery rate was 77.4%, improved 20.9% and no effect 1.7%. Of the 175 cases under long-term clinical observation, disease recurred in 59 cases including two who persisted in Qigong exercise, 3 practicing it on and off and 54 who gave it up. Qigong improves mechanical aspects of digestion by strengthening the muscles that push food through the alimentary canal. There is also scanty but strongly suggestive evidence that qigong can improve the chemical aspects of digestion, helping the breakdown of food into nutrients and promoting the elimination of pathogenic bacteria. Researchers at the Pharmaceutical Department of Jiamusi Medical College used ultrasound to examine the gallbladders of twelve qigong practitioners before, during, and after qigong meditation. Results showed an increase in the diameter of the gallbladders and an increased secretion of bile. When the same scientists examined the feces of seven qigong practitioners, it was found that the number of pathogenic bacteria was less than in controls, and the number of beneficial, anaerobic bacteria was higher. Thus, the researchers concluded that qigong promotes

healthier microflora in the digestive tract.

Many digestive problems have a strong psychological component. An individual can become constipated from defensive, uptight attitudes or from the burden of unassimilated feelings or thoughts. The efficient breakdown of foods is disturbed by confusion, anger, frustration, and fear. These stresses cause the nervous system to produce chemicals that can lock onto cells in the digestive organs and prevent their efficient functioning. Certainly some of the positive effects of qigong on digestion result from simply learning to relax and become more self-aware. As the mind slows down, the brain waves also slow down. Qigong helps the mind to "downshift" from beta to alpha, theta, or a combination of the two. Qigong generally creates a preponderance of high-amplitude alpha, measured in microvolts. Before qigong practice, alpha might appear on the EEG like ripples on a pond. During qigong, alpha changes into high-crested ocean waves. This is not an increase in frequency of brain waves. Rather, more brain tissue is doing the same thing at the same time, producing a greater electrical charge, and hence, a higher amplitude.

During qigong, theta waves also increase, though generally not to the same degree as alpha. It is likely that delta waves become more pronounced too as the qigong practitioner becomes more and more tranquil, although more research is needed to verify this effect. Alpha and theta brain waves engendered by qigong practice tend to be concentrated in the frontal portions of the brain. Usually after three or four minutes, there is a measurable shift of alpha and theta concentration from the rear occipital regions to the frontal lobes. This corresponds to a quieting of the language and evaluative functions of the brain and an increased focus on holistic experience in which subject and object feel unified. Instead of labeling, categorizing, and judging experiences (beta), the qigong practitioner is sensing, experiencing, and silently feeling. Qigong increases vitality because it conserves energy by lowering the metabolic rate. The body relaxes; the heart beats more slowly and regularly; the mind becomes quiet. The respiratory rate decreases from an average resting rate of sixteen breaths per minute to three to five breaths per minute. Both inhalation and exhalation are smoother, with fewer pauses or breaks compared with untrained subjects. High levels of stress in our society create a tendency to breathe rapidly and shallowly by opening and closing the chest. Qigong practice emphasizes a more efficient way of breathing using the abdomen. Once the body experiences the pleasure of healthy, relaxed breathing, it becomes natural and habitual.

In qigong breathing, the lower abdomen moves out with inhalation and in with exhalation. During inhalation the diaphragm drops, pushing the abdomen out as the lungs expand and fill with air. During exhalation the diaphragm relaxes and moves back up, the abdomen gently contracts, forcing air out. This method, called either "abdominal" or "diaphragmatic" breathing, conserves energy since less is required to move the abdomen than to move the chest. Most importantly, it creates the most favorable conditions for absorbing oxygen and releasing carbon dioxide. X rays have shown that qigong practitioners move their diaphragms three to four times more than do most individuals, indicating that they are breathing more fully. When skilled qigong practitioners were studied under a fluoroscope screen while practicing meditative qigong, their diaphragm movement significantly increased, but the number of movements per minute (respiratory frequency) decreased.

Diaphragmatic breathing continuously strengthens and tones the abdominal muscles. It may be as essential for a beautiful appearance as exercises such as sit-ups. What is the use of a daily morning "ab" workout if, during the rest of the day, the diaphragm is asleep and not exercising properly? Healthy breathing makes all of the muscles involved in respiration both stronger and more elastic.

Qigong cannot miraculously change your chronological age, but it can change your functional age. A fifty-year-old has the health and vitality of a thirty-year-old. Chinese research has shown that with long-term, regular practice qigong can improve many of the biomarkers of aging, including vital capacity, blood pressure, cholesterol levels, hormone levels, kidney function, mental acuity (especially memory), vision and hearing, skin elasticity, bone density, reaction time, physical strength, and immune function.

Important experiments have been conducted to measure the activity of the enzyme superoxide dismutase (SOD) in qigong practitioners. SOD protects the cells against damage from superoxide, a highly toxic free radical. Superoxide is a reactive variety of oxygen that can cause aging of the body's tissues, including wrinkling and changes in skin pigmentation, the appearance of "age spots," in the same way that exposure to air causes food to rot or go stale. Superoxide can cause the breakdown of cartilage and synovial fluid, the cushioning and lubrication between bones, leading to arthritis and joint damage. When it penetrates the cellular DNA, superoxide may induce cancer and other immune system disorders. Chinese scientists hypothesized that qigong should increase SOD levels and thus decrease superoxide.

Peak Periods Of Visceral Qi

11 P.M.- 1 A.M. Gallbladder

1 A.M.- 3 A.M. Liver

3 A.M.- 5 A.M. Lung

5 A.M.- 7 A.M. Large Intestine

7 A.M.- 9 A.M. Stomach

9 A.M.- 11 A.M. Spleen

11 A.M.- 1 P.M. Heart

1 P.M.- 3 P.M. Small Intestine

3 P.M.- 5 P.M. Bladder

5 P.M.- 7 P.M. Kidney

7 P.M.- 9 P.M. Pericardium

9 P.M.- 11 P.M. Triple Burner

The basic principles of qigong posture are simple. The spine should feel long and open, with the shoulders relaxed, neither slouched nor pulled back. The elbows, knees, and fingers are all slightly bent rather than rigidly locked. The feet are generally flat on the ground. The chest feels easy and open, neither puffed out nor depressed. The abdomen and solar plexus are free of tension, allowing the breath to become slow, quiet, and deep. The whole body is alert, relaxed, and more fully alive.

The various elements of posture are combined together in "the qigong stance." Although the qigong stance may be practiced from a standing or seated position, it is most beneficial to practice from a standing posture. Standing creates the greatest ease of breathing because it allows the most space for the lungs, diaphragm, and abdomen to move. In qigong exercises, the stance is also held for a moment while making a transition from one technique to another. For instance, to do a qigong bend, first stand in the qigong stance, with the feet shoulder-width apart and flat on the ground. Then slowly bend down until your upper torso is hanging. Hold that posture for a few seconds, with the knees slightly bent and the breath as relaxed as possible. Next gradually straighten the spine, resuming the stance. While practicing the qigong stance or other forms of qigong, wear loose, comfortable clothing, with flat-bottomed shoes, or go barefoot if the ground is a comfortable temperature. If you do not need eyeglasses to read instructions, take them off. Also remove any rings or other jewelry, since these may interfere with qi circulation. It is easiest to get the feel of these principles from a standing position. If standing is difficult for you, sit down. Most seated qigong practices, such as breathing exercises and visualization, are practiced from a chair. Exceptions will be made clear in this book. Sit in the middle of a straight-backed chair, without leaning against the backrest. Avoid overstuffed chairs that you disappear into, as they make it difficult to maintain a healthy posture. Whether standing or sitting, the legs are uncrossed, the feet shoulder-width apart and flat on the ground. The hands rest comfortably at the sides or, if seated, in the lap.

Tension means shortened muscles and restricted range of motion, creating the possibility of bone irritation and inflammation (arthritis) and damage to the cartilage. In qigong, the joints are considered gateways that allow the passage of qi.

It is important to keep these gateways open by consciously relaxing and releasing all of the joints. Do not lock the elbows or knees. Keep the wrists soft. Release tension in the shoulders, fingers, hips, ankles, toes. Imagine all of the vertebrae supple, like a rope, capable of unrestricted motion. Relax open these joints; think of the relaxation as a gentle expansion from the center, toward the periphery. Become aware of places where you contract inward. "Empty the neck, let energy reach the crown." Release the muscles of the neck both outward, toward the surface, and down along the back. Think of the muscles gently lengthening and opening. The head becomes light and free, delicately balanced on the upper spine.

In Daoism, the head is considered the abode of the inner gods. It is visualized as a sacred mountain, containing caverns for training and initiation. When the neck is tight, the energy cannot reach the head. We lose touch with the "inner gods," that is, the intuitive mind. The spirit becomes dull. On a physical level, qi and blood flow are both restricted, contributing to headaches, eyestrain, and confusion. Holding the image of a suspended head is a way to create "breathing space" in the body and to counter the unappealing effects of gravity and age: the tendency to grow shorter and wider. Ida Rolf, Ph.D., famed creator of the Structural Integration (or "Rolfing") method of body therapy, reminds us in her classic, *Rolfing*: "The inevitable action of gravity anywhere at any time on any soft, pliable mass is to bring it nearer to a formless, chaotic, spherical unit. Thus in human bodies, gravity acts to shorten, thicken, and compress. Only the bones prevent bodies from becoming a thick, amoeba-like ball." Interestingly, Dr. Rolf says that if we could only put the human body on a "sky hook" many of these abnormalities would be corrected.

She Ding Shang E

"Tongue touches the roof of the mouth." Keep the mouth relaxed, the lips lightly touching. Unless otherwise specified or unless you are exhaling through the mouth, it is best to keep the tongue gently touching a comfortable place on the upper palate. This is useful for two reasons. First, it generates, saliva, which should be swallowed when necessary, preventing the mouth or throat from drying out. According to Daoism, saliva is the body's "longevity liquor." The second reason is that the body's major yang meridian ends at the upper palate while the yin meridian begins at the tip of the tongue. By touching these points together, an important energy circuit is closed, allowing the qi to circulate with a stronger current. A stronger current means more energy and vitality.

Chen Jian Zhui Zhou

"Sink the shoulders, drop the elbows." Chronically lifted shoulders are a common symptom of tension and anxiety, often resulting from fear and a need to protect oneself against a perceived threat. When our shoulders are raised, the ribs lift; breathing becomes shallow and thoracic. Other tensions quickly follow in a kind of chain reaction. The midback becomes tight, freezing the shoulder blades and preventing them from expanding with the breath. From the back, tension moves into the neck and head and along the arms. Raised shoulders create a feeling that the arms are disconnected from the rest of the body.

Shoulder tension often results in elbow tension and a habit of locking the elbows. The converse is also true; locked elbows cause the shoulders to tighten. Locked elbows slow down circulation to the hands; the fingers become cold, numb, and insensitive. It is also easier to damage the elbows when lifting heavy objects. Sinking the shoulders and relaxing the elbows makes it possible to transmit whole-body power through the arm, an essential skill in baseball, tennis, golf, and in many other sports. In the qigong stance, it is imperative that the shoulders sink down. Be careful not to slump the shoulders forward or pull them back. Let them sit straight down. At the same time, loosen the elbows; relax them open. The elbows, like the knee joints, are never locked during qigong. The elbows are "dropped," that is, slightly bent. When shoulders and elbows drop, it is easier for the qi to drop, to fill the dan tian, the vital reservoir in the lower abdomen.

Zhong Zheng

"Central and erect." This refers to the straight spine and centered feeling while practicing the qigong stance and most qigong exercises or meditations. The spine is the highway for electrical messages to and from the brain; it is also the highway for qi. If it is bent, crooked, or leaning, the qi cannot flow evenly. With a centered and stable spine it is easier to feel the bones stacking, one over the other. The skeletal structure is used to maintain the erect posture without unnecessary tensing of the muscles. The weight drops evenly through the feet, maximizing contact between the feet and the yin, earth-qi of the ground.

Think of the spine as a flexible rope rather than a stiff pole. It should be straight, but not stiff. The rope is gently stretched and pulled at both ends: the head lifting and tailbone sinking. Or imagine that the spine is a string and each vertebra a bead on that string. Let there be a comfortable space between each "bead," no cramping or crowding. Give your vertebrae room to breathe. Maintain the feeling and image of an elongated spine, and allow the hips to roll slightly under. If you place one palm on the sacrum with the fingertips touching the tailbone, it is easy to feel a gentle tucking of the pelvis. The spine feels straight, though there is still some natural curvature. This posture facilitates awareness of the lower abdomen and stimulation of the ming men acupoints below the second lumbar vertebra, which harmonizes kidney function. After qigong practice, the back resumes its normal curves. The words "central" and "erect" also imply that the spine is plumb erect, perpendicular to the ground, rather than straight on an incline, like an airplane taking off. Do not lean to the front or back, right or left. You are in a position of maximum potential, capable of moving with equal ease in any direction. This is also called zhong ding "centered and stable," a posture of poise, rootedness, and fine balance. Returning to the image of a tree, if the body is centered and stable, it feels like a tree with deep roots and flexible branches. Instead, the sternum is sunk down and relaxed. The point is not to raise or puff out the chest. Lifting the sternum creates tension in the diaphragm and makes abdominal respiration more difficult. In martial arts practice, a raised chest exposes the sternum to attack. "Lift the back" means to extend and lengthen the spine. The two phrases "Sink the chest" and "Lift the back" go together. If the back is extended naturally, the chest will be neither concave nor convex. In terms of qi circulation, lifting the back helps the yang, heavenly qi, to rise up the back. Sinking the chest helps the yin, earthly qi, which flows along the front of the body, to sink toward the ground. Thus the heavenly and earthly, yang and yin, are able to follow their natural courses and create greater internal harmony.

Song Kua

"Relax the kua." The word kua refers to the inguinal area, the creases at the junction of the thighs and trunk. This is a core and pivotal area of the body. Relaxing the kua can facilitate relaxation of the hips and the deep muscles, including the psoas muscles, which attach to the hips. This improves sexual performance and responsiveness and helps strengthen the reproductive system. The hipbones form a protective shell around the lower abdominal energy center, the dan tian. When the muscles and tendons around the hips are relaxed, the dan tian qi can spread more easily through the rest of the body. It is also easier to feel qigong movements as inner directed, propelled by the movement of qi in the lower abdomen. There is a qigong saying, "When the intent (yi) arrives, the qi arrives." This means that the more your mind is focused on what you are doing, the more qi you can develop and control. It is impossible to benefit from qigong if you are trying to watch TV or listen to music or prepare the shopping list while practicing. Qigong does not work without awareness and focus. In standing, the knees bend, the weight of the body sinks through the feet into the ground. In sitting, the body rests gracefully in the chair and the feet are rooted into the ground. The breath also sinks, dropping deep within the body. With every inhalation the dan tian expands (expanding the lower abdomen and, to a lesser extent, the lower back); with every exhalation, it contracts. This method of breathing massages and stimulates the dan tian. In time, as the dan tian accumulates a greater supply of qi, the

student will experience a feeling of warmth, fullness, and inner strength, at first only during practice, but eventually all day long.

An intent to drop energy downward, to sink the qi, increases balance and stability and facilitates proper breathing. It is important not only in qigong training, but to improve performance in any sport.

Qigong cultivates a powerful and unique form of relaxation. When filled with qi, the body is like a tree branch filled with sap; it can bend and flow with the breeze, but it does not snap or lose its connection with the root. On the other hand, a stiff, dead branch is easily broken. Thus the adage of Lao Zi, "Concentrate the qi and you will achieve the utmost suppleness. . . . Suppleness is the essence of life." In qigong posture, the chest is down, the stomach out, and knees bent! Military posture is designed to cut off autonomy and independence, to influence the soldier to follow orders. When the abdomen is pulled in, it becomes virtually impossible to feel our weight sinking through the feet into the ground. The soldier loses touch with the unconscious—the "ground" of the mind—and with deep feelings. Theoretically, he will not hesitate when given a command. Being cut off from deep feelings may be a desirable state for a soldier, but it is unhealthy for qi development. Qigong posture is designed for self-empowerment, to help the student feel internally strong and capable of unrehearsed action.

