

The Healing Self-Care Practices of Tai Chi and Qigong



by Deborah Mason Marcantoni, HTCP

Our calling to energy healing is very gratifying and needed in this ever changing world. Healers are great givers of heart, energy and spirit in such degrees that we often neglect our own health, our own hearts and the nourishing of our own energy or qi (chi) and spirit (shen).

Our friend, founder and mentor, Janet Mentgen, was a great believer in self-care, and was always encouraging us to investigate new ways to nourish our body, mind and spirit. Self-care has always been a priority in my life, and yet 13 years ago, I learned the hard way how stress and emotions can cause healthy cells to become cancerous. In one short year I went from being the strongest, the most fit and healthy I had ever been, to being diagnosed with Stage 1 cervical cancer.

Eastern medicine recognizes the impact stress and emotions have on our health, in fact Chinese Medicine believes 80% of all illness is due to emotions that cause energy (qi) imbalances, stagnation and blockages.

Certainly there are genetic and environmental risk factors that predispose us to cancer, yet Chinese Medicine views cancer to be a disease caused by qi stagnation. In my case, the negative emotions of anger, fear and resentment towards my regional corporate position caused a major energy blockage and stagnation deep in the core of my body, just behind my heart center. I felt this tingling sensation between my shoulder blades for over a year before my diagnosis.

Energy blockages in the qi channels and meridians can cause shifts in the flow of qi to organs, tissues and cells. Our pumping hearts initiate the movement of blood, yet it is qi that “*moves, guides and leads*” the blood through the vast highways of arteries, veins and vessels, so nutrients, oxygen and wastes can be exchanged at the cellular level. When qi is blocked or inadequate, stagnation results, which does not allow cells to sustain normal healthy growth and maintenance.

In my case, I held the negative emotions in my heart center, which affected the proper function of not only my chakras, but also my conception vessel (Ren Mai), and my central (Chong Mai) and belt channels. The anger affected my liver and the fear affected my kidneys. My qi was further depleted from my lack of sleep, my exhaustion from 12-15 hour work days, and the lack of fresh whole foods when I was on the road. Neither my vegetarian diet for 28 years, nor my regular workouts at the gym for the previous 15 years was enough to keep the cancer at bay.

Two laser surgeries removed the cancer cells from my body, yet 9 months later the cells began to show dysplasia (abnormal tissue development). Healing had begun the first three months after surgery, yet I still had not found a way to manage my stress and transform the emotions of my heart.

So what made the difference in my healing process? The missing ingredients to strengthening my immune system and managing my stress and emotions were Tai chi and Qigong (Chi Kung). Twenty-four hours after my first surgery a simple

Qigong technique released the tingling blockage behind my heart center, and it released down my central core channel until it reached my cervix, where the energy seemed to disperse into the cells of my womb. The sensation was so powerful that my dog, who had his head in my lap, felt the release and jumped up!

Qigong began the deep healing and Tai Chi not only strengthened my body but also strengthened my immune system. Tai Chi also helped me to begin to handle the emotional stress and my response to that stress.

My initial training was in Tai Chi because it was easier to find a local teacher, yet I believe it was my Qigong training a year later that really set the stage for my deeper healing and understanding of how to take my Tai Chi and yoga practices further. Qigong and Tai Chi are simple, yet powerful healing tools! Qigong has become my passion and my greatest tool for self-transformation, while Tai Chi is my serene, -owing meditative dance.

Qigong dates back 5000-7000 years in Chinese culture. It is the yoga of China and yet it is different. In India, yoga is a "branch" of Ayurvedic Medicine, the physical branch of exercising, strengthening and stretching the body, that positively affects the energy (prana) and spirit of the body.

In China, Qigong is the "mother of all." In the beginning Qigong was a way of sensing, understanding, relating to and becoming one with nature, so life and health could be as balanced and harmonious as possible in the harsh times of ancient civilization.

Qigong is only a word, yet it encompasses many concepts and definitions. The ancient Chinese discovered the principles of energy in nature and themselves and from that came a philosophy of life and the initial constructs of their science and medicine. Energy exercise (Qigong practice) and herbs were the first medicine of the ancient Chinese for thousands of years before their science began to develop the roots of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM).

