

Medical Qigong Level 1 Basic Qigong Theory

Introduction—the Importance of Knowing Qigong Theory

Our Qigong Master, Dr. Yang Jwing Ming, stresses that a Qigong practitioner must know not only the Qigong exercises but also the theory of Qigong. If you understand the theory, you understand how to improve practice. When you practice any Qigong you must first ask, “What, Why, and How?” “What” means: “What am I looking for?” and “What do I expect?” and “What should I do?” Then you must ask, “Why do I need it?” “Why must I do it this way instead of that way?” Finally you must determine, “How does it work?” “How much have I advanced toward my goal?” and “How will I be able to advance further?”¹ Understanding is the root of any work. With understanding you will be able to know your goal. Once you know your goal, your mind can be firm and steady.

The qigong view of a human being. According to Traditional Chinese Medicine [TCM], the living human body consists of three parts. The Yang part is the physical body, which manifests the life (activity) of the body. The Yin part is the inner energy, which nourishes the physical body and keeps it alive. The refined product of the Yin and Yang parts is the spiritual or mental body. These three parts are mutually related and cannot be separated.²

No matter what kind of Qigong you practice, in order to have a long healthy life you must give equal emphasis to the Yin side of Qigong practice, which promotes smooth Qi circulation and a high level of Qi storage in the body, and the Yang side of physical training, which maintains physical strength and a healthy body condition.

Basic Definitions and Concepts

Qi

The energy or natural force, which fills the universe. Qi can be defined as any type of energy, which is able to demonstrate power and strength: electricity, magnetism, heat, and light. Except possibly for gravity, electromagnetic energy is the only type of energy in the universe. Electromagnetic energy includes light and heat. Chinese refer to Qi in its narrow definition as the Qi that affects our health and longevity, i.e. human Qi. The ancient character for Qi was the word nothing on top of the word for fire, meaning no fire, Qi is harmonized. Too little or too much Qi causes “fire” in the body. More recently the character for Qi has been changed to the word air over the word rice, acknowledging that after we are born, the Qi circulating in our bodies comes mainly from the air we breathe and the food we eat.

Types of Qi. Heaven Qi is made up of the forces, which heavenly bodies exert on the earth such as sunshine, moonlight, and the moon’s effect on the tides. Under heaven Qi is Earth Qi, which is influenced and controlled by Heaven Qi. It is made up of lines and patterns of energy, the Earth’s magnetic field, and heat inside the Earth. Finally within

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Earth Qi, each individual person, animal, and plant has its own Qi field, which always seeks to be balanced. All natural things, including Humans, grow within and are influenced by Heaven Qi and Earth Qi. Human Qi is usually considered a separate type of Qi different from Earth Qi and the Qi of plants and animals.

Qigong.

Any training or study dealing with Qi that takes a long time and effort. The narrow definition of Qigong is “the study or practice of circulating the Qi in the human body.” Today Qigong consists of the fields acupuncture, herbal treatment, martial arts Qigong, Qigong massage, Qigong exercises, Qigong healing, and religious enlightenment Qigong.

Actually any activity that is able to regulate the Qi circulation in the body is a Qigong practice. This covers a range of activity from jogging or walking, which require little mental involvement to still meditation, which involves almost exclusively mental activity. The best exercises for maintaining health are in the middle of this range where you can learn how to regulate both your physical body and your mind.

Bioenergy.

The term bioenergy describes Qi more accurately than the term bioelectricity because it includes both bioelectricity and biomagnetic energies.

Qi circulation system.

Qi circulates through the human body via eight vessels and 12 meridians. The vessels are like reservoirs or super highways. The meridians are like rivers or two-lane roads. In addition there are luos, which are like streams or country lanes, that distribute Qi like capillaries distribute blood.

In Qigong we are concerned primarily with two vessels—the Governing Vessel, which is situated in the center of the back of the torso, and the Conception Vessel, which is situated in the center of the front of the torso. These two vessels supply Qi to the 12 meridians. The vessels connect at the bottom of the torso at the Hui Yin point (Conception Vessel 1) and at the mouth. In Qigong practice, we hold the tongue at the roof of the mouth to strengthen the connection between the Governing and Conception Vessels.