In summary, when practicing qigong, keep in mind the following: relax the whole body, especially the joints; keep the neck relaxed and the head suspended delicately over the spine; the jaw is also relaxed, with the tongue generally touching the upper palate; sink the shoulders and elbows; maintain a relaxed but erect spine, centered and stable; maximize contact between the feet and the ground, feeling your body's weight dropping through the feet; release the sternum; the spine is long and extended; the hips are relaxed. Do not use force! Be aware of what you are doing! The abdomen is relaxed, and the breath feels as though it is sinking into it. As we "observe" our areas of tension, it becomes possible for tension to dissipate. There is a reciprocal relationship between chronic functional tension (as opposed to tension caused by injury or disease) and habitual lack of body awareness. A tense body part lapses into unconsciousness, becoming white noise, like the constant hum of an electric fan, or the drone of passing automobiles. If I am unaware of an area of my body, it is easier for the tension in that area to be maintained. Yet when I am aware of a tense shoulder, the shoulder begins to relax. As I become aware of the breath, the breath slows down. Awareness helps to thaw out frozen diaphragms and locked sternums. It presents the opportunity for change. We can see that awareness might not be comfortable or pleasant at first; it is, however, the first stage in cultivating tranquility and deep relaxation. Relaxation creates deep and efficient abdominal respiration, resulting in more complete oxygenation of the blood. Relaxation also helps to dilate blood vessels and lower blood pressure. It also affects blood chemistry, including normalization of the acid-base (pH) balance and reduction of blood and tissue levels of calcium, which can help prevent or eliminate tremors, spasms, and tension in the muscles. The overall result is improved circulation and oxygen delivery to all parts of the body. This is especially noticeable in the hands and feet, which often feel pleasantly warm both during and after qigong. According to Chinese medicine, relaxed abdominal breathing is an energetic pump, sending qi through the meridians. In the *Explanation of the Thirteen Movements*, we read, "Qi is rooted in the feet, controlled by the yao [waist and abdomen], and manifests in the hands." Like a reservoir filling with water, abdominal breathing causes the dan tian energy center to fill with qi. Once the dan tian is filled, the surplus of accumulated qi begins to overflow into the meridians, bones, and, eventually, all the tissues of the body, creating a general sensation of warmth. Eighty-years-young Taiji Quan master Gao Fu constantly advises her students, "Relax through the feet, into the ground." We should not be "standing on our own two feet," but standing on the ground! This creates a feeling of balance, support, and comfort. An individual who is standing relaxed and sunk feels "stable as Mount Tai" (a majestic Taoist holy mountain in eastern China) and rooted like a tall tree. If the roots are deep, the tree will sway, but not topple. When I teach qigong classes, I am always amazed at the external signs of sinking. Faces release their lines and worries. The eyes and jaw loosen and relax. The shoulders, which may have been raised, sink and sit on the torso. The breath is now sinking and moving more freely in the lower abdomen. To relax we need to pay attention to what we are doing setting aside worries and thoughts. The Chinese are fond of repeating, "To relax, you must be tranquil." And we need to regard relaxation as a process of surrendering to a deeper wisdom, rather than acquiring, through effort, a new ability. Developing large muscles requires effort; cultivating relaxation requires letting go. Adopting this attitude will help us to stop trying to relax. The three principal methods of fang song gong are: 1. Sequential Relaxation and Sinking. 2. Floating on the Ground (Tensing and Relaxing). 3. Relaxing the Three Lines. Experiment with each. Practice any one or combination of relaxation techniques that work best for you, every day, morning and evening. Your practice sessions can last anywhere from five to twenty minutes. Stand with the feet shoulder-width apart or sit in a comfortable, erect posture. Close your eyes or leave them half-open, with a soft, unfocused gaze. Starting at the crown and working your way down toward the feet, become aware of and ask each part of the body to relax and sink toward the ground. First bring your mind to the head. Relax the muscles of the crown, forehead, eyebrows, eyes, cheeks, jaw, gums, ears, all the muscles of the face. Feel these muscles letting go, releasing downward. Become aware of the neck. Relax the muscles on the front, sides, and back of the neck. Relax and mentally open the vertebrae of the neck, so the upper spine can be soft and open. Let your head float easily on the upper spine, like a cork floating on water.

Relax the shoulders, letting them sit on the torso. The shoulders sink straight toward the ground, neither pulling back nor slouching forward. Allow relaxation to spread through your arms and hands, so you become aware of the weight of your own arms. If you are sitting, release the weight of your arms onto your lap or thighs. Relax the elbows, wrists, and fingers. The fingers are neither spread open nor curled into fists. Feel the natural extension and weight of the fingers. Relax the collarbones, the shoulder blades, the ribs, and breastbone. Let the ribs hang and release down. Relax the chest muscles, including the pectorals and the muscles between the ribs. Release the muscles of the upper back and along the spine. Relax the entire spine—upper, middle, and lower—feeling the spine opening, gently extending to its natural length. Note that when the spine is relaxed, it is open, not compressed. You should feel a comfortable space between each vertebra. Now let your open, relaxed spine be finely balanced and connected with the ground, like a tall tree. Release the muscles of the lower back (the sacrum) and the tailbone, so the spine can balance with minimal tension, without extra, muscular help. Relax the entire torso, especially the internal organs, letting go of tension on the surface of the body and inside the body. Release the solar plexus, diaphragm, and abdomen. Let the abdomen hang out and sink down. For a change, don't worry about how you look; rather, be concerned about how you feel! Allow the body to breathe without interference. Let the breath relax, so it can sink deep in your body. Relax the hips. Relax the inguinal area and the groin. Relax the buttocks and the anal sphincter. Become aware of the connection between the top of your leg bones (the femur) and where they attach to the hips. Let there be a comfortable space and freedom at the head of the femur. Release the thigh muscles, including the backs of the thighs, the hamstrings. Release the knees, again allowing a comfortable openness, so the articulation has the potential for easy and natural movement. Relax the lower legs, the calves, the ankles, the bones of the feet, the toes. Again, check your body to see if it is relaxed and sunk, yet appropriately open, with the fullest potential for movement. Let gravity work for you, allowing each part of your body to seek its lowest level, like water flowing downhill. Lie on your back on a comfortable, flat surface: a thick rug, exercise mat, or very firm mattress. As you focus on each part of the body sequentially, tense that part of the body and then release it into the ground. Tense your muscles only within comfortable and safe limits. There is no need to strain or to tense as much as possible. (Only those without serious medical conditions should practice this method. For instance, it may not be safe to tense

a herniated disk or diseased heart.) Tighten the crown and the muscles of the face, then let go. Tighten the neck, let go, and so on. You may tighten each arm and fist one at a time or simultaneously. The same is true for legs and feet. Gradually work your way down. At the end, tighten and clench the toes, then release them. Many students find that this technique helps them to become more precisely aware of each body part and to more fully relax. From a standing, seated, or supine posture, with the arms naturally extended at the sides, imagine the body has three lines. First relax the line from crown to coccyx, including the entire spine. Next relax the line across the shoulders and arms, down to the fingertips of each hand. Finally, relax the line of the hips and legs, all the way down to the toes. Feel each line relaxing, sinking, opening. Proceed slowly, at your own pace, and repeat each line or the entire exercise as often as you wish, until you feel you have achieved satisfactory progress. The word qigong has often been translated as "breathing exercises." This makes good sense, as the word qi commonly means air or breath and the subtle energy carried by the breath. It is the air we breathe, the oxygen delivered to the cells, and the energy that sustains life. Awareness of the breath is a constant feature of both moving (active) and tranquil (passive) qigong. One of the ancient names for qigong, tu gu na xin, "expelling the old, drawing in the new," sounds like a modern description of the gaseous exchange that occurs during respiration. On inhalation, fresh air is drawn into the lungs and a nutritive component of it, oxygen, is carried by the red blood cells to the tissues. On exhalation, carbon dioxide, a waste product, diffuses from the blood into the lung's air sacs and is expelled. One of the goals of qigong is to maintain the balance and efficiency of this exchange, so that the entire body receives the energy it needs. It also causes a constriction in the blood vessels, further preventing the oxygen from reaching its target. Oxygen delivery depends more on the quality of breathing—ease, grace, and efficiency—than the quantity of air forced into the lungs with each cycle of respiration. In fact, as we will see later, if breathing habits are poor, then the respiratory rate increases in order to keep approximately the same amount of oxygen flowing to the cells each minute. This quickened pace is a drain on body energy. Healthy breathing increases vitality and creates the most favorable conditions for gaseous exchange. Abdominal qigong breathing causes even the tiniest blood vessels, the capillaries, to relax and gently dilate with a greater flow of blood, oxygen, and qi.

Before attempting qigong breathing, it is important to discover your usual breathing pattern. Check periodically to see if this pattern has changed in order to track if qigong is really improving your habitual way of breathing. It may be easy to breathe correctly when you are trying to do so. However, the goal is to breathe correctly in everyday life.

1. How does the breath feel? Does it feel smooth or choppy, deep or shallow, clear or turbid, light or heavy, quiet or noisy, easy or difficult, healthy or diseased? Pay attention to the subjective feelings and thoughts evoked by the breath. Is your breath a slow-moving stream or is it dammed by tension and anxiety? Images that rise spontaneously to consciousness are also important indicators of the quality of breath and qi.

2. Where do you breathe? How does the breath enter and leave? Where does it go to, how deep in the body? Can you feel it moving through the nostrils, down the trachea (windpipe), in and out of the bronchi and lungs? Do you breathe with your nose or mouth or a combination? Do you feel the breath moving in your chest, in your abdomen, in your back, anywhere else? Can you feel the breath moving in your hands or feet? There is no right or wrong in this inquiry. Your experience of the breath does not have to concur with your knowledge about breath. For now, let yourself forget medical dogma and anatomical charts. Discover what your own senses have to teach you.

3. Which part of the body moves with inhalation and exhalation? Does your chest open or close or move at all with inhalation? Does your abdomen move as you breathe? A good way to answer this question is to place one hand on the chest and one on the abdomen and to notice which hand rises or falls in response to inhalation and exhalation. Another method is to lie on the back and place a lightweight paperback book on the abdomen and notice whether it rises or falls as you inhale and exhale. At the same time, does the lower back seem to press into or release from the ground as you breathe? Now place the book on your rib cage and again note the response to inhalation and exhalation. If you use two books, one on the left side of the chest, one on the right, you can find out if the two sides of the body expand and contract with equal ease. The back might also feel as if it presses into and releases from the ground. We sometimes forget that the ribs are designed to move front, sideways, and back. What about the sternum (breastbone)? How does it move as you inhale and exhale?

4. What is your breathing rate? How many breaths do you take per minute? Look at the second hand on your watch and count how many exhalations you make in a minute. Do this while you are calm and meditative, not during a period of physical or mental activity. Make sure you loosen your belt and are wearing comfortable clothing. A constricted abdomen will automatically speed up the breath.

At least once a week, go through these four steps and write down your response in a Qigong Progress.

In all of the following exercises, it is best to breathe only through the nose. The nose contains fine hairs (cilia) and mucus that help trap and filter out dust, pollutants, and germs. Some of these harmful particles are swallowed, thus removing them from the respiratory tract. Blowing the nose, coughing, or sneezing discharges others. Because the mucous membranes contain a rich supply of capillaries and white blood cells, bacteria trapped there can also be disinfected and destroyed. The nose has often been compared to a humidifier; it conditions the air before it enters the windpipe and lungs. The air is warmed by the blood flowing through the nose and its mucous membranes and by residual warmth left from the previous exhalation (if one exhales through the nose). The air is moisturized by water vapor rising from the lungs and by a combination of mucus and drainage from the sinuses and tear ducts.

The upper end of each nasal passage has spiral-shaped bones called turbinates or nasal conchae (Latin for "seashell," referring to their appearance). Here the nasal passage narrows, and the air divides into various passages. As air moves past the turbinates, swirling currents are formed, further warming and moistening the air and affording more opportunities for relatively heavy particles to settle on the nasal lining or be trapped by its mucus. After this final filtration, air continues down the windpipe. As air is inhaled and exhaled past the turbinates, approximately two quarts of water are conserved and returned to the lungs.

On a psychological level, nose breathing encourages meditative awareness. This is why one breathes through the nose during Zen meditation. The air feels warm and comfortable and is thus less distracting. The mind does not have to control the opening and closing of the mouth, allowing fuller relaxation and focus on the object of meditation. Naturally, if one is suffering from a sinus infection, a cold, or other disorder that makes it difficult or uncomfortable to breathe through the nose, then by all means use the mouth or a combination of nose-mouth breathing that is most comfortable and effortless.

The foundation of qigong breathing is shun hu xi, "natural respiration." Shun actually means "free-flowing, going with nature's current." It is the opposite of swimming upstream. Natural breathing is also called abdominal or diaphragmatic respiration. On inhalation, the diaphragm muscle contracts and moves downward, pushing the abdomen out. This increases the volume of the lungs, creating a partial vacuum and sucking air in. During exhalation, the diaphragm relaxes upward, the abdomen releases inward, pushing air out. Thus, inhalation: abdomen expands; exhalation: abdomen contracts (figs. 4a-b). This is the most efficient and natural way to breathe. The dropping of the diaphragm opens the lower lobes of the lungs, where most of the oxygen exchange takes place. Contrary to a popular misconception, breathing abdominally creates more internal space, more room for the lungs to expand than expanding the chest. This also means that a greater volume of air will be

exchanged. The rising and falling of the abdomen also gently massages the internal organs.

By breathing abdominally, respiration can become slow and relaxed. The average adult resting respiratory rate is about 16 breaths per minute (bpm). Yet someone mentally and physically relaxed should breathe at about 5 breaths per minute! I am not suggesting that you should breathe this slowly if you are reading an exciting novel or cooling down after a workout.

The key to natural respiration is not forcing the breath. Natural breathing is the way children breathe. Watch an infant's abdomen as she inhales and exhales. The abdomen expands on inhalation, retracts on exhalation. The child has not learned the unique adult talent of interfering with nature! Rather than trying to control the breath, acknowledge nature's wisdom by allowing the breath to move of itself. No need to pull the breath in or push it out; just let it go. Trust nature to breathe you!

As you breathe abdominally, look for six qualities of the breath: Slow (Man), Long (Chang), Deep (Shen), Fine (Xi), Even (Jun), and Tranquil (Jing). Slow means a slow respiratory rate and an unhurried mood. Long means that the breath is a long, steady stream of air. It is not gasped or puffed or broken by excitement or anxiety. Deep refers to breath and qi sinking low in the body, filling the dan tian energy center. Fine means smooth and quiet, instead of coarse and loud. Even means a feeling of internal balance and equal ease of inhalation and exhalation. It also implies not favoring any particular part or side of the body. Right and left sides, front and back, are all capable of movement. Tranquil refers primarily to a mind focused on present experience, free of thoughts and worries. According to Hu Bing, chief physician of the Qigong Department, Beijing Academy of Chinese Medicine, "The efficacy of qigong is determined by one's depth of quietness (ru jing): the greater the tranquillity, the greater the benefits." This is an excellent principle to keep in mind throughout your qigong training. Notice also the four stages of the breath: a) inhalation, b) the turning of the breath between inhalation and exhalation, c) exhalation, and d) the natural pause that occurs during the second turning of the breath, between exhalation and the next inhalation. Do not try to prolong any of these stages; simply observe them. Can you let the breath fall easily, effortlessly out after inhalation, or do you have an unconscious tendency to push the breath out? After exhalation, are you anxious and untrusting of the body's ability to inhale automatically? Are you trying to control a process that is controlled gracefully and beautifully for you? Can you let inhalation occur when and as the body wishes, with no added effort to pull the breath back in?

Indian Yogis believe that the moments of the turning of the breath are times of deep inner stillness. By paying attention to these brief periods we can remember the time before we were born and have a foretaste of the experience after death. In religious literature, exhalation has often been compared to creation: God says, "Let there be light," and there is light. He/She uses voice, breath, and intent, exhaling the universe. Inhalation is compared to the dissolution of the universe, the withdrawal of creation back into the cosmic womb. Between inhalation (yin) and exhalation (yang), we are in a state of nondual awareness, more accepting of the unknown dimensions of the world and ourselves.

Thoracic respiration does not allow as much air into the lungs as abdominal breathing. To compensate, the respiratory rate must increase in order to maintain the same amount of air going into and out of the lungs each minute. The breath is rapid, shallow, and primarily in the chest: major characteristics of the hyperventilation syndrome. The breath may appear full and deep, because of the more noticeable and dramatic movement of the chest, but this is the opposite of what is happening.

Hyperventilation has a deleterious effect on blood chemistry. It causes the blood to lose carbon dioxide (CO₂) more rapidly. Because CO₂ is necessary for acid formation in the body, the loss of CO₂ means that the blood's acid-base (pH) balance shifts toward alkalinity (base). This shift decreases the ability of the blood's hemoglobin molecules to release oxygen. Normally, oxygen rides "piggyback" on the hemoglobin molecule, becoming oxyhemoglobin. During hyperventilation, the bond becomes too tight; the oxygen cannot let go. Thus even though oxygen is in the blood, less of it is delivered to the cells, which means less energy and an impaired ability to carry on ordinary metabolic processes.

The brain comprises only 2 percent of the body's weight yet consumes more than 20 percent of the body's available oxygen. According to Dr. Fried's *The Psychology and Physiology of Breathing*, "Rapid breathing [i.e., hyperventilation] reduces brain blood flow, while slow, deep breathing enhances it, other factors being equal." Some forms of migraine are caused by chronic constriction and dilation of the arteries feeding the brain. This can be precipitated by emotional stress, diet, and rapid breathing. A loss of oxygen supply to the brain cells can also cause anxiety, strokes, and increased frequency of epileptic attacks. Wilder Penfield, one of the world's leading neurosurgeons and experts on epilepsy, wrote, "The mechanism whereby hyperventilation elicits change in the EEG and seizures in epileptic patients is still unknown. It may act by causing a partial ischemia [reduced blood flow] due to cerebral vasoconstriction, and there may be some increase in excitability accompanying the lowered CO₂ concentration."

Although natural respiration is generally the safest and healthiest way to breathe, it is also helpful to occasionally practice "reversed breathing," ni hu xi, as a way to stimulate the qi and gain more control over the breathing muscles. Reversed breathing is not dangerous if practiced for brief periods of time. It is dangerous if it becomes your normal breathing method.