Qigong is "the mother" of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), Tai Chi, Kung Fu and Feng Shui. Qigong encompasses many concepts and principals that have impacted Chinese culture,

philosophy and science for thousands of years, and yet the purpose of Qigong exercise is quite simple –

It keeps man's connection to the spiritual essence of earth and universe (heaven) strong, and those essences would strengthen and balance the qi of man's body. Strong and balanced qi creates a strong and balanced body, mind, and spirit and that insures good health, wellness and longevity.

The benefits of Qigong and Tai Chi are as many as the hundreds of styles and forms that have developed over time. Qigong came first and the secrets of the forms were held dear to the families whose ancestors had discovered and developed them. Out of Qigong evolved the Kung Fu of the Shoaling monks. The traveling spiritual monks actually became the spiritual mentors and the physical protectors of the Chinese peasants with their martial art that kept their bodies and minds strong.

Tai Chi (Taiji Chuan), which is only 400-500 years old, came later. Tai Chi is a softer or more "yin" form of martial art practiced by monks, peasants and royalty alike. Although Tai Chi is practiced in a very slow and controlled manner, which quiets the mind, strengthens the body and balances the qi, it can be just as powerful as Kung Fu as a defense.

I have been a student and teacher of Qigong and Tai Chi for 13 years and it never ceases to amaze me how powerful these



Above: Holistic Healing and Health introduces Tai Chi to over 500 members of a naval carrier at the Puget Sound Naval Base in Bremerton, Washington. The captain of the ship demonstrates moves along with instructor Teenie Spiker.

simple exercise movements can be! Benefits can range from better sleep and less stress, to better balance and flexibility, to deeper healings from depression, emotional trauma, paralysis, tuberculosis and cancer.

Most students come to Tai Chi and Qigong to help manage stress and reduce acute and chronic symptoms of illness and disease. For many, physical and emotional relief and improvement in wellness are recognized in a few days or weeks. Even the most curious and casual of students can be helped in a short period of time.

Yet, for the more serious students who are diligent in their practice, it becomes evident that their Qigong and Tai Chi practices have an even deeper power to support their health and healing as it develops their “*shen*,” their spiritual essence. A well developed and strong shen supports the qi of all organs, tissues and cells, and is the ultimate goal of deeper forms of Qigong. The masters tell us that in the beginning we have to “*work at our Qigong practice*.” Our *work* is to take the time to first learn it and then do it. Our work is to give Qigong and Tai Chi a chance to make a difference in our health and lives. Then one day we may find we are no longer “*working*” at our Qigong, and realize that our Qigong is, as the Chinese say, “*working us!*” Without our conscience effort our practices begin to work us differently, as if there is a higher consciousness that knows exactly what we need that day as the qi and shen are guided to make a “*specific*” difference or change in us. This is when we really begin to experience the power of Qigong practice!

My studies and practice of Qigong have taken me further in my human transformation than I ever imagined possible, and in that unforeseen transformation my soul has been touched and transformed! First I healed my body and emotional heart, and as my qi and body became strong and balanced, my “*shen*” (spirit) began to strengthen and transform. Together, the physical and spiritual strength began to allow “*healing gifts*” to rise and unfold, which has made an amazing difference in my Healing Touch clinical practice.

Whatever your personal and professional needs and desires are, your self-care is a “*critical*” piece to support their manifesting in your life! Beware of the many distractions and “*the to do’s*” in your life, do not allow them to impede your caring for

yourself. Begin to make “*yourself a priority*,” for you are worth it and you deserve it! As you become healthier and happier, the guilt you once felt about taking time for yourself will disappear. You will begin to understand how your self-care nourishes your body, mind and spirit and how it makes you a stronger healer and a more fulfilled human.

About the author:

Deborah Marcantoni, a Healing Touch Certified Practitioner since 2000, is the owner and director of Holistic Healing and Health in Silverdale, WA where her clinical practice offers Healing Touch, Energetic Healing and Healing Qigong. Her Healing Qigong training began in 1996, and took her to China (1999) to study Medical Qigong in Beijing hospitals, with 11 years of additional training programs in the U.S. with teachers, masters and TCM doctors. Deborah, who will complete her 6-year Masters program in Healing Qigong in July 2009, is also a Certified Senior Qigong Instructor, Certified Tai Chi Instructor, Certified Yoga Instructor, Certified Personal Trainer and Fitness Instructor, and Certified Nutrition Specialist. She can be contacted at www.holistichealingandhealth.com.