



Video Transcript

What Is Qigong? A Beginner's Guide to Energy Healing, Movement & Nervous System Balance

Everything in life, everything contains yang energy and yin energy. So inherently it creates balance, not only between muscles and bones, which a lot of movement practices focus on, but also through blood, energy, the organs of the body are a focus of qigong. And here we come to the mind work of our movement form. Qigong is a form of moving meditation.

My name is Dr. Judith Ehrman Shapiro, and today in Learning with Gaia, we're going to be talking about what is Qigong. So the word qi means energy, and it means so much more than energy. It means life force.

If you close your eyes and feel within your body the breath, coming in and out.

That's qi. The word gong means work, so we're working with energy within the body.

But the word qigong is a newer iteration. Qigong goes back documented 2,000 and 3,000 years ago

in China. And other words that have been used to describe the movement work are yang shen, which means life nourishing, and negong, which means internal work.

So if you picture the development of the external martial arts, you think of the warrior archetype.

You think of healthy, strong, vital. forward-moving,

community-minded, strategic and focused. That warrior archetype,

very early on in the development of the external martial arts,

the realization came of all the wellness benefits to the movement and training that was being done.

So if you picture it as a tree, the external martial arts developed and the Internal martial arts develop towards wellness. So qigong is part of traditional Chinese medicine, also known as TCM. You think about things like acupuncture,

herbalism, and qigong, which is a movement form of medicine. It's really beautiful because Qigong is a self-healing technique. It's an area in which we take the agency, we take the ability to make choices, and we apply them to our own sense of wellness. You don't have to wait for an appointment. You don't have to take a pill that you're not sure of. There are movement patterns that benefit us.

points of philosophy that I think are important to understand when you're working with Qigong. So one is that coming from an ancient book called the Book of Change, everything in life, everything contains yang energy and yin energy.

So yang energy is the energy of the sun, the energy of action, the energy of making things happen. Yin energy is the energy of stabilization, the energy of receiving, and the energy of surrender.

Yang and Yin. And everything in this philosophy is divided into Yang and Yin. And everything subdivides further into Yang and Yin. I'm going to show you what I mean. There's a posture that we'll be exploring called Old Monk holds the alms, presents the alms. You see the yang energy being lifted up in the hand while the yin energy stabilizes the body. So one of the benefits of Qigong is we're always working towards equilibrium and balance within the system. But if we just look at this part of the movement, we see that the hand is not only lifting and pressing to the sky, but it's also receiving and holding space. Yin and yang divides everything and contains everything.

The other point is that in traditional Chinese medicine, we work along currents of energy within the body called meridians. So in Qigong, the movements express stretching and moving obstacles through the body along the lines of meridians. So inherently, it creates balance. Not only between muscles and bones, which a lot of movement practices focus on, but also through blood, energy, the organs of the body are a focus of qigong.

And letting go of obstacles and stress. There are three areas without which you really don't have qigong. You're not doing qigong. One is postural alignment and movement patterning. The second one is breath work, working through the breath. And the third is called focused intention. Within these three areas, we'll be able to see the benefits of Qigong.

So in postural alignments, we work with certain stances or postures that are held. Here, we're really working on establishing balance between the areas of the body so that when our posture is off, we're using tensions to hold ourselves in balance. Whereas when the body is naturally in alignment, we can let a lot of that tension go. This helps us generally in the area of balance. So if you feel like your balance is off, it helps practice balancing.