The twelve meridians are linked to these two vessels. The meridians for the six Yang organs are linked to the Governing Vessel and the meridians for the six Yin organs are linked to the Conception Vessel.

It is not clear how the Qi circulation system is related to the blood, nervous, and lymphatic systems. Chinese medicine believes Qi and blood are closely related: Qi provides the energy for blood cells to survive and blood helps to transport air Qi to the cells of the body.

Wisdom Mind (Yi).

The mind related to wisdom and judgment. When Yi has an idea, it strives to bring it to actualization in the physical world as either an event you will seek to bring about or an object you will create. The Yi is focused and firmed by the will

Emotional Mind (Hsin).

Hsin literally means heart. While Hsin also denotes the presence of an idea, this idea is much weaker than that expressed in Yi. If someone says he has Hsin to do something, this means his emotions intend to do it, he has within him the desire to do it, but he may lack the strength of resolve to actually commit himself.

Dan Tian (Elixir Field).

Three spots are considered Dan Tian. Medical qigong is most concerned with the Lower Dan Tian. It is located in the center of the lower abdomen on a level about two inches below the navel. This is the “Real Lower Dan Tian.” Sometimes the point Qi Hai, located on the Conception Vessel one and one-half inch below the navel is incorrectly identified as the Lower Dan Tian. The Real Lower Dan Tian works like a battery because of the sandwiching of electrically conductive muscle tissue lining the intestines with electrically insulating mesentery and other casings.

Yin Organs

The six Yin organs are the Heart, Lungs, Kidneys, Spleen, Liver, and Pericardium. The Yin organs store Original Essence and process the essence obtained for food and air.

Yang Organs.

The six Yang organs are the Large Intestine, Small Intestine, Stomach, Gall Bladder, Urinary Bladder, and Triple Burner. These organs handle the digestion and excretion.

Wai Dan Qigong

Wai Dan means external elixir. Qigong and martial arts training which emphasizes developing the muscles, with build up of Qi in the limbs. This type of training builds Qi at the skin surface or in the limbs as opposed to the torso or the center of the body, which includes the vital organs. Exercises like walking or dancing can build the Qi potential in the limbs to a high enough level to clear obstructions when it flows into the center of the body to nourish the organs. This is the main reason why a person who exercises or has a physical job is generally healthier than someone who sits all day. Other methods of building the Qi externally (on the surface of the skin or in the limbs) include massage, acupuncture, and herbal treatments.

Keys to Qigong Training

Regulating the Body (Tyau Shenn).

The Meaning of Regulating

The Chinese character for regulating, Tiao, is made up of two characters Yan, which means “speaking or negotiating” and Zhou, which means “to be complete, to be perfect, or to be round.” The meaning of Tiao means to adjust or tune up something until it is complete and harmonious with others. Tiao means to coordinate and to harmonize with others by continuing adjustment.

Regulating means to adjust and tune constantly until the goal is reached but the real regulation happens only when you don't need to consciously regulate. This is called the regulation of no regulation. An example is like how you drive a car after you have learned how and are well experienced. Regulating the body means to adjust your body until it is in the most comfortable and relaxed state. Your body must be centered and balanced. If it is not, you will be tense and uneasy, which will affect your Yi and the circulation of your Qi. When you are tense, your oxygen consumption increases.

Regulation of the body therefore begins with regulation of your mind Yi and Hsin. Your Yi must first be relaxed and calm, then it can control the emotional mind and let it relax, too. Finally, when the peaceful Yin and Hsin will coordinate with your breathing, and your physical body will relax.

Regulating the body means to find and build the root in the forms you are practicing. To build a firm root you must know how to keep your center, how to balance your body, and most importantly, how to relax so that the Qi can flow.

Feeling is the key to regulating. The deeper and the more sensitively you are able to feel the more profoundly you will be able to regulate. Conversely, the deeper you are able to regulate, the more profoundly you can feel.

Three levels of relaxation

1. Look relaxed. The first is the external physique or posture. It consists in adopting a comfortable stance and avoiding unnecessary strain in posture or movement. Although you look relaxed, you are still tense internally. Your mind must first relax in order for you to reach this “looking relaxed” state, but it does not have to reach a very deep level. Almost everyone can reach this state.

