



by Shoshanna Katzman, L.Ac., M.S.,

Qigong (pronounced 'chee-gung') is an ancient Chinese exercise designed to balance and cultivate the flow of energy for health and healing purposes. Qigong is easy to learn and can be performed by anyone regardless of ability. Also known as Chinese Yoga, it is a form of energy medicine that strengthens the body physically as it calms the mind and spirit to promote relaxation and revitalization. It involves slow rhythmic postures and movements integrated with the breath and enhanced with vocalization of sounds and creative visualizations.

Qigong accomplishes this through various methods that ensure both physical and energetic health. One major explanation for how Qigong works is through invigoration of energy within a precious energy center of the body known as a dantian - translated as "elixir field" and commonly referred to as "sea of energy".

A total of three dantians exist and are located in the lower abdomen, chest and head - known as the lower, middle and upper dantians respectively. They are reservoirs of highly rotating energy where vital energy is stored, gathered and transformed. Their function is to collect energy and redistribute qi (vital energy) to the body's internal organs, nervous system, endocrine system, and then into the blood to strengthen the entire body.

The three dantians also collectively store and activate fundamental energy necessary for life known as "The Three Treasures" - namely jing, qi, and shen. Qigong practice fortifies the energy within all three dantians together with these associated treasures to promote health and longevity. Qigong harnesses their immense reserves by heightening both their flow and mutual nourishment. When these special substances are plentiful in quantity and quality the result is an energetic momentum that mobilizes the body, mind and spirit to produce optimal health and wellness.

The practice of qigong builds flow within all three of these dantians to manage and cultivate movement of qi throughout the body. However, specific movements are designed to nourish the upper dantian which is where the shen resides, also likened to spirit. Balancing of this extraordinary aspect of the energetic system strengthens sense of purpose, mental clarity, vision for future goals, psychic and intuitive ability as well as manifestation of hopes and dreams.

Creation of a bright and vibrant shen is dependent on plentiful amounts of the other two treasures of qi and jing. This is produced from qigong postures intended to nourish both the middle and lower dantians. It is the middle dantian where qi resides, also likened to the breath. Invigoration of this dantian leads to a "happy and tranquil heart" helping one reach out to

relate with others combined with the ability to honor their own uniqueness and healthy boundaries while doing so.

Jing (vital essence) resides in the lower dantian. Cultivation of jing provides the physical strength and stamina needed for proper growth and development helping one to be prolific, balanced and healthful in a multitude of ways. The lower dantian is the energetic center of physical healing of the body as well as an individual's power center. It is also where the majority of vital energy is stored for the lasting resilience and centeredness necessary to withstand the plethora of stressful situations in life.

Chinese medicine practices such as Qigong strengthen the three treasures of jing, qi and shen as it nourishes an individual's integral being. In terms of emotional and mental health this supports full and appropriate expression of feelings and emotions as well as development of spiritual identity involving one's total being. It forges the ability to release negative emotions such as excessive anger, sadness, worry, grief and fear which in and of itself strengthens the vital health of the body's organ system - namely the liver, heart, spleen, lung and kidney respectively.

Qigong is easy to learn, simple to practice and readily available through private or group lessons and even easy to follow with a DVD or book. Taking responsibility for one's health through right living habits, stress reduction, moderation with food and drink, ample rest, balanced work habits combined with these powerful movements provides an excellent approach to building energetic and physical strength and thus maximize energetic momentum to create a vibrant life force for health and wellness.

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