In reversed breathing, the abdomen contracts during inhalation. At the same time, the chest cavity expands slightly--the ribs opening, the sternum lifting. During exhalation, the abdomen is slightly distended, and the chest closes naturally. In both the inhalation and exhalation phases, the breath is deep, soft, and silent. The abdomen is moving, though opposite to the fashion of "natural respiration." In the practice of reversed breathing, the respiratory rate should be slow. This is in contrast to habitual reversed breathing, characterized by a quick breathing rate and symptomatic of tension and anxiety.

There are three methods of practicing reversed breathing. The first is to simply pay attention to the physical process, as described above. This is very strengthening for the diaphragm and abdominal muscles. The second is to note the vertical component of reversed breathing. While inhaling, qi and intent seems to shift to the chest, the middle dan tian. While exhaling, it seems to shift back to the lower abdomen. In this way two energy centers are stimulated, as well as the solar plexus (called the huang ting "yellow court" in Chinese). The third method is pay close attention to the horizontal component. In this technique, during inhalation, as the abdomen contracts, imagine the breath being drawn back, toward the sacrum. The qi adheres to the ming men "the gate of life" opposite the navel. During exhalation, as the abdomen protrudes, the qi is pushed toward the navel. It may be helpful to imagine a pearl in the abdomen that is pushed forward and backward with each breath. This is one of the most powerful ways of using the breath to, stimulate and strengthen the dan tian energy center, increasing the dan tian's ability to pump qi through the body. Dan Tian Breathing is an extremely beneficial variation of natural breathing. The dan tian is the energy center in the abdominal region, about three inches below the navel and midway into the center of the body. The precise location of the dan tian can vary slightly from individual to individual. Some students feel it behind the navel, others locate it closer to the pubic bone. Listen to how your body breathes. The dan tian will be the point or region from which the expansion of the abdomen seems to originate. When practicing dan tian breathing, both the lower abdomen and the lower back expand with inhalation, and both retract with exhalation. Most of the movement is still felt in the front of the body, but there is definitely a response in the back. If you were to hold your hands on the lower abdomen and lower back of a qigong master during inhalation, you would feel as if a small balloon were expanding in the abdomen and pushing both hands away from each other. The lower spine pushes lightly into your palm and the kidneys seem to expand with a gentle outward and lateral movement. During exhalation, air is let out of the balloon and the hands sink toward each other. Dan Tian Breathing includes all of the benefits of natural respiration. It makes the mind and body relaxed, decreases unhealthy reactions to stress,

lessens anxiety, allows more efficient gaseous exchange, and massages internal organs. Additionally, Dan Tian Breathing stimulates the kidneys, the lower spine, and the important acupuncture point, ming men "the gate of life." Ming men controls the proper functioning of the kidneys and, when stimulated, increases the body's overall vitality and energy level. Dan Tian Breathing primes the body's major energetic pump so that qi can spread more efficiently throughout the body. Embryonic respiration refers to the time when the embryo (or fetus) is in the womb. Breathing is an internal process, air and nutrients being exchanged through the umbilical cord. In Daoism, the Dao ("Way of Nature and Spirit of the Cosmos") is considered the Great Mother. When an adult practices embryonic respiration, he/she feels a return to the womb of the universe, nurtured by the primordial qi. Echoing the teachings of the great Christian mystic Meister Eckhart, the child ("Christ") is born within when one becomes "poor in spirit," free of greed, egotism, and the tyranny of intellect. What is the actual practice of embryonic respiration? Embryonic respiration is sometimes called "stopping the breath." The breath is so slow, easy, and slight that it seems to have stopped. We read in various qigong texts, "Hold the breath for twenty minutes.... Hold the breath for two hours, from 11 P.M. to 1 A.M." Obviously, no one is expected to hold the breath for unnatural or dangerous periods of time! Hold the breath (bi qi) means the breath feels as though it is held within; it has become an internal, effortless movement. For this reason embryonic respiration is often called internal breathing (nei hu xi). The abdomen rises and falls. Air enters and leaves effortlessly, spontaneously, the way an infant breathes. The mind is free of thoughts and images. It too has "stopped. That is, subject and object seem to disappear in the experience. I am not breathing. There is only the breath. He calls this "a state of non-respiration in which there is neither inhalation nor exhalation . . . the breath seems to enter and leave through the whole body." Some authors describe this experience as "the whole body becomes entirely qi." The continuous influx of universal qi helps to create a new self, a seed or embryo of wisdom, and long life. "When embryonic respiration is restored, it neither gathers nor scatters, is without self or other [duality] . . . it unites the yin and the yang." Embryonic respiration, Zhao continues, is really not a matter of how one uses the nose, mouth, or dan tian. Rather, it is a state of being, a condition of utmost serenity. According to Charles Luk's translation, "When the breath remains (nearly) stationary, the (immortal) fetus will be as secure as a mountain and by continuing his practice . . . all phenomena will be absorbed into nothingness and with spirit frozen in this state by day and night, the bright pearl will form in this unperturbed nothingness." He likens this process to death and resurrection, again a reference to the birth of a new self. To put this in simple terms, embryonic respiration means to allow breath to become completely effortless, so that it leads you into a state of blissful stillness and serenity. In this state, you are likely to feel as if you ate unified with the cosmos, at one with all of life. You will feel spacious ("noth-ingness"), free of any constraints, as though you have become the breath. At the same time, there is a feeling of clarity and luminosity ("the bright pearl"). When the meditation is over, your mind and body will feel refreshed, as though you have recaptured some of the vitality of childhood.

Qigong Breathing Methods

Method	Inhalation	Exhalation	Purpose
Natural	Abdomen expands	Abdomen	Establish good contracts
Differentiated	All possibilities	All possibilities	Control of breath, release inhibitions
Reversed	Abdomen	Abdomen expands	Energize,
Contracts	strengthen	diaphragm	Dan Tian
Abdomen and	Abdomen and	Strengthen and	Lower Back Expand
Embryonic	See above, minimal	See above, minimal	Spiritual bliss,
	Movement,	Movement,	Expanded
	Effortless	Effortless	Awareness

The Chinese term for Standing Meditation is Zhan Zhuang, "Standing Post." One learns to stand as still and stable as a wooden post in the ground. Standing has several advantages over seated or supine meditation. The mind is more likely to remain alert, as any lapse in awareness might cause one to lose balance. In Standing Meditation, the legs and feet are naturally extended, uncrossed; thus blood circulation is not impeded and may actually improve. "In movement, be like the dragon and tiger. In stillness, have the mind of the Buddha." He emphasized that the secret of Standing is "emptiness" (kong). An empty mind can sense internal blockages to the flow of qi (qigong healing), can meet the opponent creatively without a preconceived strategy (qigong martial arts), and can realize the nature of the cosmos (spiritual qigong). It is obvious that for Wang Xiang-zhai, Standing was a method of both physical and spiritual cultivation. "After forty years of experience, I have learned that all true strength arises from a primordial, selfless void, and that this void can be gradually comprehended by paying attention to the small, subtle movements of the body." The most important points to remember are: The body is relaxed, yet extended and open. Use minimum effort. Stand with the feet parallel and shoulder-width apart, the toes pointing straight ahead, the knees slightly bent, the back straight but not stiff, the abdomen relaxed. The head is held as though suspended from above. Unify the internal energy by imagining that the breath is able to flow everywhere in the body. The weight is evenly distributed on the feet. Make sure you are standing plumb erect, not leaning to the front, back, right, or left. This will allow the body's weight to spread through the feet into the ground, favoring neither toe, heel, inside of the foot, nor outside of the foot. Maximizing contact with the ground creates a feeling of deep roots, easy balance, and abundant internal energy, qi. One feels like a tree, drawing nutrients from the soil. The posture should feel relaxed, harmonious, and natural.

The arms are in a rounded position, at the height of either the abdomen (fig. 5), chest (fig. 6), or face (fig. 7), as though lightly embracing a giant beach ball. The palms can be facing either away from or toward the body. Wang advised, "Don't raise the arms higher than the eyebrows or drop them lower than the navel. Don't cross the right arm over to the left side or the left arm over to the right." Generally, during the practice of Standing, one either holds one position for a long period of time or spends a lesser period holding several positions in succession. For instance, the hands might be held at chest height for twenty minutes. Or the hands can be rounded at the level of the abdomen for five minutes, chest level for five minutes, face level for five minutes, then back to chest, five minutes, and abdomen, five minutes. This gives a total workout of twenty-five minutes. Keep the shoulders and elbows relaxed. The fingers are gently spread; the palms feel hollow and receptive. Try to keep the forearm, wrist, and back of the hand in an almost straight line or curving gently. Avoid letting the hands droop down toward the wrists or flex back stiffly toward the forearm. An excessively open or closed wrist joint interferes with the flow of qi and blood to the fingertips. The eyes should be open and relaxed, looking with a soft focus, straight ahead into the distance. Standing Meditation is best practiced outdoors or near a window with an unobstructed view. Wang advised, "One's inner thoughts do not wander to the outside. Outside events do not encroach on the inside." Another way of putting this is that the eyes are open but not focusing on or grasping at external objects. They see in a dis-attached way, not distracting one from inner awareness. One is gazing inside and outside, allowing the two realms to merge into one seamless experience. Begin training about five minutes a day. If you are practicing with the arms at the height of the abdomen, chest, and face, divide the time evenly among the postures. During your second week of training, practice for ten minutes a day, fifteen minutes per day during the third week, and so on. Build gradually to a minimum of twenty minutes daily Standing, and a maximum of forty minutes. This is a small investment of time considering that you will probably have more energy during the day and need less

sleep at night. It is possible to judge the length of Standing without looking at the clock. Simply count your exhalations. If you count sixty breaths in a single posture (or twenty breaths for each of three postures), this will probably take four or five minutes, at the normal respiratory rate of approximately 15 bpm (breaths per minute). As time passes and your qigong improves, the breath will slow down, approaching the rate indicative of deep rest, 3-5 bpm. Now you will be standing for close to twenty minutes. You can vary the breath count according to your abilities and needs, increasing the count if you need to stand longer, decreasing the count if you need to stand for a shorter period. Proceed slowly and systematically. After three to four months of regular training, you will be able to sense the most beneficial length of practice. In qigong, "beneficial" does not necessarily mean comfortable or easy. It does mean a length of practice sufficient to deepen self-understanding and to improve health and vitality. The period can vary a great deal from person to person. As Wang Xiang-zhai's student, Tang Rukun, explained to me, "I know some old-timers who stand for thirty minutes, others who stand for hours. Standing is like eating. Some people need a lot, some a little to satisfy them." Wang Xiang-zhai compared Standing to a furnace, refining and tempering the students' minds and bodies. The length of "firing" depends on the material. When you find an area of discomfort, apply any of the following strategies: 1. Do nothing--simply being aware of tension may change it. 2. Inhale into the area, exhale stagnation and diseased qi. 3. Think of the tension or discomfort dropping down, through the feet and into the ground. It is also helpful to practice Standing after you are deeply relaxed, for instance following a massage or a hot bath. This allows you to more accurately sense how tension returns, how it is programmed back into the body-mind system. If Standing becomes painful rather than uncomfortable, then do not continue. Pain is a danger signal and should not be ignored. If the pain is a result of poor postural habits, it may have a simple solution, such as checking if the back is straight, the chest relaxed.

Stages of Standing

Most students pass through three tests in Standing Meditation. First, there is the "test of discomfort," where every joint and muscle seems to be out of place or doing something wrong. Trembling or shaking in the joints, most frequently in the ankles, knees, or wrists often accompanies this. Trembling results from weakness in the muscles or tendons; perhaps muscles have weakened or atrophied because of lack of use.

Test number two is called "the test of fire." Finally, after months of practice, one has learned how to release energetic knots and tensions. The basic body mechanics-how to stand and breathe-are automatic. The places that were formerly depleted are now filled with qi. The hands and feet may feel uncomfortably warm. The forehead is beaded with sweat. The abdomen feels hot. Again, this is a transitory test that may last anywhere from a few days to a few months. The most difficult test, number three, is called "the test of patient growth." I once asked Master B. P. Chan if the ancient qigong and martial arts masters had superior abilities to those of the present. He said, "In general, yes. But only because they were more patient." It is at this point in one's training, when Standing feels ordinary, comfortable, and nothing special, that most students abandon the practice and look for a new form of "entertainment." But it is precisely at this stage that the most lasting benefits of Standing are cultivated. As Wang often admonished his students, "The ordinary is the extraordinary." One can now focus not on unusual sensations, symptoms of imbalance, but rather on the positive, on the miracle of breathing, feeling, and awareness. With each step of Walking Meditation, you are practicing Standing Meditation. Stillness and motion are harmonized; the mind and body become tranquil and balanced. Walking Meditation also stimulates the qi gathered during Standing to flow more strongly through the body. The current of qi increases, becoming like a mighty river that can sweep away debris and open clogged passages.

Step out slowly with your left leg, letting the heel touch first, and then the rest of the foot. Transfer the weight from the rear (right) to the front (left), feeling the way the rear leg becomes "empty" as the front leg becomes "full." The weight passes through the foot into the ground. Now take the rear foot and "post" it, bringing it up to the front foot and just touching it momentarily with the toe on the ground. The weight is still on your left.

Now the posted right foot steps out, again reaching with the heel. Once more the foot comes flat, molding to the ground, and the weight transfers from rear (left) to front (right). Once the weight has completely emptied from the left leg, the foot can post, touching on the toe, near the right. The process is repeated, step after step, for any length of time. Step, shift, post, step, shift, post. After a while, you can practice the "retreating step." The method is basically the same as forward stepping, except that as you reach back, let the ball of the foot touch first. The weight transfers, this time from front to back. The front foot "empties" and steps lightly on the toe, close to the foot that has the weight. The posted foot reaches back on the ball and sinks flat into the ground. The weight transfers, shifting back, and again the front foot posts. Step, shift, post, step, shift, post. You can practice the Walking Meditation, advancing and retreating, as long as feels comfortable.

You will discover that the feet are actually moving in a crescent pattern, causing the body to zigzag slightly with each step. When Chinese artists make ink, they grind the solid ink stick into a dish of water with the same semicircular motions. For this reason Wang called this exercise Mo Ca Bu "the Grinding Step." It takes about ten minutes to make a good supply of ink; it takes an equivalent period to accumulate qi during Walking Meditation. The trick is to move your "ink sticks" (the feet) smoothly. When the feet touch the ground after posting, there is no sound, no "clunk." The movement is delicately balanced. It may help to imagine that the hands are truly resting on a lake's surface. They slide along the surface, neither pressing into nor lifting from the water. The body moves on a plane, without making waves. Or you can imagine that the feet are stepping with such fine control that they would not crack dry brush or startle a deer!

Another challenge: Can you relax each leg as the weight leaves it, as it posts and steps? Obviously, a greater amount of tension is required when the leg is "full" and weighted. But when it is empty, can the muscles empty? Can the thigh and calf relax? Or do you hold on to an attitude of working, making an effort even when none is needed? The ancient qigong masters said that a key to developing more qi is "clearly differentiating yin and yang." It is as if by establishing the positive (yang, full, with weight) and negative (yin, empty, without weight) poles, more electricity (qi) can flow. While you are advancing, imagine that there are ropes attached to your legs, waist, and arms, pulling you back. When you retreat, the ropes are pulling you forward. Or imagine that your entire body is immersed in water or that the air is thick and viscous. It is important that the student imagine resistance but not use increased strength. Imagined resistance helps each part of the body find the path of least resistance and least effort. Wang wrote that by imagining counterforce the student recognizes a new, deeper source of coordination and power. Other experiments can include slowly expanding and contracting the arms while Standing. The arms open and close like a balloon filling and releasing air or as though playing an accordion. This can also be done during Walking Meditation. For example, while advancing with the arms rounded, chest-high, increase the diameter of the circle as you step and shift to the front (fig. 16), and decrease the diameter as you post the rear leg (fig. 17). You can also experiment with various positions of the arms or different ways of coordinating the breath with walking. Qigong Meditation includes two types of practices. The first and most important is called ru jing ("entering tranquility"). Entering tranquility means training the mind to be silently aware without any particular point of focus. It is nothingness. The mind is not thinking about but rather experiencing directly, immediately, without the mediation of thoughts and concepts. Ancient Taoist classics called this "the fasting of the mind." To fast from food is relatively easy. But to fast from words requires perseverance and practice. A Taoist asked his teacher how to understand reality. The master said, "Listen to the stream." It is not easy to just sit and listen, without letting the

mind wander about or dance from thought to thought. Yet such listening is extremely satisfying and comforting. It is like tasting the food rather than reading the menu. "Thought is born of failure," said biologist Lancelot Law Whyte. "Only when the human organism fails to achieve an adequate response to its situation is there material for the processes of thought, and the greater the failure the more searching they become." A powerful critique of our intellect-obsessed civilization. The information explosion may be a sign not of progress, but of maladaptation!

In Daoism *qi* may be visualized as energy, breath, or luminous spirits. By practicing *qigong*, the spirits are well-nourished and happy and help to maintain the health of the body. The Chart of Inner Luminosity* is a symbolic representation of the human body and the spiritual forces that dwell within it. The bottom of the chart is the tailbone, the top, the crown. The Chart was carved in stone at the White Cloud Temple of Beijing (seat of the Quan Zhen Sect of Daoism) in 1886 by a Daoist priest named Liu Cheng-yin.