2. Feel relaxed. The second level of relaxation is relaxing the muscles and tendons. Your meditative mind must be calm and peaceful enough to feel deep into the muscles and tendons. Then your mind will be able to feel the Qi flow in the muscles and tendons. This level will help open your Qi channels and allow the Qi to sink and accumulate in the Dan Tian.

3. Be able to sense the organs and bone marrow. This is the highest level of relaxation. It is necessary to be able to achieve mind-body communication (listening and feeling Jin in Taijiquan). The third stage is relaxation of the internal organs, bone marrow, and every pore in your skin. Your Yi must have reached a very deep level of calmness and peace to sense the organs and marrow.

The Purposes of Regulating the Body

1. To find the most naturally relaxed and comfortable posture or position for meditation. This will allow the Qi to flow freely with the breathing natural and smooth and with the mind relaxed and focused so the Shen can be raised to a higher level.
2. To provide the best conditions for self-internal feeling. The efficiency of your mind-body communication will increase to a high level. It is through this profound feeling that your mind is able to lead the Qi to circulate effectively in the body.
3. To coordinate and harmonize the physical and mental center.

Relaxation Practice

Can be done anytime, anywhere, in any posture. The first step is to relax the mind. Only when your mind is relaxed will your body start to relax and your lungs loosen. This in turn will slow down your heartbeat and help your mind reach an even deeper level of relaxation. And so on.

Relaxation of the Mind: The first step is to concentrate on your third eye and bring all your thoughts from the outside world into your body. Let your thoughts be calm and peaceful so that you can concentrate your mind on relaxing. The second step is to relax your concentrated mind. While your mind may be clear, it may still be tense from concentrating so you must learn to concentrate without concentrating. When your mind is tense, your body will also be tense. Concentrate your mind on your breathing and on the sensation of your lungs expanding and contracting. Every time you exhale, feel your body relax to a deeper level.

Relaxing Your Breathing: Once the mind is calm and peaceful, breathing can be independent of thought. First neutralize the effect your emotional mind has on your breathing by calming and relaxing the mind. Next you must learn to relax all the muscles involved in breathing. Bring your calm and concentrated mind to your chest. As you breathe, pay attention to how the muscles of the diaphragm move. The more you can feel them the more your Yi will be able to lead the relaxation to a deeper level. As you do this breathing training, you will notice that the area around your solar plexus will start loosening up. When your chest is loose, you have reached the fundamental stage of relaxation.

Relaxing the Body: Relaxing the body is the first step in regulating the body. The body must be relaxed to be able to sense the body's center and balance. Relaxation involves the muscles, skin, organs, and bone marrow. Relaxing the organs and marrow is the most difficult because your mind does not communicate directly with them. You must be able to relax all of these to let the Qi flow freely and smoothly. Then you will be able to lead the Qi and feel that your body is transparent.

Postures for Relaxation Practice: There is no relaxation posture that is good for every part of the body. Whatever posture you use, some part of the body will be tense or pressed. The postures should feel comfortable and natural and your body should be centered and balanced. Consider if the surface you are lying or sitting on is too hard. Lying is a good posture for beginners; since you don't have to pay attention to your root, center, and balance, it is easier to regulate your mind. The disadvantage of lying is that your back muscles will be pressed down by your weight, which restricts their ability to loosen. When you become familiar with the relaxation exercises, you should also learn to relax while you are sitting.

Rooting, Centering, and Balancing

Regulation of the body includes seeking its root, center, and balance. Every posture has its unique way of rooting determined by its purpose or principle. To create a firm root for a posture, you must "image" the intent of the posture. To "image" means to adjust your posture exactly as if you were carrying out the intent of the movement. If the posture's intent is to move Qi to the palms with a forward push, for example, you must adjust your posture exactly as if you were pushing something heavy. You must feel its weight and resistance as you exert force against it, and realize the force and counterforce in your legs. If you mentally treat the action as real, your body will too, and the Qi will automatically move appropriately for those actions. If you only pretend that you are pushing something heavy, your mind and body will not treat your actions as real, and the Qi will not move strongly or clearly.

