

The cultivation of Triangles in Qigong practice

Three forms of Qigong

Let us first consider what Qigong actually is. Many people have heard about Yoga, but Qigong is not yet well known. Just as the term Yoga is mainly associated with physical exercises and less with the Yoga system as a whole, the same applies to Qigong. Many people are familiar with images of group exercises in parks.

There are three basic forms of Qigong: moving, meditative and still exercises.

Qigong is much more than just practising for physical health care. It is a 7000 year old method that seeks to regulate and harmonise the constitution of body, soul and spirit through a specific work with energy. Qigong is used as a therapeutic treatment in Traditional Chinese Medicine. It is a gentle technique to strengthen the body's vitality, to cure certain illnesses and it can even prolong the lifespan. This development process not only stimulates the self-healing powers, but it also activates the awakening and further development of consciousness on a higher level. It can promote the ability to connect the microcosm (a human being) with the macrocosm (universe) and bring them back into a harmonious resonance. Practising in groups creates strong energy fields, and their effects can be further enhanced by having people line up in geometric formations. Daily practice is very important in Qigong, as this is the only way to achieve lasting results.

The threefold Qi

The Chinese character for Qi changed over the centuries. The original or first known symbol is threefold and stands for the three energies Yang, Yin and their relationship within the human being. In the course of time, the symbol was increasingly adapted to concrete thinking and the character in use today emphasises more the nourishing function of Qi and its effect on the material level.

According to Daoist ideas, the world arose from the original Qi (Yuan-Qi), in which Yin and Yang were still mixed. Heaven and earth only formed through the separation of the One: what Yang-Qi received rose bright and clear and became heaven, what Yin-Qi received became dark and heavy and sank to the earth. And what Yin and Yang received in fair and balanced amounts was the human being in between. The symbol for this is the three horizontal lines.

In Qigong philosophy, body and soul are seen as a unit. Qi flows through the energy channels of our body, the meridians, and connects all the body cells with each other and – according to Chinese belief – it connects also body and soul. Qi is within and around us; there is a constant exchange taking place, regardless of whether we are aware of it or not. Qi can be described as a life energy that is present everywhere, and because Qi follows attention, we can consciously direct it through the practice of Qigong. According to Traditional Chinese Medicine, the causes of all physical complaints lie in the fact that the Qi has become ill or poisoned.

In everyday Chinese language the term Qi is widely used to describe physical, emotional and mental states, for example. It is also used in the arts and for natural phenomena.

The three Pillars of Qigong: Movement – Breathing - Imagination

The training of body, breathing and mind is the basis of all Qigong practice, and applies to both beginners and advanced practitioners. It means the harmonious connection of the three pillars of Qigong. This actually sounds much simpler than it often turns out to be in practice. People in the West in particular, with their modern way of life, often have great difficulties at the beginning in calming

down and freeing themselves from everyday impressions. Physical relaxation is often lacking and for many people the imagination is not that easy to activate. While the physical exercises focus on movement and the conscious control of Qi, in the more advanced stages, when soul work and spiritual development play a greater role, meditation and silent exercises are also practised.

There are different methods to activate the flow of Qi:

1. Consciously directing the Qi (through attention and imagination),
2. allowing the inner Qi to flow freely, whereby so-called spontaneous movements can take place; the Qi then moves the body from within. These spontaneous movements often indicate that the Qi is in the process of dissolving a disturbance or blockage in the system and
3. a mixture of these two methods to varying degrees.

The three Treasures: Jing – Qi – Shen

The doctrine of the three treasures is a very old concept in Chinese health teaching, derived from Daoist philosophy. The ancient sages were aware of the energetic side of existence, and their lives were focused on cultivating and maintaining this energy. For them, health was based on three energies or basic substances known as the Three Treasures:

Jing (精), Qi (氣) and Shen (神)

They can generally be translated with the terms essence or life essence (for Jing); power, life energy or subtle breath (for Qi) and spirit, mindfulness or spirit-heart (for Shen). However, it is always emphasized that it is impossible to convey their full meaning through Western language. But at least it gives us an idea of what is meant.

The three Dantians

The three treasures have their counterpart in the human body in the three Dantians, the so-called elixir fields. The upper, middle and lower Dantian are located in the head, chest and lower abdomen. They are energy centres in the body that have a special relationship to the energy circuit and also serve as a reservoir for Qi.

The first treasure, Jing

Commonly referred to as the essence of the body, Jing is considered to be the primordial energy substance that gradually depletes throughout lifetime, causing us to age and eventually die. Jing gives our bodies form and substance. Daoists strive to preserve Jing in order to achieve longevity. When practitioners learn to strengthen Jing, they can build a solid foundation for health and powerful inner development. However, if a person wastes their Jing by living an uncontrolled life without restraint and moderation, the proverbial oil in the lamp or the wax in the candle will quickly burn up and lead to poor health, exhaustion and rapid ageing.

The second treasure, Qi

Qi is the invisible life force, the vital force behind all transformative processes of life. The focus is on the cultivation and development of this substance. All movements and transformations in the universe and in the human body occur through Qi. Our life depends on Qi and our health depends on the quality of Qi. A harmonious, healthy and strong flow of Qi can be achieved through the cultivation of breath, mind and Qigong practice.