Reading the chart from bottom to top, *qigong* philosophy interprets it as follows:

- The boy and girl working the water treadmill represent the need to balance *yin* (feminine) and *yang* (masculine) energy. They also represent the right and left kidneys, which in Chinese medicine are considered reservoirs of sexual potency. The accompanying inscription says, "Kidney water reverses its course." This means that by practicing meditation, the waterlike sexual energy is conserved and made to flow upward, repairing the spine and brain and recharging the body with vitality.
- Next we see a man plowing with an ox. The inscription says, "The iron bull tills the earth and sows the gold coin." This means that *qigong* requires the perseverance of a farmer and the stamina of a bull. Regular practice enables one to plant the seed of long life and wisdom ("the gold coin"). The earth element, related to the spleen, is also a symbol of *qi* acquired through a balanced diet and harmonious lifestyle.
- The four circular *yin-yang* symbols suspended above a flaming cauldron represent the lower *dan tian*, the "field of the elixir," below the navel. The *dan tian* is like an alchemical vessel. By practicing abdominal respiration, the internal energy begins to cook. Eventually it "steams," healing, repairing, and energizing the body. The four *yin-yang* symbols are radiating energy in all directions.
- The weaving maid and the boy standing above her symbolize the unity of *yin* and *yang*. The weaving maid is *yin*, the ability to store energy, to go inward, to maintain tranquility. Inner quiet is a prerequisite for energy cultivation. According to Chinese legend, the weaving maid spins a silken garment out of moonlight, which we see as the Milky Way. Here, the silken garment is the internal energy rising up the spine.
- The boy represents *yang*, the active and outgoing. He stands in a ring of blood; he is the spirit of the heart and the middle *dan tian*. According to a Chinese legend, the boy, usually called "the cowherd boy," and the weaving maid were once lovers, but because they neglected their duties, the ruler of the heavens, the Jade Emperor, changed them into stars at opposite ends of the sky. One night a year, the seventh day of the seventh month, celebrated as Lover's Day in China, the lovers cross the heavens and meet. In the Chart of Inner Luminosity, a bridge of *qi* joins the distant lovers. Thus *qigong* is the means to unify internal energy. The boy also represents spiritual wisdom, innocence, simplicity, and youthful vitality regained through *qigong* practice.

* The name of this chart, *Nei Jing Tu*, is usually translated "The Chart of the Inner Texture of Meditation." *Jing* (not to be confused with the homonym *jing*, meaning sexual energy) commonly refers to the warp and woof of a fabric. However, I believe that the author is making a deliberate pun on another word with a similar pronunciation that refers to the brilliant spirits (*jing*) sensed in meditation.

- We see the stars of the Big Dipper constellation protruding from the cowherd's crown. This means that a *qigong* student should absorb *qi* from the stars and seek harmony with the cosmos. Taoists believe that the Dipper handle is like a lightning rod, drawing *qi* from the stars into the Dipper bowl. During the course of the year, the handle of the Dipper makes a 360-degree rotation. Since it thus points to all of the stars, it is a reservoir of astral power.
- The forest is the wood element and the liver. It represents the largest organ in the body and thus has a prominent place in the Chart. The liver, according to Chinese medicine, controls the even flow of *qi*. A healthy "forest" is extremely important for success in *qigong*. However, we cannot improve our health by focusing on only one organ exclusively. Kidney-water helps the liver-wood to grow. Wood provides fuel for heart-fire. Heart-fire creates ashes and nutrients that are necessary for the farmer to reap a good harvest from the earth (spleen). The earth produces gold and metal, the element and energy of the lungs. Metal becomes a molten liquid, feeding the kidneys. The organs thus form a circle of mutual interdependence.
- The twelve-tiered pagoda represents the throat and the back of the neck. During meditation, *qi* is pumped from the sexual center, up the spine, passing the middle *dan tian* and internal organs, to the throat, continuing over the crown and then down the front of the body. The throat is an area where the *qi* is easily stuck, a result of poor posture, tension in the neck, or the concentration required to keep *qi* flowing upstream. From a Western psychological perspective, *qi* may be impeded at the "pagoda" because of difficulties in self-expression and communication. The pagoda may also symbolize the importance of having a high vantage point, of not getting bogged down by details.
- To the left of the pagoda we see a rectangular pool of water with the word "drawbridge" written next to it. The pool is the mouth and saliva. The bridge is the tongue. The pool provides water that prevents the mouth from drying out during breathing exercises. Saliva also absorbs *qi* during meditation; the meditator swallows saliva periodically and imagines it dropping into the lower *dan tian*, replenishing it. The tongue forms a bridge between two major meridians, the Governing Channel that follows the spine and extends over the crown, ending at the upper palate, and the Conception Channel that begins at the tip of the tongue and descends to the perineum. Touching the tip of the tongue to the upper palate closes the circuit so *qi* can circulate and flow without leaking.
- Above the pond are two circles, representing the two eyes and the sun and moon. The *qigong* student closes his eyes and turns their light inward, illuminating the inner world. By practicing self-awareness he becomes a sage such as Lao Zi, the meditating figure above the right eye, or Bodhidharma, the founder of Zen Buddhism, the figure standing under Lao Zi with upstretched arms. The presence of Lao Zi and Bodhidharma, esteemed founders of Daoism and Zen, signify the importance of meditation as the means to awaken intuition and wisdom. They also represent the fundamental unity of different spiritual paths, all leading to the same goal.
- Continuing up the spine, we see the head as a series of sacred peaks. Mountains are funnels that draw down stellar and heavenly energy; this energy is concentrated in caves. Taoists go to mountain caves to meditate and commune with heavenly power. The human body is a microcosm of the universe, a "small heaven and earth." In the *Nei Jing Tu*, the meditation caves are within the meditator's own head.
- At the top of the head are phrases that read, "Nirvana [Enlightenment]," "Realm of the Sages," and "Longevity." These are the goals of *qigong* meditation.

Also known as the "Six Word Secret" (*liu zi jue*), this is a classical system attributed to a Buddhist hermit of the sixth century, in which breath and sound purge the major internal organs of noxious and stagnant *qi*. The method has become very

popular in modern China, thanks to the dedicated teaching of the late, renowned qigong master, Dr. Ma Li-tang. Dr. Ma had excellent results teaching his qigong to students and hospital patients. You can practice from either a seated or supine posture. Meditate for a few minutes, observing how you breathe, the quality of the breath, and your general sense of bodily ease or discomfort. In each of the exercises below, fresh qi is inhaled through the nose, old qi is exhaled through the mouth while quietly chanting a sound.

1. Lungs: Focus the mind on the lungs. Locate the lungs with your mind. Inhale, imagine healing qi filling the lungs, reaching all of the air sacs, all of the tissues and lobes of the lungs. As you exhale through the mouth, make a barely audible prolonged chant, See-ahh. Repeat two more times.

2. Kidneys: Become aware of the kidneys. Feel them with your mind. Inhale fresh qi into the kidneys; exhale unneeded qi with the low chant, Chrrrooooo. Repeat two more times.

3. Liver: Locate your liver internally. Feel it, be aware of it. Inhale healing qi into the liver. Exhale toxins with the chant, Shuuu. Repeat two more times. This sound should be like a "Sh" as though saying, "Hushhh, be quiet." At the end of the sh, form your mouth into the U shape.

4. Heart: Be aware of the heart. Inhale fresh qi into the heart, letting the qi permeate all of the tissues, muscles, chambers, and valves of the heart. Exhale with the sound Ho. The sound is identical to hoo in the word "hook". Repeat twice more.

5. Spleen: Locate the spleen with your mind. Feel it, a spongy organ just behind the stomach. Inhale healing qi. Exhale toxins with the sound Hooo, just like the word "who." Repeat for a total of three times.

6. Triple Burner: The triple burner refers to a bodily function rather than a specific substance or organ. It is the aspect of qi that helps to control the balance of heat and moisture in three regions of the body: the head and chest, including heart and lungs (upper burner), the solar plexus, including the spleen and stomach (middle burner), and the lower abdomen, including the liver and kidneys (lower burner). Inhale pure qi into the entire torso. Exhale with the sound Seeeee. While making the sound, form the mouth into a smiling shape and imagine a happy feeling pervading the body, as though your body is smiling. Repeat two more times.

The Taoist sage Lao Zi said, "Use light to develop insight." Color and light are the most common elements in healing visualizations among all ancient cultures. In indigenous Hawaiian counseling, sessions often begin by imagining the body suffused by blue, green, purple, and white light, to bring peace and healing power to the body, mind, and spirit. Native Americans will sometimes imagine specific colors of light carrying their prayers to the patient. In China, the therapeutic use of color is systematized according to the theory of correspondence. Just as internal organs are related to various sounds, so they also correspond to particular healing colors. An individual can learn to see these colors internally, as though radiating from the respective organs. If the organs are diseased, they will generally appear a sickly black or gray. The patient trains to project the proper healing color, thus returning the organ's qi to balance and harmony.

Bring your mind to the lungs. As you inhale, draw a beautiful white light into the lungs. When you exhale, dark light leaves, but the beautiful white color remains in the lungs. Again, inhale into the lungs. White light suffuses the lungs, exhale dark light. As you look within, the lungs have retained even more of the white color. They are beginning to glow on the inside, like luminous pearls. A third time, inhale white light into the lungs, exhale the poisons. The healing white light remains within. You can repeat two more times, for a total of five.

Now focus on the kidneys. Inhale deep, ocean blue light into the kidneys. (In some texts, black is recommended. If you prefer black, imagine a healing gemstone color, like black jade or obsidian.) Exhale the toxins. With each cycle of the breath, the kidneys glow more brightly inside, like blue sapphires. Repeat a total of five times. Your awareness rests on the liver. Inhale forest green light into the liver, like the green of spring leaves. Exhale the unneeded qi. Five repetitions. As above, with each cycle, the liver retains more of the green light. It glows like an emerald. Bring your attention to the heart. Breathe healing red light into the heart. Exhale diseased qi. Five times. The heart is beginning to glow with a beautiful rubylike color. The mind goes to the spleen. Inhale healing yellow light into the spleen, filling it. Exhale the poisons. As you continue, the yellow color becomes clearer and clearer, the spleen appears like a brilliant topaz. Five repetitions. Now, while breathing in a relaxed, natural fashion, do a quick review of the internal organs, seeing them glowing internally, like five precious gems. With practice, you can hold all of the images in your mind simultaneously. The lungs white pearl, the kidneys blue sapphire, the liver green emerald, the heart red ruby, and the spleen yellow topaz. Enjoy this image as long as you wish, then let them dissolve and disappear in simple awareness of the body. Notice if your internal organs feel different. How alive are you now, compared to the beginning of the meditation?

Resistance to disease is lowered during times of transition, whether this be a positive or negative emotional change, a change of employment or environment or the change of seasons. An important benefit of qigong is an improved ability to flow with changing situations.

A classic meditation for attuning to the seasonal changes appears in the Daoist classic *Bao Pu Zi* (The Master Who Embraces Simplicity), by the fourth-century alchemist Ge Hong. Based on years of personal experience with this technique, I have adapted and expanded the meditation below. The meditation adds another element to the system of correspondences: the connection between color, direction, and season. Each of the five sections of the meditation is practiced on or shortly after the beginning of the season. Spring equinox: Stand outdoors facing east. Imagine clouds of healing green qi flowing from the east and entering the body. You can inhale the qi, or imagine it entering through either the crown of the head or the pores of the skin. As green qi fills the body, the body is visualized as beautiful green jade.

Summer solstice: Stand outdoors facing south. See red qi swirling toward your body. Absorb it, as above, visualizing the body becoming red jade. On a sunny day in late summer (so-called Indian Summer, considered a separate season in ancient China), face any direction you wish. Imagine yellow, earthy qi rising directly from the ground, up into your body. Your body becomes yellow jade. Autumn equinox: Stand facing west. See clouds of white qi blowing toward you. You absorb it and become beautiful white jade. Winter solstice: Dress appropriately and stand outdoors, facing north. Imagine healing black qi-clouds approaching you. The black qi fills your body, turning it into radiant black jade.

Stand outdoors on a warm, sunny morning. Your arms are resting at your sides, with the palms open and pointing forward. Face the sun, with the eyes shut. Feel the warmth and light on your face, body, and palms. Open your mouth and inhale the sun's light. Exhale through the nose. Imagine your whole body filling with sunlight. Repeat three times.

Variation A: Stand facing the sun, as above. Inhale sunlight through the mouth, imagining that the sun's healing light is mixing with the saliva. Then close the mouth, and as you exhale through the nose, swallow saliva, imagining it dropping into the lower abdomen, like a golden pearl sinking into the sea. After repeating for a total of three times, rest the palms gently over the lower abdomen and concentrate on deep, quiet breathing. The abdomen should feel pleasantly warm and full of healing energy.

Variation B: Sit on a chair, preferably outdoors on a pleasantly warm day, although the technique can also be practiced indoors. Breathe softly through the nose. Imagine the sun directly overhead. The golden light of the sun pours into the body through the crown of the head. The body is a hollow vessel, filling slowly with the light, from the feet all the way to the crown.

As the light reaches the crown, it cascades down over the outside, flowing over the skin until it again reaches the feet. Another method would be to imagine the golden light pouring only over the outside of the body, as though taking a solar shower. Either technique is practiced only one time in any session, and not more than once a day. The length of the meditation can vary quite a bit, some students spending three to five minutes filling the body with sunlight, others requiring ten minutes or slightly more.

Variation C: While seated either outdoors on a warm day or indoors facing a window, imagine that your body is made of transparent crystal. Pleasantly warm sunlight moves easily through it.

All of these sun meditations add yang qi to the body and are excellent ways to improve vitality and create more "sunny" disposition. These meditations are similar to the sun meditations. Stand outdoors on a moonlit evening, ideally under the full moon. If the weather is uncomfortable, then stand indoors, facing a window. As above, the palms face forward and you sense the light and cool energy of the moon. Inhale silver moonlight through the mouth, visualizing the light filling the body. Exhale through the nose. Repeat for a total of three times.

Variation: In the evening, during any phase of the moon, sit on a chair either outdoors or indoors. Imagine the full moon overhead, shining down on your body. As you breathe naturally, inhaling and exhaling through the nose, silver moonlight enters the crown and slowly fills the body, from the bottom to the top, like filling a cup. Silver light continues to pour in. As it reaches the crown, the overflow pours over the surface of the body until it arrives at the feet. Then let the image go and just experience your body, now fully energized with the feminine, yin power of the moon. The moon meditations energize the body with yin qi and are especially invigorating to the nervous system and the brain. They also improve intuition and expand awareness. Whereas the sun meditations create a sunny disposition, have no fear-the moon meditations will not turn you into a "lunatic." To the contrary, they engender feelings of peace and inner quiet.

The stars of the Big Dipper Constellation (Ursa Major) have special significance in Chinese culture. In ancient China, each of the stars in this constellation was related to one of China's provinces. If a court astrologer saw a shooting star moving eastward toward a particular dipper star, he might divine that the province of Chu was about to be attacked from the east. The dipper is also a cosmic timepiece; the handle of the dipper makes a complete 360-degree circuit during the course of a year. In the spring, the handle points east, in the summer south, in the fall west, and in the winter, north, thus exactly corresponding to the season-direction correspondence in Chinese Five Element Theory. In qigong theory, the dipper is a reservoir of cosmic qi, collecting qi from all of the other constellations and stars as it makes its yearly course.

This meditation can be practiced indoors, but it has more powerful effects if practiced outside under a clear, starry sky. First look at the actual constellation in the sky. Then sit down and close your eyes. Imagine the dipper overhead, the bowl of the dipper filled with zi qi, purple qi or amethyst-colored light. The dipper overturns, purple light pouring down. As it reaches your body, it flows over the crown, over the face, down over the shoulders, chest, and back, continuing until the whole body has been bathed in purple light.

The qi of trees is very compatible with that of human beings. Trees stand upright as we do. They drink water and require air and sunlight. They bloom in summer and retreat to quietness in winter. From the most ancient times trees have been symbols of spiritual growth. Their deep roots and high branches suggest an ability to connect earth and sky, the physical and the spiritual.

In a forest or park find a healthy-looking tree. It can be any type of tree, though the Chinese prefer mountain evergreens, such as the pine. Approach the tree respectfully, as though visiting a wise teacher. Make a mental request or prayer, asking the tree for permission to connect with some of its healing power. Stand several feet in front of the tree and close your eyes. Feel the presence of the tree. Inhale through the nose, intending that healing qi enter your body. Exhale through the mouth, releasing stagnation and disease. Do not send this disease back toward the tree. Rather release it as light or into the ground, as though you are turning your unneeded qi into compost. Practice as long as feels comfortable. Mentally thank the tree again before you leave. An alternate method is to stand facing the tree, breathing slowly and deeply, in and out through the nose. Again sense the presence of the tree. Imagine that you are able to circulate qi between your own body and the tree. Inhale, drawing the tree-qi up your feet, through the body, following no particular pathway; wherever you experience it moving is correct. As the qi exits the crown, imagine it going to the tree, being absorbed by its branches and moving down through the trunk. As you see it exiting the roots and moving toward your feet again inhale, absorbing it into your feet and inhaling it once again up your body to the crown. Again, exhale as the qi is released from your crown and moves down through the tree. Repeat several times.