Before you can develop a root, you must first relax and let the body settle. Dissolve the tension and find a comfortable way to stand. You must learn to rely on your body's structure for support so the body will stop struggling to stand upright and your Yi will not be pushing upward. This lets mind, body and Qi sink and the muscles to relax even more.

To root, your body must imitate a tree and grow an invisible root beneath your feet. Your Yi must be able to communicate with the ground, this means being able to feel or sense the ground, noticing whether it is soft or hard, how flat the ground is, how slippery it is. Eventually you will start to feel your Yi leading your Qi into the ground.

Keeping the body's center. Once you have gained your root, you must learn how to keep the body's center. This includes the mind's center and the physical body's center. A stable center will make your Qi develop evenly and uniformly.

Once you have built your root, you can consider being centered and balanced. When you are centered physically, a vertical line from your center of mass falls between your feet, so your root comfortably supports your weight.

Being mentally centered is a matter of feeling. If you are mentally balanced, you can be physically balanced even when you are not physically centered. When you stand, try changing your stance slightly so that your physical stance becomes less centered and less stable, and practice maintaining your balance and stability mentally.

Regulating the Breath (Tyau Shyi)

When you have relaxed your body to the stage of regulating without regulating, then you should pay attention to the breathing. When the breathing is correctly regulated, the mind can lead the Qi effectively and efficiently. Breathing methods were considered top secret in many styles. You must learn how to breathe so that your respiration and your mind mutually correspond and cooperate. When you breathe this way, your mind will be able to attain peace more quickly, and therefore concentrate more easily on leading the Qi. Breathing is affected by your emotions. For example, when you are sad, you inhale more strongly than exhale. Therefore, in order to regulate your breathing, you must first regulate your mind.

Breathing is crucial in Qigong. Brain cells use 12 times the amount of oxygen as other types of cells. Oxygen is also needed for replacement of all types of cells. Tension depletes the body's oxygen levels. It is also a key to maintaining your youth. Normally when the average person exhales, the Qi expands and goes from the primary channels to the skin. When he inhales, the Qi draws inward from the primary channels and into the bone marrow. As a person ages, their breathing normally becomes shorter and shorter. Therefore less Qi flows to the skin and bone marrow and the skin starts to wrinkle and the hair turns gray and falls out.

Purposes in Regulating the Breath

To take in oxygen sufficiently and smoothly and also to expel carbon dioxide efficiently. To provide an ample supply of Oxygen for cell reproduction. In addition dead cells must be expelled in the form of CO₂. One trillion (10¹²) cells die each day in the human body and must be replaced.

Relaxing and deepening the breath also helps with the regulation of the body and mind in a mutually reinforcing cycle. Relaxed breathing helps relax the mind and body, and as the mind and body relax, the breathing can become deeper and more relaxed.

Steps in Regulating the Breath

In the first stage, your breath must be become calm, smooth, and peaceful. You must first regulate your emotional mind to bring it to a peaceful and calm state. In this stage, inhalation and exhalation will be relatively equal. Mental calmness in turn deepens calmness of the breath.

The next stage is to make your breathing deep, slender, long (slow), and soft. You can achieve this stage after considerable training. It should become comfortable. You should enjoy it.

Methods of Qigong Breathing

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1. **Natural Breathing** begins by regulating the way you normally breathe without attempting to change over to Qigong type breathing. Choose any comfortable posture. Do not try to control your breathing, but pay attention and feel it. Inhale and exhale smoothly with the lungs relaxed. Breathe through your nose softly and gently. Train your natural breathing to be calm, slender, deep, continuous, and uniform. Work on this until you can regulate your normal breathing without conscious effort and with the body relaxed. Your heart rate will slow. You may practice in any comfortable position. Practice until “real regulation” has been achieved. “Real regulation” means regulating without regulating, i.e. you have created a natural habit.

The experience gained now in regulating your normal breathing will be very useful when you try more difficult styles of breathing. Keep your lungs relaxed and calm. Use only about 80% of your lungs’ capacity. When you inhale to full capacity, the muscles around your lungs will tense.

