



The Healing Power of Qi

Qi is the subtle life force linked to all manifestations of energy

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

It is a fundamental energetic substance commonly translated as vital energy or breath. Qi exists in everything and connects all things to each other, both organic and inorganic. It is in the air breathed, the food eaten, the animals loved and the surrounding natural world. Qi exists within inanimate objects too, such as wooden furniture or crystal rocks that adorn one's home.

The vital energy of qi is an invisible force that is felt through its actions – one perceived through feeling its effect within

the body. It becomes quite tangible during an energetic exercise such as tai chi or qigong - typically described as a pulsating or vibrating sensation felt throughout the body.

Qi is the active principle and essential substance that constitutes the energetic body, flowing through each vital organ and bodily system. It nourishes, animates and replenishes every aspect of being.

When qi is flowing freely and abundantly it leads to overall harmonious working of the body. Peak digestion, me-

tabolism and elimination are major results – derived when qi transforms food into nutrient essence and then waste into turbid substance.

Immunity is boosted through the protective function of qi. Body warmth is sustained due to its warming function. And vital organs are kept in place, fluid levels maintained and blood kept in its vessels due to qi's retaining function. Moreover, homeostasis is restored and regulated as qi transforms energy into refined substances such as blood and other fluids

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The earliest evidence of qi was found within an inscription on a jade artifact from the Warring States Period of the late Zhou Dynasty (481-221 B.C.E.). This following is its translation:

“To regulate qi: When it is in depth, it will accumulate (store, collect); when it accumulates, it will spread; when it spreads, it will move downward; when it moves downward, it will settle; when it settles it will firm; when it becomes firm, it will sprout; when it sprouts, it will grow; when it grows, it will regress; when it regresses, it will become nature (heaven, sky); heaven (sky) has roots (pounds into the ground) above; earth (ground) has its root (pounds into the ground) below; smooth flow enables life; reverse flow leads to death.”

This inscription provides greater insight into how qi moves and impacts health - helping to provide understanding of why regulation of qi through practices such as tai chi and qigong promote health and longevity. The statement that “smooth flow enables life; reverse flow leads to death” is most telling in this regard. Tai chi and qigong practices rectify imbalances by reversing qi flow when it moves in the wrong direction, opening and releasing flow when blocked, strengthening flow when deficient and lifting qi when dropped. Dysfunction is thus thwarted by preserving quantity and quality of qi flow. According to tai chi theory, this is accomplished in the following four ways:

- Upward body movement raises or ascends qi
- Downward body movement sinks or descends qi
- Opening movement disperses or moves qi outward
- Closing movement gathers or draws qi inward

Qi and the energetic practices of tai chi and qigong thus work in tandem to maximize health and movement competence. Qi infuses tai chi and qigong with energetic power and in return tai chi and qigong normalize qi flow in the body. Together they optimize organ function, regulate hormones, balance emotions and nurture spirit. They also promote longevity through cultivating postnatal qi, while conserving prenatal qi.

Prenatal qi is finite and can't typically be replenished. It is acquired from one's parents at conception, stored in the kidneys, governs growth and development and is the determining factor for constitution, disposition, strength and vitality. It naturally diminishes with age and once consumed leads to termination of life. Whereas, postnatal qi is derived after birth from food, drink and air breathed.

Qi cultivation technique applied while practicing tai chi and qigong allow postnatal qi to be the primary one consumed,

rather than having to dip into prenatal qi reserves. This is further enhanced through taking full and relaxed breath - along with breathing clean fresh air when practicing outdoors. And consuming nutritional foods and drinking the purest water possible adds benefit to building ample postnatal qi reserves.

There are many things that can be done to promote the quality and quantity of qi flow. It is simply a matter of making the healthiest choices possible to support conservation and building of qi reserves within the body. This is an important decision, as it has a major impact on quality of life and health.

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