Then reverse the circuit. As you inhale, absorb the tree-qi through your crown, moving it down your body toward the feet. As it exits your feet, exhale and imagine the qi being absorbed by the roots of the tree and rising up, like sap, through its trunk. Then inhale again as the qi leaves the tips of the tree branches and moves toward your crown. Continue inhaling as the qi enters your crown and moves down toward your feet. Exhale as you send qi into the tree roots and up through the tree. Repeat several times.

After practicing the tree meditation several times, you may find that you can circulate the qi in this manner without coordinating the breath. Keep the breath moving at its own pace, while imagining a constant stream of energy moving from the tree up your body and back down through the tree. Then reverse direction. The energy can move as slowly or quickly as it needs to. After the tree meditation, stand for a few moments in silence. Perhaps you will feel as though you are more like a tree now, deeply rooted, yet standing tall with dignity and beauty. The meditation has three stages, known as Crane, Turtle, and Deer, to cultivate qi, shen, and jing respectively. The same posture is used throughout. Assume the Standing Meditation stance, following all of the guidelines for qigong posture: feet shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent, back straight and long, abdominal breathing. Whole body relaxed into the ground. Place your palms on the lower abdomen, with the thumbs on either side of the navel, the index fingers lightly touching, just a few inches above the pubic bone. The eyes are closed; open them only if balance is difficult. First get a sense of how you are breathing and how the breath feels under your palms. Let your palms tell you something about the quality of the breath. Allow the breath to become slow and deep. After a few minutes of self-observation, proceed to Crane Breathing.

Crane: As you inhale, feel the hands filling with the abdominal breath. At the same time, the upper body rocks back ever so slightly. The hips are pushing toward the front and the weight shifts a bit toward the toes. The back sways, like a willow in a breeze. There should be no strain in the lower back. The movement is very slow, and small. As you slowly exhale, press gently in with the palms, as though you are helping the breath out. At the same time, the upper body rocks and bends a little bit toward the ground. The hips are moving back; the weight is shifting toward the heels. Again the movement is very small, slow, and fluid. Continue, coordinating the swaying of the torso with the breaths. Inhale; the abdomen fills the hands, upper body rocks back. Exhale, press the palms in gently, upper body rocks to the front (figs. 18, 19). The upper body is moving as one unit. Be careful that the head stays in line with the spine. As you sway and shift with the breath, the neck does not bend. Practice the exercise for three to five minutes. The Crane is ultra-relaxed, quiet, and contemplative. The Crane is a Chinese symbol of awareness and balance. She stands at the edge of a lake, perfectly balanced on one toothpick leg for an hour or more. You might assume that she is asleep, until a fish swims by. The Crane is relaxed, yet alert and full of qi.

Turtle: Continue the basic rocking movement of the Crane. This time, as you inhale, rocking back, contract very slightly the muscles at the back of your neck, as though you are a turtle pulling your head into your shell. Imagine the movement, don't use force! The chin does not physically move toward or away from the breastbone. The feeling is that as the breath expands into your palms, the head is being drawn down. Now, as you exhale, rocking toward the front and pressing with the palms, the muscles at the back of your neck release, like a turtle extending its neck. Continue. Inhale, rock back, hands fill, neck contracts down. Exhale, rock forward, hands press, neck releases. If you cannot physically contract or isolate the neck muscles, then just imagine the movement. Practice for three to five minutes. The turtle lives long because he moves slowly and conserves shen during sleep by keeping his head in the shell. He is also constantly exercising his neck and spine.

Deer: We are still practicing the basic Crane movement. Now inhale, rock back, and contract the muscles around the tailbone upward, like a deer lifting her tail. If you cannot isolate these muscles, imagine the movement. Exhale, rock to the front, press with the palms and release, relax down the tailbone, inhale, and lift the tail. Exhale, release. Coordinate with slow breathing and continue for three to five minutes. The deer is a universal symbol of sexual vitality. Musk oil and musk incense, among the world's oldest aphrodisiacs, are taken from the musk glands of the deer. The deer sleeps with one heel pressed into the perineum, thus stimulating the sexual glands. To close the exercise, return to basic Crane Breathing. Inhale, the abdomen fills, body rocks back. Exhale, the palms press, body rocks forward. No contractions anywhere. Gradually let the movement become slower and smaller, until you rest in stillness. Keep the palms on the abdomen, feeling the movement of the breath. Very slowly and gently release the pressure of the palms on your body and allow the hands to float to the sides. Notice the feeling that remains in the abdomen. Do you still doubt that the dan tian exists? When you are ready, open the eyes and return to this alternate reality.

Western improvisational dance is expressive of ideas, aesthetics, dance motifs. Spontaneous Qigong is completely effortless. The inner movement of qi is allowed to become external movement. Spontaneous Qigong flows from the inside to the outside. Qi pushes the body into completely unique shapes and movements, opening blockages and tensions and creating a relaxed and alert state of body and mind. Here's how it works:

Begin by standing in the qigong posture, relaxed and sunk, knees slightly bent, back straight, breathing with the abdomen. Practice with the arms at the sides or with the arms at the height of the forehead, chest, or abdomen, whichever position is most comfortable. The elbows should be bent so that the arms have a rounded shape, palms facing each other. The eyes are closed, though they can open slightly if necessary to maintain balance. The posture should feel light and flexible. The position of the arms, feet, or torso may change during practice to accommodate the movement of qi. For instance, the hands might begin at the height of the forehead, then move to the abdomen, the sides, or behind the body. Or you may need to place one foot in front of the other to allow natural shifting and swaying motions. There is no fixed rule. In Spontaneous Qigong, you are not moving the qi, the qi is moving you.

In this qigong, you are becoming sensitive to the inner movement of qi. By exaggerating these movements slightly, your body may sway, bob, tremble, rise and fall, shift, rock. The feet are basically fixed, though you may take small steps or readjust the posture if this feels natural and necessary. The qi movements might continue for only a few minutes, switching to a new pattern; or the same movements might continue through the course of the qigong. There may be periods when your body rests in stillness and then begins to move again. The entire exercise should last twenty minutes.

Ba Duan Jin means literally "Eight Pieces of Silk Brocade." These eight exercises are elegant, graceful, and essential methods of qi cultivation. They were first described in an eighth-century Taoist text, *Xiu Zhen Shi Shu* (The Ten Treatises on Restoring the Original Vitality), in the Taoist Canon. Taoist tradition attributes the exercises to one of the Eight Immortals of Chinese folklore, Chong Li-quan. Chong is frequently represented in Chinese art as a bald-headed, potbellied figure, with a white beard reaching to his navel. Chong had been a general during the Han Dynasty. When his army was defeated in a battle against Tibetans, Chong withdrew into the mountains rather than face the Emperor's wrath. There he met a Taoist who transmitted to him dao-yin (qigong) "recipes" to create an inner elixir of long life. The Eight Brocades was one of these methods.

1. Two Hands Reach Skyward to Balance the Triple Burner

This simple arm stretch gently elongates the body and balances the metabolism of the Three Burners: the upper, middle, and lower body. Stand in qigong posture. The arms circle overhead. Interlace the fingers and as you inhale stretch them upward, with the palms facing down. At the same time rise up on the toes (fig. 20). As you exhale, the feet rest flat on the ground and the interlaced hands rest for a moment on the crown of the head (fig. 21). Then stretch upward again, inhaling, rising on the toes, this time with the palms facing up (fig. 22). Exhale, again the palms rest on the crown, the feet flat. Repeat several times, each time alternating the direction of the palms.

2. Open the Bow as Though Shooting the Buzzard

Take a wide and deep "horse-riding" stance. If you are strong and flexible, try standing with the thighs parallel to the ground. Do not stand so low that the knees are strained or collapse inward. Begin with the hands in fists, rolled inward at chest height, so the back of the hands are facing each other. As you inhale, pull the right fist back toward the right shoulder, with the elbow extended out, forearm parallel to the ground. At the same time, the left hand opens widely as the arm extends straight to the left side, the whole arm parallel to the ground. The left palm is facing outward. To make this exercise more effective, bend the last three fingers of the left hand slightly toward the palm, so that only the index finger and thumb are extended (fig. 24 is a mirror image). Exhale, forming both hands in fists and bringing them back to the starting position in front of the breastbone. Repeat to the other side. As you open to each side, the head turns and the eyes look toward the extended arm. Whenever the arms return to the center, the head and eyes are facing straight ahead.

3. Raise Each Arm to Regulate the Spleen

Stand with the feet parallel, shoulder-width apart. Position your left arm overhead, with the back of the hand resting on the crown. The right hand is resting against the side of the right rib cage, with the palm facing down. Push the two hands away from each other, one pushing toward the sky, the other pushing toward the earth (fig. 25 is a mirror image). Next, with the arms extended, switch them, circling them at the sides of the body, until the back of the right hand is resting on the crown, the left hand facing down and attached to the left side ribs. Again push the hands away, toward earth and sky. Keep repeating from side to side. It is generally easiest to inhale as the arms stretch away. However, some individuals prefer to coordinate the exhalation with the arm stretch. Both are possible and beneficial. The head and eyes remain facing forward throughout the exercise. There is no need to look up or down toward either hand.

4. Looking Behind to Cure Fatigue and Distress

With the arms resting naturally at the sides of the body, palms lifted slightly and facing downward, slowly turn the head from side to side (fig. 26). Don't strain or force the head to turn more than feels comfortable. Do not lift or drop the chin as you turn the head. The eyes can either look in the direction the head is facing, or they can look slightly over the shoulder. That is, if you are turning to the left, you can allow the eyes to look farther to the left and perhaps slightly behind the body. The breath can coordinate however feels natural.

5. Bending Over, Wagging the Tail to Calm Heart-Fire

We can see from the name of this technique how imaginative the Chinese language can be. The practice is even better than the name.

There are two ways to practice this Brocade. From a wide, deep horse-riding stance, rest the hands on the thighs, with the thumbs pointing backward. Then either:

a) Swing the upper body slowly and smoothly like a pendulum. Keeping the feet planted, turn from the waist toward one thigh. Bend down toward that thigh, exhaling (fig. 27). Swing slowly toward the other thigh, with the body still bent over. Then, as you rise up over that thigh, gradually straightening the back, inhale (fig. 28). Continue inhaling as you face the center, returning to your starting position. Then repeat, beginning on the other side. Turn toward the other side; exhaling, bend down and swing the body toward the other leg. Inhaling, rise up over that leg and face center.

b) From the same stance, turn slightly from the waist, exhale as you bend down over one thigh, turn in the bent-over posture only to the center (not to the other thigh, as in option a above). Inhaling, rise up in the center (fig. 29). Then, exhaling, turn to the other side. Still exhaling, bend down on that side, turn the body to the center, and inhale, rising up and straightening. Some practitioners prefer this variation and claim it is more effective.

6. Reaching Down to Dissipate Disease

Stand naturally, with the palms resting on your buttocks. As you bend down, exhale and let the hands lightly slide down the backs of the legs, down to the calves, ankles, or as far as you can bend comfortably (fig. 30). The spine is soft and flexible so each vertebra can relax into the bent posture. Then begin to inhale, allowing the palms to move up along the backs of the legs as you resume the straight stance. Continuing to inhale, the hands resting on buttocks, rise up on your toes (fig. 31). For just a moment holds the breath, imagining the body filled with healing qi. Then rest the feet flat on the ground and exhale again toward the toes, palms moving along the backs of the thighs, knees, calves. . . . Repeat several times. This exercise helps to draw healing qi into the entire upper body. It also stretches the back, stimulates the kidneys, and massages tight hamstrings and calves.

7. Punching with Angry Gaze to Increase Qi and Strength

According to Chinese medicine the eyes and the emotion of anger stimulate the liver, the muscles, and the flow of qi. Staring with an angry gaze may have been beneficial for ancient Chinese recluses, who probably had low levels of emotional frustration. However, the stress of modern living causes many people to repress or impulsively express anger. Therefore, it may not be healthy for students to cultivate an "angry gaze." Instead of increasing strength, an angry gaze is more likely to make us tense. So let's think of "angry gaze" as "intense" or "focused" gaze. Having an intense gaze while punching stimulates the liver and helps it to purify toxins and spread healing qi more efficiently.

Stand with the feet about three feet apart, knees slightly bent. Your stance is slightly wider and deeper than usual, but it is not the strenuous horse stance of Brocade two or five. The eyes are gazing intensely, as though you are a hunter looking for the deer that will feed your family. Both hands are in fists, palms up, under the shoulders. The elbows are pulled back, behind the body. Punch slowly (no jerky or snapping motion) forward with one fist, the hand rotating as the arm extends. By the time you have finished the punch, the palm has rotated downward. Stop the punch while there is still a little bit of bend in the elbow. Do not lock the joint. Now, as the extended fist draws back, palm up under the shoulder, the other fist rotates and extends out. Keep rotating in this way, one fist out, the other back.

8. Toe Touching to Strengthen the Kidneys and Waist

Stand in a natural shoulder-width stance. As you exhale, slowly bend toward your toes, allowing each vertebra to participate in the bend. Do the movement slowly enough that you can sensitively relax and release areas in your spine that seem to be adhering together or preventing a full, relaxed bend. If you can reach your toes without straining, grasp them and pull your upper body even closer to your legs (fig. 33). Do not attempt this if you have a spinal injury or condition for which bending is inadvisable. Once your body has bent as far as is comfortable spend a few moments breathing naturally. Notice how the front of the body is compressed, the back of the body open. Let yourself breathe with the kidneys. Feel the lower back expanding and releasing as you inhale and exhale. Now, after your next exhalation, slowly return to a standing position, inhaling on the way up. Let the vertebrae build, one on top of the other. Stand up slowly, sensitively, with awareness. Continuing to inhale, bend gently back into a bowed-back posture (fig. 34). Now, as you briefly hold this posture, return to natural breathing. Feel how now the back is compressed, but the front of the body is open. The lungs easily expand and contract with the breath. Let it happen! Now take an inhalation, and as you exhale, return to a straight posture and continue exhaling down toward your toes. Repeat the technique several times.

The Five Animal Frolics (Wu Qin Xi) are graceful; dance like exercises modeled after the Crane, Bear, Monkey, Deer, and Tiger. They are a complete qigong system, developing strength, grace, flexibility, balance, and an abundance of healing qi. The Five Animals are medical qigong because they circulate the qi and improve health. They are also martial qigong because they encouraged the development of various Animal martial arts: Crane Style, Tiger Style, etc. And the Frolics are spiritual qigong because they teach harmony with the animals and all of nature.

I will describe the practice of the two foundation exercises of the Five Animal Frolics: the Crane and Bear. The Crane is the symbol of meditative stillness and longevity. In Chinese mythology, the crane is the companion of Shou-lao, the God of Longevity. Taoists say that enlightened sages ride to heaven on the back of a crane. The Bear is a symbol of strength, power, and healing wisdom. In ancient China, the shaman-healers wore bear masks and may have imitated the stepping of the bear in ritual dance. The Crane and Bear are the yang and yin of the Five Animals. The Crane is light, relaxed, excellent for the heart and to keep the body cool in summer. The Bear is heavy, strong, stimulates the kidneys, and warms the body in winter. Practice both of them during the same workout. This will keep yang and yin, fire and water, in balance. The Crane and Bear can be practiced safely and with excellent health benefits even if one does not know the other three.

Crane movements are practiced at a relaxed, slow, and even pace, as though swimming in the air. The Crane is like a meditative dance with six distinct techniques. Repeat each technique nine times, then pause for a moment and move on to the next.

1. Standing Crane: Hold your hands palms up just in front of the dan tian with your fingertips almost touching. As you inhale, raise the lower arms and hands up to the lower tip of the breastbone (fig. 41a). Be careful to keep the shoulders relaxed; don't raise the shoulders or chest. As you exhale, keeping the palms facing upward, lower the hands down to the dan tian. Continue, inhaling, hands raised to chest. Exhale, and drop hands to lower abdomen (fig. 41b).

2. Crane's Beak: Hold the arms out at the sides at shoulder height, palms facing down (fig. 42). There is a straight line along the shoulder, upper arm, forearm, wrist, and hand. The elbows are slightly bent. As you inhale, raise the arms about six inches higher. At the same time, let the fingertips of each hand touch together, forming a point, the crane's beak (fig. 43). As you exhale, relax open the crane's beak and float the arms down to the starting position, arms and hands outstretched at shoulder height.

3. Crane Flaps Wings: Begin the same as Crane's Beak: arms to the sides at shoulder height, palms down. As you exhale,

lower the arms until the hands are the height of the waist (fig. 44). As you inhale, raise the arms back to shoulder height. The hands stay open the whole time, swimming gracefully through the air. After the last repetition go straight into Crane Squatting.

4. Crane Squatting: We continue from the end of Crane Flaps Wings. The hands are resting at the level of the waist. As you inhale, slowly squat. Let the heels lift from the ground; the knees bend and bow out to the sides. You are going into as deep a squat as comfortable. At the same time, lift the arms and turn the palms up. The arms rise until they are as high as the shoulders (fig. 45).

Now, as you exhale, slowly stand up. At the same time, the hands turn palms down and float down to waist height. Repeat.

5. One-Legged Crane: Begin with the hands palms down at waist level. While exhaling, squat and reach down with the arms, as though embracing the knees (fig. 46). As you inhale, stand back up, shift the weight to one leg, and cross the arms in front of the chest, palms facing the body. Still inhaling, raise one knee up in the air until the thigh is parallel to the ground. At the same time circle the arms overhead and out to the sides, until they are extended laterally at shoulder height. Hold this balanced position for a few seconds (fig. 47). Then again slowly exhale, go into a squat, and embrace the knees. Inhale, going back to the erect posture, hands crossed. One leg lifting, the arms continuing overhead and out to the sides of the body. Hold for a few seconds and repeat.

