

Cultivation of Body, Breath & Mind



by Shoshanna Katzman

Consistent practice of the Chinese exercise arts of tai chi and qigong regulate the body, breath and mind and can be easily adapted to enhance everyday activities. This approach is a process that begins by paying special attention to physical alignment, learning to regulate the breath and focusing intention of the mind.

It serves as a way to open free flow of qi, the vital energy that motivates and moves all bodily functions and transformations. Moreover, it increases integration of the body and mind through moving “together as one.” This has far-reaching benefits for overall wellbeing and peace of mind.

Tai chi is an ancient Chinese martial art that is primarily practiced today for its fitness and wellness benefits. Graceful and flowing movements are sequenced together into what is known as a form or set, which induces complete relaxation and is commonly known as “meditation through movement.”

Qigong is practiced with the main purpose of cultivation of qi. It differs from tai chi in that it was originally created with medical purpose in mind. Qigong involves gentle, flowing movements which incorporate breath, sound, visu-

alization and self-massage. Both tai chi and qigong are forms of physical fitness practiced to promote internal healing.

Regulation of the body refers to the establishment of proper body alignment with increased flexibility and internal integration. This leads to smooth qi flow along with building its resources and properly storing them, rather than their being squandered and lost.

The best way to create this for oneself is to maintain a straight flat back with a relaxed pelvis and buttocks tucked underneath. Also, it is important to relax the shoulders and keep head erect, while aligned with the back. This positioning can be done while sitting, standing or walking.

Moreover, be mindful to relax the soles of the feet, while feeling the connection to the ground. This helps with more complete centering and greater composure throughout the day. Body regulation also leads to a regular and rhythmic breath, with added benefit of a relaxed mind.

Regulation of the breath has to do with being conscious of the natural rhythm of one’s breath, which activates qi flow. This promotes health by gathering and circulating vital energy throughout the body. Furthermore, it involves breathing into the

diaphragm and belly in a full, slow, relaxed, smooth, regular and rhythmical manner.

Keeping the mouth closed and breathing in and out through the nose during belly breathing is preferred. This activates glands in the nasal passageway to fight off bacteria, while the mucus membranes prevent cold air extremes from penetrating the body. In doing so, inhale and expand the belly, then exhale and deflate.

Belly breathing serves to oxygenate the blood, strengthen digestion and promote heart and lung function. Additionally, it allows for the bringing in of a maximum amount of air with a minimum of effort. It also clears the mind and calms the spirit. These results are further heightened through spending time outdoors whenever possible, thereby taking advantage of clean fresh air and opportunity to commune with nature.

Regulation of the mind has to do with staying focused, rather than being distracted and “all over the place.” This cuts down on thinking about “a thousand things” at once - traditionally known as the “monkey mind.” Regulation of the mind leads to a more serene state of being and allows for daily accomplishment of a multitude of tasks.

There is a saying in qigong and tai chi - yi dao, qi dao, which translates as “where the mind goes, the qi follows.” Remembering this throughout the day is a way to maintain single-pointed concentration on a matter at hand. This saves a tremendous amount of time in the long run and keeps a smile on one’s face.

In our modern world, having an open mind to the wisdom of the ancient Chinese exercise arts will make a big difference in quality of life. It leads to the ability to protect oneself from the never-ending onslaught of information. Regulation of body, breath and mind allows for the creation of a calm, focused and integrated existence. It produces a shift in sensations bringing about enhanced awareness that emanates throughout the body, one that brings a person into the joy of the moment.

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