And it also helps to prevent injury because you're always working through the center of the joints and with joint mobility. The second area, the movement pattern, is meant to stimulate those lines of energy within the body,

the meridians. And here we pick up certain embodiment ideas, one of which is Chen, so we're rooting to rise. One is called Song, which means we remain relaxed and calm, but we don't lose structure. So there's no like lying on the couch in Qigong. We maintain our structure. but in a very relaxed and gentle way. And the third embodiment principle is called Zong. And Zong is about finding the center, finding equilibrium and balance. Breath is a very important part of Qigong. So with breath, we're oxygenating the body as fully as we can. It is truly the best medicine. in the world with no side effects and it's free. We need to keep breathing through the body. It moves the blood and the chi through our circulation. It calms the vagus nerve, which runs from the top of the body to the bottom of the body and helps to mediate the sympathetic nervous system. fight, flight, and freeze response. It really helps us to calm those areas, allowing us to make choices. The other thing about breath work is that it helps to alter stress hormones within the body. So the next area is breath. There's breath work. That's very important in Qigong. with breath we oxygenate the body we improve circulation we tap into the vagus nerve which runs the whole length of the body helping to calm us and we help to mitigate the effects of chronic stress through the sympathetic nervous system so our fight flight, or freeze response, where we are able to pause and breathe, feel oxygen within the structure, and then make choices that are conscious. The third area is focused intention. And here we come to the mind work of our movement form. Qigong is a form of moving meditation. So here there's a phrase that says, where the Yi goes, the Qi goes. Yi means attention, what we're paying attention to. So what we pay attention to, that's where the energy in our body migrates. So think about when the body is disinhibited and the attention is going everywhere. We're worried. We feel anxious. We feel uncomfortable in the body. What happens is the energy in the body tends to dissipate. So it's also moving with the attention from here and there. As we focus and calm the attention, the energy gathers around that. So it comes to a place of equilibrium and presence, which then allows us to move forward. One thing that I love about Qigong, and I've been a dancer for 20 years. I'm a yoga teacher. I love moving. But Qigong is at the top of the mountain for me. And one thing that I love about Qigong is that it is completely accessible. You can do Qigong in any kind of clothing at all. You can do Qigong with shoes on. You could do Qigong with shoes off. You can do standing Qigong in a small space that doesn't take up a lot of time or energy. You can do... of qigong that is very deep and fulfilling. The other thing I want you to know is you can do qigong through illness and injury as a form of self-healing and rehabilitation.

I had my total hip replacement less than three months ago and I never stopped doing qigong. I have pictures of doing qigong in my hospital bed and it connected me to vitality and healing force within my body, even when I needed to stay sitting. The way that you work in that state with

Qigong is you dial back the energy. So I'm going to talk more about that, but first I want to move into one more area. There's something that we call the three harms in Qigong. So the don't do this kind of thing in Qigong. And I like to talk about it because it really differentiates Qigong from other forms of moving. The first form is holding your breath.

So your breath will be cued during the practice of Qigong, very much like we cue breath in yoga. But whether or not I'm breathing in and you're breathing out,

the point is that you continue the flow of breath within the body.

To hold the breath means to hold the energy. So just keep breathing.

The second harm is we don't over muscle anything.

So there's a rule in Qigong and the rule is you go at 70%.

This is not High intensity training. It's about the opposite.

And by the way, I love high intensity training, but Qigong is not that. Here we reserve about 30% of our energy at all times. Where does that energy go and why do we do that?

It helps us continually check on our alignment, which is a form of Qigong in and of itself.

It helps us stay aware of what is happening in the body and what we're experiencing.

And it helps us not to overdo. So the rule in Qigong is if you can't do it slowly, don't do it.

That means when you don't feel well, it's okay to do Qigong at 50%.

If you have the flu, if you have COVID, if you've been through surgery,

You can do Qi Gong with your hands. This is called pushing waves.

And you do it at 10% until you reconnect to Qi,

to life force in your body. The last harm has to do with postural alignment.

So we don't want to stick out the chest and arch the back in particular.

We want to soften through the core. is the lower part of the body,

soften the back of the knees, allow the head to rise from the crown of the head.

So if you're small or short like me, I do a lot of this in life. I'm looking up at people.

You want to bring your chin down and rise from the crown of the head. This is Qigong,

and I'm hoping that you will join me in this gentle adventure on Gaia Goddess.

This is Judith Ehrman Shapiro.

We hope you enjoyed this practice with Gaia. And if you did, make sure to heart it above and explore more suggestions below. Till next time, love, light, and Gaia.