2. **Chest Breathing.** Is breathing by expanding and contracting the rib cage with the abdomen moving up and down only slightly. Chest breathing is used in external martial arts, weight lifting, and deep sea diving because it expands the capacity of the lungs and allows you to hold your breath longer. External martial arts use this method of breathing to take in additional air Qi and then to lead to the Qi to the muscles when exhaling. There are advantages to using chest breathing from time to time. You will enliven the cells in the parts of the lungs that are not commonly used and keep them from degenerating. Heavy chest breathing increases the supply of Air Qi so that you can send a lot of Qi to the skin. This helps to open the tiny Qi channels in the skin and strengthens your Guardian Qi. When you practice Chest Breathing, keep your mind and chest muscles relaxed.
3. **Normal Abdominal Breathing NAB** (aka Dan Tian Breathing or Back to Childhood Breathing (Faan Torng) or Buddhist Breathing). NAB is the next step after chest breathing for the Qigong beginner. NAB involves slow, deep breaths that seem to go down to your Dan Tian. In NAB the lungs are expanded and contracted by the muscles of the diaphragm and abdomen rather than the chest. The breath must be smooth, natural, and continuous. Do not hold your breath.

Naturally you must first concentrate on your abdomen at the beginning to control the abdominal muscles. After achieving “real regulation,” you are ready to build up Qi at the False Lower Dan Tian (Qihai CO 6). Once you have reached this level, you should coordinate your breathing with the Huiyin and anus. Gently hold up the Huiyin and anus but do not tighten them. When you achieve “real regulation” you will feel a wonderful comfortable feeling in the Huiyin and anus. You will also feel that the Qi is led more strongly to the skin than when you were doing chest breathing.

NAB has the following benefits.

- a. Increases the lungs’ capacity by allowing the diaphragm to drop lower, creating more space for the lungs.

- b. Internal organ massage by the muscles of the diaphragm and the lower abdomen increases the flow of Qi and blood in and around the organs helping them to stay healthy.
- c. Invigorating the abdominal muscles, which loosens the Qi channels and vessels in the area.
- d. Helps lead the Qi from the kidneys to the lower Dan Tian and keep it there.
- e. Massages the three glands of the abdominal area—pancreas, adrenals, and testicles or ovaries. This is also true of RAB. This massage promotes the production of hormones. When the hormone level is high, body functions operate efficiently and cell replacement occurs smoothly. Hormone level also effects the efficiency of conversion of fat into Qi. The likelihood of developing kidney stones decreases.

Since you are relaxed when doing NAB, the majority of the Qi circulates in the primary Qi channels, which connect the internal organs to the extremities, and does not enter the Qi capillaries, the lou, to energize the muscles. Since the majority of Qi is not led away from the primary Qi channels, the physical body is not energized and remains relaxed. Therefore NAB is able to bring a beginner to a state of deep relaxation.

Train NAB for six months, until it occurs naturally. Then you can begin training Reverse Abdominal Breathing.

Regulating the Mind (tyau hsin)

Regulating the mind involves learning how to keep you mind calm, peaceful, and centered, so that it can judge situations objectively and lead the Qi to the desired places. The mind is the main key to success in Qigong practice.

Regulating the mind in scholar and medical Qigong practitioners aim for a calm, peaceful, and harmonious mind so that the emotional mind will not disturb the body's Qi circulation. For religious groups, the aim was also Buddhahood and enlightenment. Finally, marital artists aim to raise the Spirit of Vitality and build up a highly concentrated mind to develop a sense of enemy. No matter what goals each school is aiming at, the basic training rules and principles remain the same and they follow the same training path.

Regulating your mind means using your wisdom mind to regulate your emotional mind. The emotional mind Hsin is like the ape or monkey, always running around. You have to put it on a leash and train it so that, although it is still emotional and excitable, it is now under your control. The wisdom mind Yi is like a horse which is strong and very useful, but which still has to be trained and harnessed before it can be used. Once the horse is tamed and trained, it can be calm, steady, and peaceful. The wisdom mind does not fully develop until you are in your 20's. Until then, your emotional mind dominates. When the Yi is strong, the Qi is strong, and when the Yi is weak, the Qi is also weak. The first secret of a strong Yi is calmness.