6. Crane Spreads Wings: Begin in the standing posture, heels touching, arms at the sides. As you inhale, draw both arms slightly back behind the body. One foot takes a step out and touches the ground lightly on the toe. All of the weight is on the rear foot (fig. 48). Now, with the exhalation, bring the extended foot back, balance the weight evenly on both feet, and bring the arms to the front of the body, with the back of the hands facing each other (fig. 49). Then, again inhale, reach out with the other leg, touching the toe, arms behind the body (not too far, don't strain the back!). Exhale, heels together, weight even, arms rolling in toward the front of the body, back of the hands facing. Keep repeating side to side. Make sure that each toe-step is light and delicate, as though you are not bending a blade of grass. The essence of the Bear Frolic is to feel sunken, stable, heavy, ponderous. According to Hu Yao-zhen, your movements should also be easy and fluid, "as though you have no bones." Lightness, agility, and alertness are concealed within. This is consistent with the nature of the bear, who can amble about slowly or charge with surprising speed.

The Bear Stance, used throughout the exercises below, is a wide, low horse stance, with the feet turned forty-five degrees out. Advanced practitioners can stand with the thighs parallel to the ground. Pregnant or menstruating women should not attempt the deep posture. Rather, find a stance that is comfortable and causes no strain. The eyes have a quiet, relaxed gaze. Qi is sunk in the dan tian. As in the Crane, the movements flow one into the other with only a slight pause between techniques. Each technique is repeated nine times to each side.

1. Bear Turns: While in the Bear Stance, hold the arms at the sides of the body, elbows bent to ninety degrees, hands facing upward at the height of the ears (fig. 50). Slowly turn from your waist to the left, exhaling (fig. 51). Be careful to turn only from the waist, do not shift the weight or turn the hips or thighs. The stance is fixed and immobile. Turn as far as you can comfortably, without strain. Then, as you inhale, return to center. Now exhale and slowly turn to the other side. Inhale, face center. Keep turning side to side, coordinating with the breath. The hips are fixed, the waist is turning. It is this differentiation of waist from hip that massages the internal organs and benefits the kidneys. After the last repetition, go straight into Bear Pushes Behind.

2. Bear Pushes Behind: This time, as you exhale, turning to the left, push the left hand out behind you, keeping it at shoulder height, palm facing away, fingers toward the sky (fig. 52). As you inhale, face the front and bring the left hand back to the original bear posture, elbow bent to ninety degrees, palm facing up. Then turn to the right, exhaling and pushing the right palm out and away from the shoulder, fingertips pointed up. Inhale back to center. Repeat side to side.

3. Bar Pushes Down: Continue the basic movement of Bear Turns. This time, as you turn to one side, exhaling, push one hand down by the hip (fig. 53). For instance, exhaling, turning to the left, push the left hand down behind you, until the palm is facing down near the left hip. Inhale, facing center and bringing the hand back to the starting posture: both hands palm up at ear height, as though holding a wooden plank overhead. Then exhale, turning to the other side, the other hand pushing down by the hip. Inhale, back to center.

4. Bar Offering: Bring the hands to rest on the lower chest, just below the breastbone, palms facing up (fig. 54). As you exhale and turn the waist to the left, extend the left hand, palm up, away from and at the height of the shoulder. The right hand extends slightly out to the left and rests palm up on the middle of the left forearm (fig. 55). Inhale, face center, both hands returning to the chest, palms facing the sky. Then turn to the right, the right hand reaching out, palm up, until it is extended laterally, at shoulder height. The left hand is palm up and resting on the middle of the right forearm. Inhale, back to center.

5. Bear Push: Begin as above, both palms facing upward under the chest. This time, as you turn and exhale, push both hands out to the side. The palms are facing away. The hands push on a plane, as though both palms are resting on a wall at your side (fig. 56). Inhale, face center, hands returning to the chest. Exhale, push to the other side.

Now switch sides again. Go into the Ruler Stance. This time the hands are held a few inches in front of the navel, about ten inches apart, as though holding an energy ball. The palms and fingers are gently spread open. The centers of the palms are lined up. Begin the Basic Rock. As you rock to the front, rear heel lifting; dip the hands slightly down, about three inches below the navel. As you rock back, front toe lifting, the hands lift up and circle inward. You are carrying the energy ball in a circle, down, away, up, and back, coordinated with your rocking (figs. 59, 60). The navel is the center of your circle. As you rock back and forth, the ball is circled about three inches above the navel and three inches below it. Do thirty-six repetitions.

Then try it on the other side. Circle the hands in exactly the same way. Rock to the front, the ball drops. As you rock back, the momentum of the backward movement causes the ball to effortlessly lift up and draw back toward the body. Repeat thirty-six times. Make sure that the breath is relaxed and natural as you practice the Ruler. Don't force or stop the breath. Just let it go. To close the exercise, gently stop rocking. Let your body settle into stillness. Then slowly straighten the legs until the knees are only slightly bent. Then very gently straighten the back. Relax all the way down to your feet. In just five minutes, the Ruler gives a powerful workout. The Ruler exercise stimulates the Bubbling Well acupuncture points in the feet, the points that feed the kidneys and bones with earth-qi. It also puts a stimulating pressure on the Ming men point on the lower back, opposite the navel, increasing overall vitality. The bent-over posture feels almost fetal and compresses breath in the dan tian, increasing its store of qi. Provided you are not bending excessively and the back is straight, long, and open, you should still be able to breathe easily. The legs, waist, and back become stronger. This method is probably a recent innovation, yet it is so simple, gentle, effective, and popular that I include it here among the "classics." Arm Swinging gives a quick charge-up and is an excellent way to improve blood and qi circulation and to begin any kind of exercise routine. If you go early in the morning to a park near any Chinatown in North America, you are likely to see seniors standing in place and swinging their arms back and forth without stopping, sometimes for as long as five minutes. Arm Swinging is the most popular qigong for the elderly.

Stand with the feet parallel, shoulder-width apart, your whole body in a relaxed qigong posture. The arms are relaxed at the sides. Breathe naturally; don't worry about or focus too much on the breath. Throughout this qigong, the toes gently curl inward as though gripping the ground. At the same time, imagine that the heels are pressing into the ground. You will feel as

though the arch of the foot, the Bubbling Well point, is lifting up, creating a kind of suction that draws qi into the body.

Now, gently swing the arms front and back, like a pendulum. Not too big a movement, perhaps a foot or two front and back, less if you have bursitis or painful shoulders. Find a comfortable, fluid rhythm. You will find that once you start, the movement seems to continue of itself, effortlessly. Continue for three to five minutes. Then slowly and gradually make the swinging movements smaller and smaller, until they settle into stillness, like a bouncing rubber ball settling into the ground. Release any gripping in the toes or heels. Stand for a minute enjoying the feeling of greater aliveness.

In ancient Taoist texts, Taiji can also mean the Polestar. Again, this connotes the balance of yin and yang. The Polestar is the unmoving pivot around which the constellations seem to rotate: stillness within motion, yin balanced by yang. The Taiji Quan exercise cultivates these qualities of balance and harmony.

Taiji Quan is often attributed to a Taoist monk named Zhang San-feng, who supposedly lived almost a thousand years ago. However, Zhang is probably a fabrication of spirit mediums who channeled his biography hundreds of years after his supposed death. The documented history of Taiji Quan actually begins in the sixteenth century with a general named Qi Ji-guang (1528-1587). General Qi (not to be confused with the similar-sounding word "qi" used in qigong) defended the Chinese against seafaring invaders by feigning weakness, enticing the enemy to enter more deeply into Chinese territory. Then his army would massively and decisively counterattack. In General Qi's Boxing Classic, this strategy became the basis for hand-to-hand combat. He called his art *rout shu*, the gentle art (*jujitsu* in Japanese). Yield out of the way of an attack, respect the opponent's opinion. If he wants to go a certain direction, avoid the blow and help him along! With the enemy off balance, your own attack will be much more effective. Self-massage has been an integral part of qigong from the most ancient times. Lightly chafing and warming the skin over various vital centers, acupoints, or sore muscles stimulates the qi and relieves congestion. Practice self-massage from either a standing or seated position.

Youthful Complexion And Sharp Senses

Practice each of these techniques ten times.

Rub your hands together to generate warmth. Then lightly circle the palms over the face. Don't forget to run your fingers through your scalp. Next, chafe one palm back and forth, right and left, across the forehead. Massage away those worry lines and wrinkles! Place the middle finger of each hand on either side of the mouth. Now run these fingers up along the sides of the nose, all the way to the hairline. Then bring them back down along the sides of the nose to the mouth. Keep going up and down. This is excellent for the sinuses and has a healing effect on the large intestine. Close your eyes. Use either the middle fingers or the knuckles of the thumbs to lightly circle around the eyes, pressing into the bone that surrounds the eyes. Do not press on the eyes themselves! The hands are each making opposite circles, one clockwise, one counterclockwise. After ten circles, reverse the directions of each hand. Do this movement slowly and with moderate pressure, enough to create a pleasant feeling of stimulation, but certainly not so much that there is pain. When you finish, rub the hands together until they are warm. Then place the palms over your closed eyes. Let yourself enjoy the warmth, quiet, and darkness for a few minutes. Then you can open your eyes again. Lightly stimulate the gums by tapping around your mouth and cheeks with the fingertips. Imagine healing qi permeating your gums and teeth. Place the back of one hand under your chin. Gently rub your hand right and left, moving from one side of your jawbone to the other. This can improve circulation, helping to prevent or eliminate a double chin. It also strengthens the immune system by improving qi flow in the lymph glands. Next, gently knead the earlobes between the thumb and index fingers. According to acupuncture theory, points affecting every part of the body can be found on the ears. Warm your hands again, rubbing them together. Place the palms lightly over the ears with your fingers pointed toward the back of the head. While holding the ears, tap the fingertips on the back of the head. You will understand why this ear-healing technique is called Tapping the Heavenly Drum.

Close the facial massage by repeating the first technique, circling the hands over the entire face and scalp, until the face feels glowing and warm. The word "emotion" is derived from the Latin *e-mot*, "outward moving," meaning the outward expression of inner feeling in tone of voice, facial expression, and gesture. Emotions are thus both mental and physical. They imply a movement of energy both within oneself and between oneself and others. Qigong practice can help to clear obstructions to the flow of emotions, so that they are expressed gracefully rather than repressed or released impulsively. Qigong can help to heal and balance the emotions by making one aware of physical components of emotional distress—tight shoulders, anxious digestion, suspicious eyes, depressed breathing—and by teaching practical methods to resolve these problems on the energetic level. In this respect qigong is similar to Western systems of body-centered psychotherapy such as Bioenergetics or Reichian Therapy. However, unlike these Western systems, qigong does not incorporate counseling. The emotions are only dealt with as they influence the qi or express themselves in poor physical habits of posture, breathing, and tension. Qigong can nevertheless be an important adjunct to counseling or a first step in emotional healing. Recently, Western medicine has begun to recognize the ancient wisdom Chinese medicine. Researchers in Psychoneuroimmunology explore the connection between the psyche, the nervous system, and the immune system. They are corroborating that state of mind and state of health go together; mind and body influence each other. The link is created by neuropeptides, "the chemicals of consciousness that are synthesized in response to thinking and feeling. Neuropeptides flow through the body like qi, carrying information to/from the brain, nervous system, and other parts of the body. Like a key fitting a lock, they bond to receptor sites on various tissues and then act as information networks helping to coordinate activity throughout the body. For instance, when your body requires fluid, a neuropeptide called angiotensin bonds to a part of the brain associated with emotions and feelings, known as the amygdala. When this happens we feel that we are thirsty. Angiotensin simultaneously locks on receptor sites on the kidneys, telling the kidneys to conserve water. Thus, the neuropeptides integrate feeling, awareness, and physiology. Anxiety and sorrow both damage the lungs. The English word "anxiety" comes from a German root *angst*, "narrow," referring to the narrowing of the bronchial passages. During times of anxiety, breath and qi are constricted, unable to flow easily in and out of the lungs. It is well known that anxiety can contribute to the development or exacerbation of asthma and other bronchial conditions. The lungs are also affected by grief as demonstrated by the heaving that occurs with crying. Grief depresses and weakens the lungs and, like anxiety, disturbs the easy and full movement of breath. According to Chinese medicine, the lungs extract qi from the air, regulating the supply of internal healing energy. When the lungs are weakened by grief, one's general health and vitality diminishes. However, this does not mean that we should suppress sorrow. It is not healthy to withhold one's tears in response to an upsetting event. Both prolonged grief and unexpressed grief weaken lung qi.

In Traditional Chinese Medicine, the word *shen*, "kidneys," includes both the kidneys and adrenals and, in some contexts, the reproductive system. The *shen* are most affected by fear. Fear causes pain and disease in the kidneys, adrenals, and lower back and creates favorable conditions for urinary tract disorders and incontinence. When one is afraid, the qi drops down toward the sacrum and in toward the center, away from the surface of the body. The body contracts in self-protection. The circulation of blood and breath slows down, resulting in conditions of excess and stagnation in the core and depletion in the periphery. A common sign of this is cold hands and feet. One is literally "frozen with fear."

Chronic fear can lead to a host of debilitating conditions. Fear and stress cause the adrenals to secrete large amounts of the stress hormones adrenaline and hydrocortisone, which signal the cells to break down stored fats and proteins into sugar

(glucose). This makes energy available to fight or flee from a threat--a necessity during short-term threats to survival but devastating if prolonged. As the stores of energy are sapped, we become weak and fatigued, leading to "adrenal burnout." The body's reservoir of hormones is not infinitely deep. If we do not have time to rest and regenerate our supply, our ability to cope with stress is impaired. The release of adrenal hormones puts many bodily processes on hold, in order to defend against the threat. This includes the shutting down of growth, repair, and reproduction by inhibiting or disabling essential chemicals and immune cells. If stress is constant, the body may forget how to return to the healthy state, losing its ability to defend effectively against pathogens or to repair and heal damage. In the West we distinguish between "healthy anger" and "unhealthy anger." Whereas the Chinese simply say that anger is harmful, Western mind-body researchers have found that honest expression of even "negative" feelings is good for one's health. Unhealthy anger is repressed, chronic, cruel, or violent. This kind of anger does not end after it is discharged; inevitably a trail of other feelings follows it, including resentment, frustration, and guilt. In my opinion, it is only this kind of anger that harms the liver. Many scientists have found that the inability to express healthy anger and other emotions conventionally labeled as "negative" may suppress the immune system and create favorable conditions for the development of cancer. Even mice exhibit different immunological states depending on their behavior. More aggressive mice tend to have smaller virus-induced tumors. It may be that a strong, fighting (and feisty) spirit goes hand in hand with more aggressive white blood cells. It is important to note, however, that a fighting spirit is different from obstinacy and stubbornness. The challenge for anyone facing serious disease is how to balance determination and willpower with acceptance of human frailty and imperfection.

That joy is considered a negative emotion is troubling to most Western students of qigong until they realize that in Chinese medical literature the term joy (le) means excitability, a tendency toward giddiness, talkativeness, lavishness, and general excess. In some texts, another character for joy is used, pronounced xi. Etymologically, this character means the joy derived from eating. According to Chinese medicine scholars Kiiko Matsumoto and Stephen Birch, "In a medical context, xi accurately refers more to the notion of problems caused by overeating. . . ." Thus, "joy" disperses and scatters the qi. It can create an uneven pulse and make one prone to cardiac problems. The excitable, joyous person is the opposite of the Chinese ideal of the sage, who is able to maintain inner composure and calm even in the midst of a storm. There is a Chinese saying, "Though Mount Tai collapses at your feet, the qi remains calm, and the face does not change color." Excitement places sudden demands on the heart. The most extreme form of excitement and thus the most damaging emotion for the heart is emotional shock, whether from a negative event such as the death of a loved one or from a positive event, like winning the sweepstakes. The epidemic of heart disease in the West may be symptomatic of our society's preoccupation with le, "joy, and excitement." Our quick pace of life over stimulates the heart, by frightening news reports, TV violence, and an infatuation with sex and romance. In qigong philosophy, it is believed that the heart likes peace and quiet. It needs a feeling of security in order to keep an even pace as it pumps energy through the body. When the heart qi is disturbed by excitement and excess, mind and spirit are both affected, creating the possibility of insomnia, confused and restless thinking, or in extreme cases, hallucinations, hysteria, and psychosis. The spleen is damaged by pensiveness. The qi becomes knotted and stuck. Pensiveness means excess concentration, an obsessive preoccupation with a concept or subject. It is the kind of intellectual nit-picking usually required for Ph.D. dissertations. Needless to say, college students often suffer from what Chinese medicine considers spleen-related disorders: gastric disturbances, elevated blood pressure, weakened immunity, and a tendency toward phlegm and colds. Excess empathy, bei, also harms the spleen. Empathy is similar to compassion. The American Heritage Dictionary defines compassion as "Deep awareness of the suffering of another coupled with the wish to relieve it." Empathy means that we also identify with that person's suffering. This feeling is especially strong when we come in contact with individuals who are facing hardships we ourselves have endured. Empathy is a positive attribute and creates a healing trust in any relationship, especially a therapeutic one. Empathy is considered excessive and damaging to the spleen when we lose a clear recognition of boundaries, when we feel distraught and upset by someone else's problems. Pensiveness and excess empathy, the two qualities that harm the spleen, are related. We are pensive when we are preoccupied with ourselves; we are overly empathic when we are preoccupied with others. Empathy is an important and difficult issue for many healers. Too much empathy makes it difficult to treat the patient objectively and may result in "picking up" the patient's physical and/or mental disease. A qigong student knows he is overempathizing when it becomes difficult to feel relaxed, centered, and rooted. To overempathize is to feel disempowered and out of touch with the earth, the element that corresponds to the spleen. Such empathy weakens the spleen, and conversely a weak spleen can create boundary issues. The spleen carries the qi of the earth. Qigong masters say that the spleen needs grounding, time spent in nature. There is a wonderful cure for both of the spleen's emotional pathologies--pensiveness and empathy. "Lose your mind and come to your senses." Spend more time in nature, seeing nature as a positive model of health and balance. The earth supports all kinds of life impartially, without attachment. Let the mind become quiet and the senses open to the environment. Such a cure may seem too simple, nontechnical, perhaps even naive. The important point is that it works! I remember my old friend, Zenmaster Alan Watts, once remarking, "We believe that we haven't thought enough about the difficulties of life. Perhaps the problem is that we have thought entirely too much!"

