

## Explain the benefits of Qigong

By Fernando G. Echeveste

As we go further into the XXI century, humanity seems to enter a new era of prosperity not seen since the Industrial revolution. With the advances in medicine and science, long gone are the days when the population on earth was being decimated by plagues or when people was dying because of a simple infection. Likewise, advances in other fields, such as Economy and Politics have brought up stability and peace in many parts of the world. Furthermore, the evolution of the collective consciousness has caused people to care more about issues such as Global Warming (a debatable subject on its own), reducing the Carbon footprint to protect the environment, eating healthier, consuming goods that were manufactured responsibly (no exploitation or slavery of another human being took place during manufacturing), etc .

Looking back at the history of humanity, there's no question the human species have thrived and evolved. However, if we look deeper into this subject we can't help but notice that the changes and transformations in many aspects of our lives is more of a side shift rather than a step forward. Every day we are being overwhelmed –consciously and unconsciously- by a series of external factors that affect our quality of life one way or another. The shift has come from situations that threatened our lives and our health and which they were originated from an unconscious state (for example, a plague killing hundreds of thousands of people and which most likely originated from poor sanitary conditions, given the living conditions humans used to lived in before evolving to a more conscious state in which good hygiene became the norm), to a state where human beings, fully conscious – although in a state of denial- are slowly but systematically killing themselves. TV and media content are affecting our minds, blocking our creativity and always telling us what to do and how to think.

We often forget to nourish the spirit by focusing more on pleasuring our senses, we neglect our body by not doing physical exercise and we poison it constantly by breathing polluted air, eating food with chemicals that harm our internal organs and using products that harm the external body and which in turn harm our internal organs as well. We are harming ourselves from many different fronts and the result of that is anxiety, stress, depression, anger management issues, frustration and many other conditions manifesting in the form of emotion imbalances as well as physical diseases such as cancer (in its many types), diabetes, heart attacks, strokes and many more.

For many of us in the western world, when we are sick we go to see the doctor. The doctor then gives a diagnostic based on his knowledge, his experience in the field and as the result of looking at the symptoms and doing an examination. If the evidence is inconclusive the doctor refers us to the hospital for a more thorough test (blood test, X-Rays, Scan, etc). When the doctor has enough evidence to give a diagnostic he proceeds to write a prescription to treat whatever disease we have. This is what happens in the modern western societies and we see it as the common way to deal with our health. However, there seems to be a few things in this approach suggesting this is not the best approach when it comes to dealing with our health. For starters, this approach focuses too much on curing the disease rather than focusing on preventive care.

Secondly, it sometimes focuses too much on treating the symptoms rather than taking a more holistic approach to investigate the root cause that triggered the symptoms in the first place, and because in western medicine's teaching there's the concept of separation between the mind and the body, issues with the former are usually overlooked. Furthermore, when it comes to the treatment, the prescribed drugs typically cause other health problems or in some cases they aggravate the same symptoms they are supposed to cure. A good example is the anti-depressants. One of the side effects for the anti-depressants is depression. It's almost like a joke but that's the way it is. We are then in a situation in which drugs create a steady "clientele" to the medical conglomerate (Private hospitals, insurance and pharmaceuticals companies, etc) thus ensuring their own survival by creating a co-dependency in 2 ways: 1) by getting the patient into the vicious circle of taking drugs to cure a disease while at the same time they develop the right conditions for new diseases in the future, and 2) by seeking to engage the patient into a lifetime of drug consumption with the pretext to control the disease, i.e. prescribing a patient pills for the rest of his life to control high blood pressure, high cholesterol, high levels of sugar in the body, etc.

Is there a better approach when it comes to our health and the relationship we have with our mind, body and spirit? The answer is: There is. The underlying basis of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is that all of creation is born from the interdependence of two opposite principles known as Yin and Yang. These two opposite principles are in constant motion creating a fluctuating balance in the universe and in our bodies. When either Yin or Yang stayed in a prolonged state of excess or deficiency, that's when disease is manifested. TCM also laid its foundation on the 5 Elements Theory or the five-phase theory which states that everything in the universe including our health is governed by the 5 elements: Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal and Water. Each one of these elements has associated with it a colour, a time of day and year (season), emotion and a Yin and Yang organ in our body among other things. The 5 elements always operate in a cycle of creation or support and a cycle of destruction or regulation on each other: Water nourishes a tree (Wood). Wood is used to create Fire. After the fire are the ashes (Earth). Metal is mined from Earth and Water condenses in Metal.

When we apply the supporting and regulating relationships to the human body we see that each internal organ play a dual role in promoting and maintaining our health by generating energy for the organ they support and when necessary, restoring any imbalances of energy in the organ for which they regulate. For example, the Liver (Wood) passes energy to the Heart (Fire) and controls any imbalances of energy in the Spleen (Earth). According to TCM there are 5 essential substances in our body: blood, spirit, vital essence, fluids (other than blood) and Life Force energy or "Qi". The 5 Elements theory is grounded on the notion of harmony and balance. Such balance and the interrelationship between the organs, the essential substances and the distribution of "Qi" in the body are possible thanks to a system of channels called meridians. There are 12 principal meridians divided in groups of Yin and Yang. Chinese doctors viewed the body as regulated by the meridians (also known as networks of energy pathways) that link and balance the various organs in the human body.

Qigong, which literally means Life Force Energy cultivation, is a series of exercises which focuses on harmonizing the energy of the individual organs, the meridians and the organism as a whole. Qigong promotes and strengthens the mind-body connection and the benefits of practising Qigong on a regular basis are enormous and varied: Improved health; Clear and tranquil mind; Deeper and more restorative sleep; Increase in energy including sexual vitality and fertility; Happy attitude. The care2 website lists 12 benefits of Qigong but we would be limiting ourselves if we think of these 12 as the only benefits. Every one of us is a micro-cosmos in the Universe and therefore, the experience and benefits will be unique for each individual. At this point I could add the usual disclaimer we typically see in the fine print of many infomercials for exercise equipments and exercise programmes: *“Results are achieved by following a regular fitness program and a balanced diet”*.

However, I won't do that here because it is my perception and I'm convinced that when we get into the habit of practising Qigong on a regular basis, we raise ourselves to higher levels of awareness and, as a result, positive changes and transformations start occurring in many aspects of our lives, changing old patterns and habits. For example, if we had the tendency to eat a lot of junk food, all of a sudden we might find ourselves not so attracted to do that anymore. In conclusion, Qigong and other practises like Tai chi and meditation promote a state of well being, harmony and peace, a state which in turn helps to prevent diseases rather than curing them or treating their symptoms. Quoting Annie B. Bond in her “The Twelve Benefits of Qigong” article in the Care2 web page: *“It is not only a matter of adding years to your life, but life to your years”*. Lastly, like Barbara Wren said in her book “Cellular Awakening”: *“When we talk about health, we are not talking about a lack of symptoms, but a deep connectedness with who we are and our place within the universe”*. Qigong is one of many tools available to us to achieve that connectedness.

## Bibliography

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