Purposes of regulating the mind. First, to harmonize the body and the mind the first step in regulating the mind is to calm the body. Only when the emotional mind is calm, and thus the body is calm, can the wisdom mind function efficiently. Second, to harmonize the breathing and the mind. In order to lead the monkey into a cage to restrain it, you need a banana. This banana is the control of the breathing. As long as you are able to concentrate your mind on your breathing, sooner or later your emotional mind will be restrained and calm down. When your breathing is long, slender, soft, and calm, your mind will be calm. The mind and breathing mutually affect each other. They must work together harmoniously in order for you to reach a high state of meditation.

The mind's connection to the spirit. Frequently the mind bothers or enslaves you to the desire for material enjoyment or money. From this desire, you misunderstand the meaning of life. A really happy life comes from satisfaction of both material and spiritual needs. Have you ever thought about the real meaning of your life? What is the real goal of your life? Are you enslaved by money, power, or love? What will make you truly happy? You are the only one responsible for your happiness.

Work on attaining the state of "Thought of no thought." In this state your mind does not think of the past, present, or future. It is completely separated from influence of the present such as worry, happiness, and sadness. Then your mind will be calm and steady, and you can finally gain peace. Once you have reached the stage of "no thought," your mind is clear enough to sense things accurately. You have to be able to sense things clearly inside your body before you can direct the circulation of Qi and nourish your Shen.

Both of the minds generate ideas, which can become thoughts. Most of these ideas last only a short time and do not remain in your consciousness. Others remain in your consciousness and affect your thinking. When this happens, the idea becomes a thought. A thought will continue to affect your thinking and decision-making, and often disturb your emotions. This matured thought is called Niann. For example, when you hear something sad which upsets you, your emotional mind has grasped an idea, which causes an emotional reaction in it. If this state of mind persists and continues to upset you emotionally, it has become a thought.

The Yi is also able to generate thoughts. They are usually calm, wise thoughts that do not disturb you emotionally or mentally. What usually happens, however, is that the idea, which the Yi has generated, is taken over by the Hsin. For example, from your Yi you generate the idea that you should get up at six o'clock in the morning for Qigong practice. However, when morning comes, your emotional laziness has conquered the idea, which was originally generated from Yi, and you decide to sleep in. This new idea of laziness is generated from Hsin. Once you finally get up, you feel guilty and sorry for yourself. If this emotional, conscious feeling persists, then it is a thought Hsin Niann. Generally in Qigong practice, it is the emotional mind and thoughts, which disturb and slow down your cultivation. Therefore regulating the mind in Qigong society usually means regulating the emotional mind.

Regulating the Hsin means to cut down on the amount of ideas generated from your emotional feelings, and to disperse thoughts (Niann) which formed from Hsin concerning your past, present, and future. If you want to stop the thoughts from being produced, you must find the

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source of the Hsin and Niann. The Buddhists believe that emotional feelings are generated by attachment to the seven emotions and the six sensory pleasures. The seven emotions are happiness, anger, sorrow, joy, love, hate, and desire. The sensory pleasures are derived from the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind.

The first step in regulating the Hsin is to inspect or look at your Hsin. You must investigate yourself and come to understand yourself. Withdrawal all your attention from the outside world and concentrate it wholly on your inner world. When you have found the roots of your emotional disturbance, you will start to regulate your Hsin.

Steps in Regulating the Mind

The most difficult part of regulating the mind is learning how to neutralize the thoughts that keep coming back to bother you. This is especially true in still meditation. Once you have entered a deep meditative state, new thoughts, fantasies, your imagination, or any guilt from the past that is hidden behind your mask will emerge and disturb you.

The first step in the process of regulating the mind is to stop new fantasies and images. Then you must deal with your conscious mind. This means you must remove the mask from your face. Only then will you see yourself clearly. Next you must learn how to handle the problems that arise from looking behind your mask rather than continuing to avoid them.

Reading

The requirements for Level I include understanding of what Qi is, how Qi is created, stored, and circulated in the human body. These are covered in *The Essence of Tai Chi Chi Kung*, pp. 20-26. [pp. 18-24 in the new edition]

¹ The Essence of Taiji Qigong, p. 24.