Organ-Emotion Link

Element	Metal	Water	Wood	Fire	Earth
Organ	Lungs	Kidney	Liver	Heart	Spleen
Harmful Emotions	Anxiety, Fear	Anger	Joy, Shock	Pensiveness,	
Qi Effect	Sorrow	Empathy			
Positive Emotions	Constrict	Drop	Rise	Scatter	Knot
	Yi	Zhi	Ren	Li	Xin
	(Integrity)	(Wisdom)	(Kindness)	(Order)	(Trust)

The client is seated in the middle of a stool or kitchen chair, his or her back not touching the backrest. Use any or all of the following:

Method 1: The Spinal Touch. Place one palm (either hand) on the spine, opposite the navel (ming men point). The other palm rests on the spine just below the seventh cervical vertebra (da chui point). Keep the hands there for a few minutes, until you have some sense of the temperature, the vibratory quality of the qi, and any other subjective impressions. Does the energy feel superficial or sunken; is it smooth or coarse, choppy or flowing, warm or uncomfortably hot, cool or deathly cold? Note also if the upper or lower body seems more energized. As you practice with more and more clients and compare your findings with the patient's presenting symptoms or medically diagnosed problems, you will gradually develop the ability to interpret your subjective feelings of qi.

Method 2: Dan Tian. Another area that gives a general and overall indication of the qi level of your client is the dan tian. Place one palm just below the navel, the other palm opposite, on the back. Feel how the breath moves or doesn't move between your hands. Is the body tight or relaxed? You may also feel vital heat and qi.

The dan tian is the place of power and loss of power. It is a sensitive, vulnerable area, connected with sexuality. When children are invalidated, they learn to hold and constrict the abdomen. These tensions often persist into adulthood. For this

reason, holding the dan tian can give you information about the client's self worth and degree of empowerment. I have found it best to assess qi here only with clients whom I have already seen a few times and who do not perceive touching this area as threatening and frightening.

Method 3: Lao Gong. To get a sense of peripheral qi and blood circulation, lightly hold the lao gong point in the center of the palm. Touch the point with your thumb, the other fingers touching the back of the client's hand. You may feel both temperature and a gentle pulsing. With practice it is also possible to intuit the emotional state of the client through this point. It is directly connected with the energy of the heart.

The ends of the fingers and toes are lightly grasped, one at a time, between your thumb, middle, and index fingers, while the other hand is held a short distance away from the corresponding organ. You do not have to know the exact location of the acupuncture points. Instead, the practitioner touches the general area of the point, around or on the nail. Since the other hand is placed directly above the organ, the method requires only general knowledge of anatomy and can be practiced by those unfamiliar with the location of acupuncture meridians.

Reflex areas on the Hand

- **Thumb-Lungs.** Hold the man's left thumb tip, the woman's right thumb tip with either hand, the other palm above the lungs. Do an energy scan of both lungs.
- **Index-Large Intestine.** While holding the tip of the index finger with one hand, the other slowly moves above the large intestine. You can also visualize the organ. This will make your hand position more accurate.
- **Middle Finger-Pericardium and Reproductive System.** The same fingertip is used to tune in, sequentially, to two areas of the body. As you hold the tip of the middle finger, your other hand goes first to the heart. Although this point is related to the pericardium (the membranous, fluid-filled sac that encloses the heart and the roots of major blood vessels), it is practically impossible to distinguish the pericardium from the rest of the heart. So we should consider this as part of heart qi assessment. There will be a second heart reflex area on the little finger. Next bring your palm over the reproductive system: genitals, ovaries, prostate, wherever appropriate.
- **Ring Finger-Triple Heater and Thyroid.** As you hold the triple heater area, the other hand moves gradually over the upper, middle, and lower torso, from the front or back of the body. Note the warmth and qi quality of the three areas to determine which is relatively full or depleted. Then bring your palm above the thyroid. A feeling of uncomfortable warmth or pressure may indicate hyperthyroidism; too little energy may indicate hypothyroidism.
- **Little Finger-Heart and Small Intestine.** As you contact the tip of the little finger, the other hand senses first the heart qi, then the small intestine.

Reflex Areas On The Foot

Big Toe--Liver and Spleen. Holding the end of the big toe with the thumb, index, and middle fingers of one hand, the other palm is positioned above the liver, sensing the qi. Then move your palm to the spleen. The procedure is similar for each of the other toes.

- **Second Toe--Stomach.**
- **Fourth Toe--Gallbladder.**
- **Little Toe--Bladder.**

Making Contact: Healing Through Sensing and Yin Yang Polarity

Placing the hands on or above assessment areas is obviously more than assessment. It is the beginning of treatment. Sensing is healing! When we interact with another, there is no way to absolutely assess the state of health. As we sense qi, the qi changes and moves toward balance. The observer changes that which is observed. This is why it is important to remember your first impressions and to note how this impression changes as your hands remain on or above assessment areas. The degree of change may be predictive of the patient's responsiveness to therapy.

Sensing, making contact, is the first, safest, and most important method of treatment. After finishing your assessment, return to the places of imbalance-areas where you felt excess, deficient, or diseased qi. Place one or both hands either on that area or in the qi field above it. One of the most effective ways to apply sensing is to position the hands on either side of a diseased area, as though you are doing Standing Meditation with the patient between your palms. I call this method "Yin Yang Polarity." Adapt the Standing Meditation posture to the position of your patient. If your patient is seated or lying on a massage table, it is difficult to reach the patient unless you squat very low or bend your back. This is uncomfortable and awkward and will decrease the amount of qi available. Instead, sit next to your patient. Keep your legs uncrossed, your feet flat on the ground, back straight, breath sunk, and arms rounded. Maintain all of the principles of Standing Meditation from your seated position. When should you use Healing Through Sensing or the Yin Yang Polarity? These methods may be used for any kind of condition, whether congested (yang) or depleted (yin). It is always the safest method of treatment when you get a confusing impression and are unsure exactly what the problem is. Because the healer is not trying to change or manipulate the patient's energy in any specific way, there is almost no chance of doing harm. For some EQH patients it may be necessary to use only Healing Through Sensing. Generally, I like to begin and end all EQH sessions with Sensing. To understand the principles of transmitting therapeutic qi, try the following experiment. Ask a friend to hold out his left hand, palm up. Place your right palm a few inches above his hand, finding the distance that allows maximum qi sensation. Now as your partner's hand remains still, slowly rotate your right hand in tiny counterclockwise circles, as though the center of your palm is a laser beam, drawing a circle around your friend's palm. Then increase the circumference of your circle, so that your palm is shining light on each of your partner's fingertips and then moving down to the top of the wrist. After several circles, reverse direction, circling clockwise. Ask your friend what he or she felt. Was there a qualitative difference between the two circles, counterclockwise and clockwise? Let your friend try the experiment on you. Is your experiment replicable? Try it with other friends and see if you get the same results. What sensation do counterclockwise circles produce, what sensation by clockwise circles?

You have already discovered the first principle of therapeutic non-contact treatment. Counterclockwise is cooling (yin) and reduces heat, inflammation, fever, congestion. Clockwise circling creates warmth (yang) and adds energy and stimulation to weak, cold, and depleted areas. If an organ or area feels hot or over-full, use counterclockwise circles, circling above it several times, until you sense that the area is responding maximally and returning to a more normal temperature. If the organ feels cool or deficient, circle clockwise. If you are unsure, use Healing Through Sensing.

Whereas most EQH treatment methods can be applied with both hands at once or either hand individually, circling palms is best performed with only one hand, called the yang hand. It does not matter which hand is used to project qi. Some healers prefer the right, some the left, some are ambidextrous, or at least energetically so, and will use one hand or the other according to their mood. The other hand, the yin hand, is relatively passive. It is not used to treat or project qi, but rather rests at the side of the body, fingers pointing toward the earth. The yin hand connects with the energy of the earth. Like the healer's feet, the yin hand helps the healer stay grounded. It will also automatically discharge toxic qi from the healer's body or draw extra healing energy up into the body if there is a need for it. There is no need for the healer to think of emitting or absorbing qi

with the yin hand. This will happen by itself if the healer is relaxed and rooted. Both hands are simultaneously practicing de qi. The yang hand reaches the qi of the patient; the yin hand reaches the qi of the earth (fig. 64).

Other effective treatment gestures include Tapping, Pulsing, and Waving. Tapping means to lightly and rhythmically tap or pat the qi field with either your palm or fingertips. This is useful to relieve stagnation or congestion and to improve circulation. In Tui-na, Chinese Massage Therapy, tapping is applied directly to the body for the same purpose. The therapist taps with either fingers, palm, back of the hand, side of the hand, or fist to produce varying degrees of stimulation. Pulsing means to ever so slightly open and close the palm. Stretch the fingers and hand open, then let it relax. Do this repeatedly at a steady pace. The qi is emitted from the center of the healer's palm. The indications for pulsing are similar to tapping. It stimulates and improves circulation. Pulsing can be used over any area of the body that requires it, including specific acupuncture points. If you pulse directly over an acupuncture point, it is easy to feel tingling and warmth at the point or radiating along the meridian. Waving is very useful for congestion or pain. The fingertips sweep down the patient's energy field, as though brushing the pain away. The technique is identical to the "Sweeping" (barrida) practiced in Mexican curanderismo healing. These three methods move qi without adding heat or cold. They can be applied by themselves or combined with clockwise or counterclockwise circling. For instance, if the kidneys are weak and deficient, it may be necessary to use gentle pulsing of qi, followed by clockwise circling. If the shoulders are tight, painful, and hot, you can use counterclockwise circling to reduce tension and waving to relieve pain. For an inflamed, sore throat, you may wish to circle counterclockwise over the throat and then sweep the pain away from the body. Usually the entire open hand is used to transmit qi. Qi is emitted from the fingers and palm over a broad area. To intensify the "qi beam," emit qi from the fingertips as a whole or any individual fingertip. This is useful to work on a very specific, small area, such as a cyst or wound. To intensify the beam still further, concentrate on emitting qi only from your palm-center, lao gong point. (Some External Qi Healers emit qi from other acupuncture points, such as the Bubbling Well in the feet or the yin tang point between the eyebrows.) Acupuncturists or those familiar with Chinese medical theory can use the most specialized hand gesture, known as "sword fingers" (jian zhi) to direct qi into specific acupuncture points. The index and middle fingers are gently extended, with the thumb and last two fingers bent into the palm (fig. 65). Here the EQH therapist is actually doing acupuncture without the needles. The sword fingers circle counterclockwise to sedate the energy of the point or clockwise to tonify it. The sword fingers can also tap by moving slightly away from and toward the point. It is also possible to combine EQH with acupuncture. Acupuncturists generally twirl or poke the acupuncture needle to change the quality of stimulation at a specific point. Acupuncturists trained in EQN leave the needle in place and while holding their sword fingers a few inches above the needle, tonify, sedate, or stimulate the point with appropriate EQH gestures.

Food and liquids enter the hollow organ, the stomach, first. The stomach is a cooking pot, mixing the ingredients with digestive enzymes and turning them into a warm soupy mash. According to renowned scholar of Chinese medicine Dr. Bob Flaws, "the spleen is both the distillation mechanism to which this pot is attached." After the soup has "ripened and rottened" in the stomach, it is the spleen's job to drive the pure food qi up to the lungs, where it can mix with the qi from breathing and create the "true qi" that feeds the entire body. The spleen also takes the pure part of fluids and drives it up to the heart, to help create blood. According to Dr. Flaws's excellent guide to Chinese dietary theory, *Arisal of the Clear*, "The sending up of the pure part of the foods and liquids by the spleen is called ascension of the clear." Meanwhile, the stomach causes "descension of the turbid," sending the impure food and liquid down to the intestines. In the intestines, the remaining pure energy ("the pure of the impure") is extracted and converted into kidney energy and various thick fluids such as cerebrospinal fluid. Whatever remains is excreted as feces and urine.

Both West and East agree that food is medicine. Food is the only medicine that we take in large doses at least a few times a day, every day of the year, for our whole life. The cumulative effects of food on the body's biochemistry and qi make it more powerful than any drug. According to ancient writings, the xian ren, the Taoist sages of antiquity, preferred a pure diet of breath and morning dew. How do we reconcile this apparent asceticism with the wonderful cuisine developed by Daoists and the Chinese passion for food? Lin Yutang says that the reason the Chinese were late in developing a science of zoology is that they couldn't look at an animal without thinking one thing: "How does it taste?" In fact, "Living on breath . . ." is a plea to, in Lao Zi's words, "embrace simplicity, lessen selfishness, reduce desires." Another way of putting this is that happiness is found by learning how to be satisfied with less, rather than always grasping at more.

In *Bo Wu Ji* (Records of Investigating Phenomena) Zhang Hua of the Jin Dynasty (265-420) states, "The less one eats, the broader the mind and the longer the life span." There is a good scientific rationale for eating less, for paying attention to quantity as well as quality: The only experimentally proven method of increasing maximum life span is through a combination of maximum nutrition with minimum calories. Roy Walford, M.D., professor of pathology at the UCLA School of Medicine, calls this the "high/low diet" or "under-nutrition without malnutrition." Although some Taoists may have attempted breatharianism, they were probably no more successful than those who added mercury and lead to their elixirs. The majority of ancient qigong practitioners probably followed dietary principles congruent with Walford's gerontology research, a fact that is recognized by some modern qigong authors. For example, Dr. Liu Zhengcai, a qigong scholar and clinician in Chengdu, notes the importance of small food quantities and proper nutrition in his work on qigong and longevity.

The high/low diet can help one avoid or dramatically postpone age-related health problems, including cancer and other immune system disorders, heart disease, arthritis, osteoporosis, loss of memory and other brain functions, kidney damage, and decreased sexual potency. The enigmatic principle "Avoid the Five Cereals or Grains (Bi Gu)" occurs in virtually all ancient works on qigong diet. According to Taoist mythology, the three dan tiens at the third eye, heart, and abdomen are infested by three worms. These worms live on the impure breaths (qi) created by immoral behavior, putrid food, and the "Five Cereals" which are the basis of Chinese cuisine: rice, millet, wheat, oats, and beans. According to a Taoist text, "The Five Cereals are scissors that cut off life, they rot the five internal organs, they shorten life. If a grain enters your mouth, do not hope for Life Eternal! If you desire not to die, may your intestine be free of it!" A fourth-century Taoist meditation classic, *The Inner Classic of the Yellow Court*, warns that the stench of these grains vexes the soul and stops the embryonic breath.

At first glance this philosophy seems as bizarre to us as it does to most Chinese. We can sympathize with ancient Taoists in their love of mysticism and magic, their rejection of patriarchy, greed, and despotism. But to reject carbohydrates, to avoid croissants, spaghetti, and rice—isn't this a slight against the people of France, Italy, and China herself! Can such a pastaphobic attitude ever be justified? There is a paradox here, conveniently ignored in most discussions of Chinese dietetics. Some of the very same Taoists who advocated grain avoidance also required five pecks of rice as an admission fee into their sect. When you eat a carbohydrate meal or snack, it is broken down into a simple sugar, glucose that can be readily utilized by the cells. Glucose is the fuel that is required for any bodily process that requires energy. When glucose combines with oxygen from respiration it produces carbon dioxide, water, heat, and ATP (adenosine triphosphate). Carbon dioxide is then carried by the blood to the lungs, where it is exhaled. Water becomes part of intracellular fluid and the metabolic water that is required for life. The heat helps to maintain normal body temperature. ATP provides the energy for muscle contractions and other essential life processes such as cell division and protein synthesis. To help the body use glucose and in the process to lower blood glucose levels, the pancreas secretes the hormone insulin. Insulin binds to receptor sites on the cell membranes, helping the cells to

absorb glucose. Insulin is also necessary in order to convert glucose into glycogen and triglycerides, substances that are stored in the liver, skeletal muscles, and as fat. When energy is needed, stored glycogen is converted back into blood sugar by another pancreatic hormone, glucagon. In an ideal situation, insulin, glucagon, and blood glucose levels stay within healthy limits, each chemical produced in just the right amount.

