

Liang Gong

A multi dimensional workout

Each of the myriad qigong forms unleashed from China's storebox in our time has its special appeal. There are very simple, gentle forms which perhaps suit beginners, elderly people and those weakened by long illness. There are fairly strenuous programmes such as the Five Animals that are fun for younger, fitter individuals to perform.

Liang Gong comes somewhere in between. It starts gently with soft neck turns and arm openings and then very gradually develops into a whole body workout that challenges our balance and stretches our suppleness to new limits.

It guides us through our bodies and also through our meridian systems opening limbs and joints, activating back and spine but also channels and points in the traditional acupuncture system. By the time we are finished with the moves we are feeling refreshed and revitalised, standing comfortably in expanded physical shells and overflowing with energy into our etheric bodies.

The final section we will practice is a creation of my own, which consists of a three-part marrow washing ritual, a cleansing manoeuvre and a final move to draw light through the energy centres of the chakra system.

Come and join us for a multi-dimensional workout!

The Five Animals

Probably the most entertaining and challenging qigong in the World

*Breathing out the old and taking in the new,
Walking like a bear and stretching the neck like a bird.
This is what cultivators of the body and those searching for long life enjoy.*

Chuang Zi, circa 300 BCE.

The Five Animals is probably the most entertaining and challenging qigong form in the world. It is detailed, varied and demanding, which elevates the long-term enjoyment factor to an extremely high level. The form is a traditional one, and is said to have its origins in the animal impersonations transmitted to Hua Tou, one of Chinese medicine's most legendary and colourful characters.

Hua Tou is credited with detailed knowledge of esoteric herbal formulas for longevity and wisdom. He is also famous for his early experiments with surgery - long before the art was developed in the West. He even has a set of acupuncture points running alongside the spine named after him!

Legend has it that he received this set of animal movements - more likely a somewhat simpler one - from the daoist recluses in their mountain caves. It became his gift to mankind with this advice: *keep your joints open and your muscles soft and filled with flowing energy.*

This programme certainly gives us the necessary tools to do exactly that.

The Four Seas

A Voyage of Discovery

In the dead of mid-winter 2013, a small group of experienced and dedicated acupuncture practitioners gathered for a winter retreat. As instructor and observer, I paid close attention to the atmosphere produced by the ongoing acupuncture treatments.

Gradually I noticed that my body was producing autonomic reactions – spontaneous, automatic movements and touch stimulation, specific to and characteristic of each sea and identifiable within the general domain of qigong and do-in.

The Sea of Marrow generated a deep bedrock of silent attention - a state of quiet, detached contemplation, wholly undisturbed by emotion or thought; a condition of deep rest and silent, non-judgemental contemplation – like resting in the deep, dark silence of the ocean floor.

The Sea of Blood although still deep and restful, is inhabited by a more obviously emotional energy content. Here we find deeply stored emotional memory. Activating this sea can assist old and ingrained muscular patterns, still in need of repair and rehabilitation, to rise to the surface.

The Sea of Nourishment consists of a slow, almost immobile sequence of touch sensations and postures, a total and conscious experience of the para-sympathetic state. The aspect of movement is almost entirely absent. In the one standing posture, a forward bend, we let the breath to do the work and allow the stretch to take care of itself as the earth pulls us towards its core. We generate a cocoon of security; entirely contained within a feeling of enclosed and protected warmth, we find sensations and images associated with comfort, rest and trust; a warm, relaxed and internally oriented feeling of simple and complete enjoyment.

The Sea of Qi by contrast is spritely and dynamic, lithe and nimble. Here we create a light, youthful and playful energy. The movements are distinct and vigorous. They seem to centre around activating the breath and strengthening the functional connection between the lungs and kidneys. They demonstrate the joyful elasticity of the sympathetic state, when it is freed from stress and the stimulation of threat and danger: the alert, inquisitive mood of a child.

Join me in a celebration of the depths of human experience.

Reeling Silk

Supreme adaptability

A phrase redolent of ancient Chinese culture.

Shades of meaning overlap and dissolve into each other.

Historical allusions fade in and out, lending flavour and giving dimensions to our practice.

Silk, the most precious of materials; cool in the heat, warm in the cold. Supremely adaptable.

Reeling - a motion of smoothly pulling in and releasing out, suggesting graceful and powerful movement, with no tension and no resistance.

Reeling silk is the skill of deception, disguise, camouflage, of hiding the obvious in plain sight.

Reeling Silk is the base, the fundamental practice at the heart of the traditional martial art Taiji Chuan. Without it we have no art. Without it we have no power and no softness. Without it our movements remain weak, wooden and predictable.

Seven simple movements is all the set contains.

Never confuse simple with easy, however.

They are not even related.

Taiji Qigong

Soft and rounded, gentle and pleasant

Taiji Qigong with its flow and choreography of is one of my favourites for experiencing the flow of vital energy in a smooth and comfortable way. It moves the body through a variety of relatively undemanding positions and movement sequences.

It provides an excellent opportunity for movement, though not strenuous movement - it has hardly any stretches and is very soft and quite fluid. It helps us both to settle into our bodies and expand into our energy fields. Participants enjoy the feeling of expanding and contracting, grounding and flying.

The movements, being soft and rounded, gentle and pleasant, make it very easy to feel Qi in and around the physical body. This makes it a great reinforcer for the practitioner on days of doubt: What am I doing? What is Qi? All this is pointless! There is no scientific proof for any of this stuff and a hundred other mantras of uncertainty. It also makes it an excellent form to teach beginners, who can then get an easy first taste of the Qi sensation - once tasted forever changed.