

Stillness within Movement

&

Movement between Movements

When we practice qigong certain things are immediately important.

We need to find our centre - we call this dan tian and begin to orientate our movements around this centre, sometimes standing for minutes at a time to get used to feeling stable and secure there.

We need to get used to feeling our breath and allowing it to become regular and focused but also relaxed and even. It gradually lengthens and we begin to feel the way the breath combines with our movements, lending them power and grace.

We also need to get used to the feeling of being deeply rooted in our feet - to steadily develop our connexion to the earth - to send roots down into the earth. This gives our stability another dimension and adds confidence to our standing and moving.

We learn the moves, the choreography of our form. Gradually, as we practice and repeat the moves, we move beyond thinking and start to improve our coordination.

Once we have reached this stage two more things become important.

We begin to look at the stillness within our movements and the movements in between the movements.

When we move we do so with all of our ingrained habits from a life of sitting in chairs, breathing in our chests and moving from our shoulders. The muscular habits we have developed over the decades do not simply dissolve all by themselves. We need to connect deep within our bodies and find stillness and relaxation there.

This makes us aware of unnecessary movements caused by tension within certain muscle groups, which should have no involvement at all in our movements. The art of finding stillness within our movements is exactly this - detecting and eliminating superfluous tension and thereby increasing smoothness.

Then we come to the intriguing question of what happens in between our movements. Do we come to an abrupt halt and stand stiffly then equally stiffly begin our next movement? Or do we feel the internal dynamics of the movements and create flow even when the movements themselves are in hiatus. What are the internal dimensions of qigong? Where is the subtle shifting of weight from left to right and back? Where the rolling of weight from the heels to the balls of the feet and toes? Where is the sinking to earth and the rising to heaven? Where our expansion into the atmosphere and our reabsorption back into the marrow?

These finer aspects of qigong are what truly make our forms not only powerful but also graceful. They are also the very aspects which carry our qigong practice into our everyday life and propel the effects deeply into our cellular and muscle memory.

Gathering and Release

Qigong for building strength and releasing tension

My teacher and mentor Peter Yates likes to say that Qigong is the mother of all the oriental healing modalities. Why does he say this?

First of all he has a strong belief – one which I myself have seen the proof of – that a regular qigong practice is the ideal preparation for the many challenges involved in caring for and treating other people. It is much more difficult to stay with the healer's path if you do not have some kind of safety net and ventilation shaft – just two of the many functions qigong provides for the committed practitioner.

Secondly and more fundamentally, qigong reveals itself gradually as a goldmine of archetypal polarities – this being another way of describing the attributes of yin and yang of course. One of the polarity pairs which, over time, makes itself known during the practice of qigong is that of gathering strength and releasing tension.

When we consider the human being as an energy field centred around a physical structure, two things become extremely important to pay attention to. One is that there are no obvious holes in the field and the other is that everything that is within the field actually belongs there.

When there are gaps in the field two things can happen. One is that vital energies can leak out and the other is that noxious energies can seep in. Qigong strengthens and tones the energy flows so that they are capable of bending, stretching and expanding to fill the entire field - from the very cells of the marrow to the outer reaches of the etheric aura. It also makes the boundaries of the field tensile and elastic so that only desirable energy forms from the outside world are granted access to the field.

As regards the purity and strength of the energy within the field itself, it turns out that qigong is specifically designed to rinse, sift and harmonise the contents of the field to produce a steady and resilient total field. This results in a human being who is capable of both intense bouts of activity as well as prolonged work in long sittings.

The optimal result of our qigong practice seen through this lens is then a situation where we are in control of the contents of our field, where we consciously partake of the ebb and flow of energy throughout our systems, where we achieve an optimal balance between strength and fluidity, between stamina and elasticity, between power and grace.

Between gathering and release.