Now three nasty things can happen: First, overproduction of insulin can cause an abnormal drop in blood glucose levels (hypoglycemia), causing the mind to wander and drift, and producing both mental and physical fatigue (the Two-Hours-After-Pasta-Syndrome; sound familiar?). Secondly, high carbohydrate consumption results in the body storing more fat. Third, the presence of a constant high level of insulin, especially when the body is carrying excessive fatty tissue, may cause the cells to become insulin resistant. They no longer produce sufficient receptor sites for the insulin or the receptors do not function normally. Glucose finds no way in; the cells, unable to "burn" sufficient glucose-fuel, become energy starved. One finds oneself craving more and more bread, pasta, and sweets. This can contribute to the most common form of diabetes, Type 2 diabetes mellitus, also called noninsulindependent diabetes or "adult-onset diabetes."

In a nutshell: at best too much carbohydrate means fat, fatigue, and unhealthy food cravings, the state that Drs. Rachael and Richard Heller call "carbohydrate addiction"; at worst, excess carbohydrate can predispose one to serious disease. The Taoists were right: high grain consumption does not nourish us. On the contrary, it "stops the embryonic breath," and weakens and diminishes qi. For instance, pears and pear juice clear the lungs and are used to treat feverish coughs. However, they should be avoided if the patient feels chilled. Lemon is cooling and makes an excellent beverage for summer heat. Chinese sometimes drink it with sugarcane juice. Lemonade, candied lemon, or lemon pickled in salt are considered therapeutic for vomiting and loss of appetite. Soybeans are also helpful for an upset stomach. They strengthen the stomach and spleen and help rid the body of toxins. Soy milk is sometimes taken for mild food poisoning. Chinese white radish (daikons in Japanese) is also detoxifying and can reduce phlegm and purge the body of pollution or drugs. Because of this property, they should not be eaten while taking medication. Pine nuts help to relieve dry coughs, and, when cooked in rice porridge, can moisten the large intestine, alleviating constipation. Dried Chinese chrysanthemum flowers are added to tea to relieve headaches and eyestrain. Chicken has an affinity for the spleen and kidneys. It can increase qi and strengthen sexual energy. However, because it warms the body and adds hot qi to the liver, it should be avoided during fevers, headaches, or liver problems. Celery, used as both a food and a spice, helps to cool, cure, and relieve the pain of hot, inflamed conditions such as canker sores and hemorrhoids. The individual properties of foods have been expertly catalogued in the works of Henry Lu and Liu Jilin (see Qigong Resources).

Water is essential to life or three important reasons:

1. It is a solvent. Water dissolves nutrients, allowing them to be transported to the cells. It dissolves waste in urine. And it dilutes toxic substances, including the chemicals that can form kidney stones.

2. Water is a lubricant, allowing digestion, sex, the movement of the joints, and the trapping of respiratory irritants (through mucus).

3. Water regulates body temperature. This is largely because it changes temperature slowly, a fact appreciated by anyone who lives near the ocean.

Water is also spiritual. Water is the oldest medicine on the planet and our link to ancient healing energies. As Tom Heidlebaugh, Algonquin educator and storyteller, so eloquently puts it, "The cycle of evaporation and precipitation means that the same water that fed the Dinosaurs moves through our own bodies today."

The qigong meal is tastefully seasoned, esthetically presented, and full of variety. Alan Watts, who combined Daoist scholarship with culinary expertise, was fond of saying, "A chicken improperly cooked and not enjoyed as it becomes you, has died in vain." Healthy cooking and eating are not only ways to improve your qigong; they are qigong! They are physical and spiritual disciplines. A monk asked Zenmaster Yun-men, "What does it mean to attain enlightenment with every atom of your being?" The Zenmaster replied, "Food in the bowl and water in the bucket."

Tea is the most important and popular medicine in China. The classics of Chinese herbal medicine generally have only a few paragraphs on ginseng; but the portions on tea fill several chapters. In China, virtually all experts in qi control-acupuncturists, martial artists, calligraphers, qigong players--drink tea regularly. There are some good reasons why.

What is tea?

I am speaking about tea, not herbal tea, but Tea. Black tea or green, it's all the same plant, *camellia sinensis*. The French correctly use the word tea (the in French) to refer only to infusions of this plant. Other herbal "teas"--such as chamomile, peppermint, rose hips--are called tisanes in French. The color, taste, and quality of true teas differ according to where and how the tea is cultivated, the quality of the soil, the age of the leaf, and the degree of fermentation. The broadest and most generally used categories of tea are green, semi-fermented, and black, referring to the amount of fermentation of the leaf and, thus, its color. Green tea, the preferred beverage in Asia, is tea in its natural unfermented state. Full fermentation turns green tea black, producing the teas most commonly used in American and European blends, including English breakfast and Earl Grey. The famous Chinese Oolong Teas are only slightly fermented and so are between green and black tea in flavor and color. The leaves usually have a reddish tint on the edges, but remain green in the center. Semi-fermented teas have the greatest variety of aroma and flavor, ranging from a light flowery bouquet to a rich "Bordeaux." Steaming, roasting, smoking, pressing, folding, or rolling the leaf may also vary the taste of tea.

History And Legend

Tea is as ancient as Chinese Medicine. More than two thousand years ago the legendary Divine Farmer (Shen Neng) catalogued all of China's medicinal plants. He tasted each plant himself, followed by a cup of tea to neutralize any possible toxicity. (Don't try this. It only works for divine farmers.) He sensed the effect that each plant had on his qi and wrote it in the first edition of the *Shen Neng Ben Cao Jing* (Shen Neng's Classic of Herbal Medicine). The edition of the text we have today, dating to the Taoist alchemist Tao Hong-jing (452-536), remains an important source of information on tea. Tea is mentioned at least eight hundred years earlier in *Shi Jing* (The Classic of Poetry). The Daoist sage, Lao Zi, is also a patriarch of tea. When Lao Zi left China in search of the Dao, the customs officer offered him the first cup of ceremonial tea.

Divine Medicine

Tea is classified as sweet and bitter flavor and so benefits the spleen, stomach, heart, and small intestine. The green color of the natural leaf is associated with the liver. Tea promotes the function of the liver to spread and harmonize the qi. This is an important benefit for qigong students. The green teas are slightly cooling, black teas slightly warming. Thus, green teas are preferred in the summer, black teas in the winter. According to Dr. Ma Shouchun, of the Northwest Institute of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (Seattle), "Tea generates fluids, stops thirst, clears heat, eliminates toxins, dispels dampness, promotes urination, aids digestion, stops diarrhea, clears heart-fire, and raises the spirit." Some of the finest teas are the Before the Rains Teas, picked early in the spring before the rainy season. The Ben Cao says that these teas "absorb the fresh qi of springtime, strengthen the body's original qi and make the eyes bright and healthy." I would add that all fine teas induce a serene, calm state of mind, sensitive to the beauty of nature. These effects linger, like the taste of the tea. The better the tea,

the more the hui wei (literally "return flavor"), a delicious, lingering aftertaste. (Go ahead, mark this place and get yourself a cup of tea before continuing.)

Pu Erh, a semi-fermented Oolong tea from Yunan Province, is probably China's most famous medicinal tea. It has been drunk in Yunan and neighboring Tibet for at least a thousand years. The Pu Erh tealeaves are unusually broad and may be close to the most ancient species of tea plant. Pu Erh is characterized by a mellow, earthy taste, almost smoky or peatlike. In 1986, in Barcelona, Spain, the Ninth International Food Award was given to Yunan Tuo Cha, a type of Pu Erh. My qigong teacher, Dr. Wong, used to carry Pu Erh tea bags with him wherever he went. In Chinese restaurants he would ask for a pot of hot water and make the tea himself. Pu Erh is excellent for weight loss and digestion and promotes the break down of fatty or greasy food. It has also been scientifically demonstrated to lower cholesterol. There's still more. Tea strengthens the immune system. Researchers at the Fujian Institute of Traditional Medicine found that tea increased the activity of white blood cells in mice. Tea does the same in the human body. The Tea Research Institute in Hangzhou has even developed a tea extract to counter the immune-depressing effects of cancer radiation therapy. Tea is also antibacterial. In ancient China powdered green tea or chewed leaves were sometimes applied as external poultices to stop infection from wounds or insect bites. In vitro studies have suggested that powdered tea can inhibit the growth of staph, salmonella, cholera, dysentery, and other bacteria. Tea is also rich in nutrients, though the amount consumed in a cup of tea is naturally quite small. The tea leaf consists of 36 percent insoluble protein. Westerners rarely drink the leaf, unless sipping powdered tea in the Japanese Tea Ceremony. There are more efficient ways to get dietary protein. Similarly, tea has insoluble vitamin A (80 milligrams/100 grams) and chlorophyll (3 percent) not available to us in steeped tea and small amounts of vitamins B₁, B₂, niacin, and folic acid. There is enough manganese and iodine to account for some alleged antacid effects of tea. Green tea is fairly rich in vitamin C (250 micrograms of vitamin C/100 grams), black tea losing some of this vitamin during fermentation. An average cup of green tea (approximately one teaspoon of tea leaves) will release about six milligrams of vitamin C after steeping in water three times. Steeped tea also has significant amounts of potassium, about 58 milligrams in a cup of black tea. One reason for the different effects of coffee and tea is that even though both have caffeine, tea contains other substances that may change or mitigate the effects of the caffeine. Also, coffee contains significantly more caffeine than tea. An average cup of drip coffee has 100 milligrams caffeine; an average cup of American brands of (black) tea 50 milligrams--a little less than a can of Mountain Dew (54 milligrams). Green tea has even less caffeine, 22 milligrams in the average cup.

Nevertheless, some precaution must be observed when using this wonder drug. Never drink day-old tea that has been left standing in the cup or teapot. Tea must be fresh in order to have healing benefits. You may need to cut back on the amount of tea if you have insomnia, an irregular heartbeat, or are pregnant. Any drink with caffeine can also interact negatively with some drugs such as birth control pills, ulcer drugs, tranquilizers such as Valium, and antidepressants that are monoamine oxidase (MAO) inhibitors, such as Marplan. Basically, if you have any condition for which caffeine is contraindicated or if you are taking any medications, consult your physician about how much tea you can drink safely.

How To Make Tea: I prefer whole leaf tea that comes from one region, "single estate tea," rather than the crushed and blended teas that are used in tea bags. Fine whole leaf teas are picked by hand, two leaves plucked at a time--more than two thousand are required to make a pound of tea. I do not recommend Japanese "Bancha tea," a tea that is very popular with American students of natural healing. There is a mistaken belief that Bancha is a "tisane," an herbal tea rather than Tea. Bancha consists largely of old, dry, and brittle leaves--the waste left over after good tea is picked. According to Kida Taiichi, an authority on tea, bancha is composed of "discarded leaves and small twigs which were separated out during the process of refinement. Bancha is a general name for these lesser quality teas." If you are ordering tea by mail or fortunate enough to live near a fine tea shop, look for the following excellent teas: among the green teas, I like Japanese Sencha and the finer Jade Dew and Gyokuro. However, my favorites are some of the Chinese greens: Long Jing (Dragon Well Tea) from Hangzhou, China; the delicate scented Bi Lo Chun (Jade Spiral Spring); and Shou Mei (Longevity Eyebrow) or Bai Hao (White Down), both made with sun-dried tea buds. Among the Oolong teas look for the rich bouquet of Tung Ting from Taiwan, Pu Erh, Ti Kuan Yin, and Shui Xian from the Wuyi Mountains. There are excellent black teas imported from India, Southeast Asia, and China. These include Assam (often used in "Irish Breakfast" tea), Cameronian--a wonderful, fruity tea from the highlands of Malaysia--fine Darjeelings, and the slightly smoky liquor of Chinese Keemun Tea.

According to the eighth-century Tea Classic (Cha Jing), the best water for tea is from mountain springs and flowing mountain streams. The next best is river water far from human dwellings, followed by well water. In today's world, we need to modify this picture. The best water is from high mountain springs that have been thoroughly tested for chemical and organic contaminants, followed by pure well water, followed by filtered tap water that is allowed to run cold for at least thirty seconds.

Always heat water for tea in a stainless steel or pyrex kettle, never aluminum. Do not use fully boiled water for brewing green or semifermented teas. According to tea expert David Lee Hoffman, "Boiling water 'cooks' the leaves of these teas, destroying their flavor." The best water temperature for green tea is 160-170°F (70-75°C); for semifermented tea, 180-195°F (80-90°C). For black teas, the water should be "bubbling": nearly boiled. Use water at a full, rolling boil to brew Pu Erh tea. Pour water as soon as it is properly heated. According to ancient Chinese texts, water that is over boiled tastes dull and flat and loses its qi. Keep the water hot for subsequent infusions over very low heat or on a fondue burner. First, the simplest and most convenient way to make tea. I call it the Everyday Chinese Style. Use a tall ceramic cup, ideally the Chinese gaiwan that has a cover to keep the tea warm. If none is available, you can use a small dish to cover your cup while steeping. Place a teaspoon of tealeaves on the bottom. Fill the cup with hot water. The Leaves will float to the top. When the leaves have sunk back to the bottom, leaving behind their mellow color and aroma, the tea is ready. When you have finished the tea, add more hot water. Good tealeaves can be steeped three times before losing their flavor or fragrance. Often, the second steeping is the most delicious. If you have a tea in which the leaves have been ground into fine pieces or a coarse powder, then you will need a tea ball or strainer. If you are using these or tea bags, the rule is still one teaspoon or tea bag per cup of tea. Infuse for about three minutes, never more than five, as the tea will turn bitter. In Gong-Fu Tea you use a small pot half filled with tealeaves. The tea is drunk from very tiny teacups. The idea is not to drink a large amount of tea, but rather to truly savor the tea experience.

Essential Steps

- Thoroughly scald the cups and the outside of the teapot with hot water.
- Fill the pot about halfway with tealeaves. Always use a spoon, preferably wooden, to put in the tea, never your hands! (The oil from your hands can affect the taste and freshness of tea.) With practice, you will learn the right amount of leaves to use, so that when they expand they will not block the spout.
- Pour in the hot water, and within ten seconds pour this out as wastewater. That's right. The first time you add water is only to release some flavor from the leaves. Now you are ready to make tea.
- Again add the hot water. Put the lid on, place the teapot in the tea boat (the bowl), and pour more hot water over the lid, to seal in the heat and flavor. The bowl catches the hot water and keeps the pot hot. There should be one to one and a half inches of water in the bowl, depending on the size of your teapot.

- Steep the tea for a total of about one minute. Never stir the tea. Instead, when the tea is ready, pick up the teapot and make some small, leisurely circles with it around the rim of the tea boat. This will mix the liquid and ensure that there is a harmonious infusion of tea flavor and color.

- Pour the tea into your guests' cups. The remaining tea is poured into the decanter.

In the 1930s one of my Taoist teachers was traveling with his friend, a Buddhist priest, to the monastery of a Taoist sage who was known as Jian Xian, "the Sword Immortal." The monastery was located two days' journey into Holy Mount E Mei, in Sichuan Province. The first evening after their arrival, the master agreed to demonstrate "Taoist sex," to the delight of my teacher and the embarrassment of the celibate Buddhist.

The monastery was dark except for the light of two candles on the altar. The master sat on a chair as a female Taoist entered the room and sat across from him. They were both dressed in long, flowing robes that reached down to their ankles. They each closed their eyes and appeared to enter a state of deep quiet. Then, according to my teacher, there was a whooshing sound, like the wind, as light visibly flashed out of the master's genital area, toward the woman's jade gate, a moment later emerging from the woman's eyes and shooting across to the master's eyes. The light kept circulating in this way several times, and then it reversed direction. Out the master's eyes to the woman, emerging from her genital region across to the master, each time accompanied by the whooshing sound. With a twinkle in his eye, my teacher, a youthful ninety-year-old, exclaimed, "This is our Taoist sex. Energy circulates. They both smile. They are both happy. And not have to lose virginity!" It is also possible to practice sexual variations of the Small Heavenly Circulation meditation.

a) The woman contracts her jade gate, drawing in yang qi from the man. She circulates this qi through her Governing and Conception acupuncture meridians: up the back, along the spine, and over the crown, then down the front midline of the body, passing through the middle of the sternum, past the navel and genitals, and returning to the spine. The man can do the same, imagining that he is drawing in yin qi and cycling it. This can happen simultaneously or the energy can flow from one to the other: The woman draws qi from the man's "jade stalk," drives it up her back, down the front, and then asks the man to absorb the energy. He draws it from her jade gate into his organ, sends it around his circuit, and returns it to the woman. One continuous river of qi circulates between them.

b) The man drinks his partner's saliva, directing it down his Conception meridian and up his back. He then gives saliva to his partner. She similarly sends it down her front, up her back. She returns the saliva to the man. The cycle continues.

c) The man draws qi from the woman's jade gate into his jade stalk. He sends it up his back, over the crown, and then asks his partner to drink the energy. She drinks his saliva and sends it down her Conception meridian until it exits the jade gate again. The man again draws the sexual energy up his spine and sends it out his mouth. She drinks. The cycle continues for a while, and then reverses. This time the woman uses her jade gate to draw the man's yang qi. She sends it up her spine, over her crown, and out her mouth. The man drinks the energy, directs it down the front of his body, and sends it out his jade stalk. It continues circulating.

With some imagination, you can discover your own variations.