



Qigong Is as Easy as: Stand, Relax & Breathe

By Noel Plaugher

QIGONG IS GAINING IN POPULARITY and for good reason, as it is a great meditative exercise. It is a very simple way to exercise the mind and body with intention. Your body will enjoy such benefits as better balance, and your legs will become stronger. However, at some point, the study of qigong has become unnecessarily complicated. The goal of this piece is to show how simple starting to practice qigong can be.

Qigong is a set of Chinese energy exercises. The word literally means “energy work.” These exercises are used to increase one’s power in the study of martial arts and also to increase health. Although qigong has become very popular lately, there is often some confusion about what the practitioner really needs to know. You do not need to understand any esoteric concepts to study qigong, and there is little required to start practicing it, other than some very simple instructions, such as found in the title: stand, relax, and breathe.

After being a victim of violent crime in 1990, I

began studying martial arts as a way to deal with the stress and anxiety that followed the experience. I ended up becoming a lifelong martial artist, and now I teach and write about martial arts and qigong. Originally, qigong was something that I was interested in primarily to increase my martial power, but I wound up really enjoying it for the health and meditative benefits I received. There are many types of qigong, including moving forms, but the type that really attracted me was the standing variety.

Standing qigong exercises consist of the practitioner holding specific postures for a period of time. There are many postures to choose from. While standing in these postures, the body is relaxed and the breathing is done diaphragmatically. The whole body is exercised in a subtle but meaningful way. Try the exercise below and you will see what I mean.

Standing qigong is the easiest form to learn, as it requires the least amount of movement, and for this

reason, this is where I like to begin. The exercise below is quite simple. After following the initial instructions, try to feel your body, relax, and breathe.

1. Stand with your feet about shoulder width apart.
2. Bend your knees slightly and shift your weight gently to the outside edges of your feet.
3. Imagine that your head is floating upwards.
4. Drop your shoulders.
5. Inhale and let your arms float up to about the level of your heart.
6. Exhale and position your arms as though they were embracing a sphere in front of your chest.
7. Drop your shoulders (I know I said it previously, but it is worth repeating).
8. The finished posture should look as though you are embracing an imaginary sphere or a tree.
9. Hold the form with as little effort as possible, and release excess tension or stiffness, especially in the arms and shoulders.
10. Push out your abdomen as you inhale.
11. Let the abdomen contract when you exhale.

Do this exercise for 2-5 minutes a day. You will feel the most benefit from the exercise if you do it consistently. Like everything, consistency is the key to success. When I first started studying qigong, I did this exercise every day for 15 minutes for about a month, and I felt absolutely amazing. Start with small increments of time and slowly increase the duration.

As you perform the exercise, your body will quickly learn the posture and you will do less policing of the physical movements. As you stand and concentrate on your breath, you will start to relax more deeply into the posture and feel a deeper connection to the earth, your body, and yourself. Maintain a consistent practice and you will start to feel the benefits. Start now! Δ

NOEL PLAUGHER is a third-degree black belt in Kung Fu Shou Shu, and a certified teacher of Xing Yi Chuan. He has studied various arts including aikido, judo, and forms of qigong, and is author of the book *Standing Qigong for Health and Martial Arts—Zhan Zhuang*, published by Singing Dragon. He lives in Atlanta, Georgia, and can be contacted at shunshifu1990@gmail.com. See more at <http://mooresofatlanta.com>, and <http://facebook.com/noel.plaughter.author>.

My anger stems from my passion and desire for a better world. I want things to be better for everyone (including myself—especially myself). But it's my current inability to express these things and be heard, to be taken seriously, that gives rise to the firestorm that is my anger.... The first step of moving away from my punishing anger is admitting that I'm angry, understanding why, and forgiving myself for it.

—Sam Russell in "Punished by Anger," at <http://tinybuddha.com/blog/punished-by-anger>

Boost Glutathione Levels Naturally

Glutathione occurs naturally in the body and is important to health and wellness. Much of glutathione's ability to improve longevity and overall health comes from the fact that it can detoxify various chemicals from the body, thereby preventing them from damaging cellular DNA.

Research has shown that glutathione levels decline as we age, although there need not be a corresponding decline in our health. It's also possible that a drop in glutathione levels may be related to exposure to heavy metals, such as mercury, lead, and cadmium.

N-acetylcysteine (NAC) is a supplement used to treat acetaminophen overdose. It can often head off severe liver or kidney damage, and it can neutralize toxins in the liver because of its ability to boost glutathione levels. Taking 600 mg of NAC daily has been shown to increase blood plasma levels of glutathione by up to 38 percent.

Eating sulfur-rich foods can also help the body raise glutathione levels. Cruciferous vegetables are some of the richest food sources of glutathione and sulfur, with Brussels sprouts being the most potent. Others food sources include cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage, kale, bok choy, watercress, mustard, horseradish, turnips, rutabaga, and kohlrabi.

—Adapted from "NAC: A glutathione booster," Dr. David Williams, DC, at <http://drdavidwilliams.com/why-you-need-glutathione>.