

THE PRACTICE OF CHI KUNG AND TAI CHI IS FOR LIFE

The term “chi kung” or “qigong” (pronounced chee gong) is composed of two Chinese words [i.e. qi (pronounced chee) and gong]. The word “qi” refers to energy, and “gong” (“gongfu” or “kung fu”) refers to any training, which requires a lot of time and effort to learn. Therefore, qigong is defined as “any training or study dealing with Qi which takes a long time and a lot of effortⁱ.” Consequently, the practice of qigong is similar to the practice of the faith because it needs to be done on a regular basis in order to achieve the desired effect. If you only practice on holy(holi)days, you won’t get much out of it.

Unfortunately, in this age of quick fixes, people look for a pill to solve their health/weight problems. People are naturally attracted to promises of easy ways to get rich quickly or to lose weight almost overnight. Unfortunately, life does not work that way. It takes as long to correct a problem as it did to create it. Only determined and patient people will succeed. Good health requires a commitment to maintain a proper lifestyle. Qigong is an easy practice, which will help you reach that goal. At Christ the King, our focus is on Chinese qigong. It is not a quick fix, rather it is a lifestyle.

There are numerous forms of Chinese qigong. One of the common goals of these different practices is the improvement of the health of your physical body and your mind. Tai Chi (or taiji) is a martial form of qigong. Consequently, the practice of tai chi can be considered either a martial art or a health exercise depending upon the goal of the training.ⁱⁱ

Improving one’s health is the objective of all of the qigong and taiji training at Christ the King. The martial aspects of taiji are discussed but not practiced. The exercises are designed to teach the student the proper method of breathing in order to enable the student to achieve a superior state of relaxation and slow down the aging process. In addition, the exercises enable the student to move the muscles around the internal organs, which massages those organs and slows down the aging process. Most of the qigong exercises which are practiced at Christ the King were taught to me by Dr. Yang, Jwing-Ming, who has written over 30 books on Chinese martial arts and qigong. Dr. Yang was named by *Inside Kung Fu* magazine “as one of the 10 people who has 'made the greatest impact on martial arts in the past 100 yearsⁱⁱⁱ.’”

A typical class will begin with a short set of warm up exercises to loosen up the torso followed by two sets of Liangong, which “is a health exercise system that combines orthopedic science and sports medicine in order to prevent and address pains in the neck, shoulders, arms, back, hips, legs and feet.^{iv}

The last two-thirds of each class is devoted to some form of chi kung or tai chi exercises. The chi kung exercises include:(1) the Five Animal Sports or Frolics, which was created nearly two thousand years ago and is the most ancient qigong system practiced today. These exercises “are a complete qigong system, developing strength, grace, flexibility, balance, and an abundance of healing qi”^v (2) The Eight Pieces of Brocade, which was created approximately one thousand years ago by Marshall Yue Fei “to improve the health of his soldiers”^{vi} These exercises not only “build up Qi in the limbs [which allows] this Qi to flow into the organs, but [they also] use the motion of the limbs to move the muscles around the organs and increase the Qi circulation there.”^{vii}; (3) Four Seasons Qigong, which is designed to regulate the body from one season to the next in order to avoid illness typically associated with that season; (4)

Taiji Qigong, which is a martial form of qigong designed to enable the practitioner to “reach the highest levels of fighting ability”.^{viii} It is used as a health exercise at Christ the King to teach the students how to correctly circulate their qi; and (5) Soft White Crane Qigong, which is used to strengthen one’s torso, including in particular the back.

If living longer and healthier is important to you, why not give chi kung and tai chi a try? Join us in the Grotto at 5pm on Wednesdays. Jim Hofstetter

ⁱ Dr. Yang, Jwing-Ming, *Qigong Meditation – Embryonic Breathing*, YMAA Publication Center, 2003, p. 8.

ⁱⁱ Tai Chi is actually a philosophy. The art that is commonly practiced is actually known as tai chi chuan.

ⁱⁱⁱ YMAA Homepage.

^{iv} Sharp, *Liangong The Complete Book*, Chi Flow Books, 2012, p.9

^v Cohen, *The Way of Qigong*, The Ballantine Publishing Group, 1997

^{vi} Dr. Yang, Jwing-Ming, *Eight Simple Qigong Health Exercises-The Eight Pieces of Brocade*, Second Edition, YMAA Publication Center, p.11

^{vii} *Id.*, p. 42.

^{viii} Dr. Yang, Jwing-Ming, *The Essence of Taiji Qigong*, Second Edition, YMAA Publication Center, 1994.