The third treasure, Shen

Shen means spirit, spirit-heart. Shen is actually the basis of our existence. It is said to appear soon after conception and leaves the body after death. Every person has his or her own Shen, which is one with the global Shen. Shen can be compared to a divine mission that descends on earth and inhabits the physical body. Shen is eternal, indestructible and immortal.

Shen likes peace and tranquillity. It likes a calm heart. The ancient Daoists showed a way to merge with the Shen by following the Dao or the natural order of things without interfering with the course of things (the so-called: wu wei).

Jing, Qi and Shen always work as a whole; they cannot be separated from one another. However, a distinction is helpful for our understanding of their roles and functions. A significant statement from ancient scriptures is as follows:

"Shen arises with Qi, Qi arises with Jing. Jing can generate Qi, Qi can generate Shen. If the body is without Shen, it cannot generate Qi. If Shen is without Qi, it cannot generate Jing. If Shen and Qi are without bodies, they cannot stand. Jing, Qi and Shen need each other."

The threefold Soul: Ling – Hun – Po

Although there is a lot of talk about the unity of body, soul and spirit in Qigong, deeper work on the soul is rarely found. The purification and cultivation of the soul aspect is called Xiulian. Following the Xiulian path means developing your thinking, speaking and behaviour step by step to be more compassionate, tolerant and helpful. The Chinese soul concept and its various aspects is very interesting and profound. I will describe the doctrine of the soul in more detail here, because it is so "tangible" and easy to imagine.

Ling

Ling is regarded as the entry and exit point, the 'breathing organ', for the Hun aspects and holds a kind of protective shield over them. Ling and Hun are connected by meridians. Opening our heart to compassion and gratitude means opening the Ling. The Ling can be transformed into a „celestial Ling" through a high moral level.

Hun

The Hun aspect is located in the liver. It is threefold:

- *Yuanshen* – It is considered to be the oldest and largest part of the soul and forms its foundation, so to speak. It is the original soul that comes from the divine, our divine spark, our soul essence. It corresponds to the Higher Self. It can be reborn again and again and, due to its past lives, has several shells in which a person's karma is stored. If the old soul shells can be completely purified and discarded, the Yuanshen can reunite with the universe and end the cycle of reincarnations on earth.
- *Yinshen* – It has the task of distributing energy throughout the body. It serves as a „database" for this life and is responsible for how much energy a person receives. Every thought, every word and every deed - whether positive or negative - is recorded by the Yinshen. After life, the Yinshen returns to the universe with these data. There are different opinions as to whether the Yinshen can leave the body during life time or not.
- *Yangshen* – In every incarnation we have a new Yangshen, which represents the connection between our physical body and the soul. A Yangshen is only with us for one lifetime and looks like us. It is this part of the soul that can escape from the body during shock-like experiences. This results in symptoms such as inner restlessness, anxiety, nervousness and an inability to make decisions. People with a lack of Yangshen have a lot of problems in life.

Po

In addition, there are the six or seven soul parts called Po, which are located in the lungs - four on the left and three on the right. Like the Yangshen, they are not reborn. People who are physically very weak only have six Po parts. Po is regarded as a kind of body soul. It supplies the body with energy.

The spiritual path of Qigong - The threefold Dao

It is very difficult to describe this path and Laozi says in the Daodejing about the Dao:
"The Dao that can be described with words is not the true Dao."

We can increase our understanding by looking at some of the requirements of this path. The basis is the cultivation of the heart and unconditional love, unity consciousness, the combination of spiritual knowledge with practice through service and meditation, to name but a few. The aim of "firm below, light above" is practised here at a very high level. It means being firmly anchored to the ground while the mind is free and empty. To achieve this, the energy of all three treasures is stored in the lower dantian.

The levels of this Daoist practice could be described as follows:

Current level: Overcoming reincarnation and fear of death through enlightenment
Higher level: Immortality of the spirit and life after death
Highest level: Immortal spirit in an immortal body

The three „Bi“ 辟

“Bi” means to avoid, to no more do something specific. It is said that three things are avoided when this path is realised:

- Bi Gu Fu Qi (avoiding gross food)
- Bi Shui Gong (avoiding sleep)
- Bi Qi Gong (avoiding breathing)

We should bear in mind that they are only effects and do not represent a goal per se. Rather, they are the „side effects” of an intensive practice that lifts a man beyond the human realm into higher realms of being.

Wenzhou - Berlin - Taiwan

When spiritual Qigong (e.g. Falun Gong) was banned in China in the 1990s, a large movement to the West began. During this time, two Chinese sisters and Qigong masters from Wenzhou came to Berlin and founded a Qigong school there. In addition to exercises for health, special attention was paid to soul work and spiritual development. They have the special gift of explaining great wisdom in a simple and very loving way. This school has existed for 25 years and has continued to develop. A few years ago, the two Qigong masters followed an inner call to bring soul and spiritual Qigong back to Asia. They decided to offer such seminars in Taiwan. It became apparent that there was an enormous demand and they are currently constantly expanding their offering in Taiwan. People are very grateful that their own culture, enriched with the wealth of experience from the West, is being brought back to them in a new way. In this way, Qigong is constantly evolving and opening up new paths; perhaps one day even back to mainland China – and thus complete another triangle.

Thank you very much!