

Qi Gong

Qi, or Ch'i, translates as energy, breath, and gong translates as effort, skill, work, so, qi gong is energy work. Qi gong exercises and movements are designed to help you wake up to your qi, cultivate qi, and to balance the flow of qi across and throughout the entire body. There are at least hundreds of qi gong practices, many thousands of qi gong exercises, and a nearly unlimited number of versions of the various movements, so it's possible to work with several wonderful qi gong teachers and never do the same exercises twice. Below are some of my favorites.

Working with these, please be mindful and measured. Just as with T'ai Chi, the body must be stable and comfortable and we never use force.

General Ideas:

Relaxed, aligned, centered, aware, open. The tip of the tongue lightly touches the roof of the mouth. The back of the top of the head rises and opens to the Yang energy of the heavens, the sky and the sunshine. The feet are as soft and open as possible, connecting with the Yin energy of the earth. Mind and heart-mind rest in tan t'ien. Feet are parallel and shoulder width unless other wise specified
Soften and spread the feet; allow all toes to connect with the ground. Knees are directly above the feet.

Quiet Standing and variations

Basic stance: (T'ai Chi's "Preparation" posture)

-- Knees are straight but never locked. Shoulders hang down, and this in turn coaxes the elbows slightly back. Palms face down at an angle, with thumbs near hip pocket area; straight line of energy from the elbows to the fingertips, so wrist gates are open.

Holding the moon

--Knees stay aligned with centers of feet, but are comfortably bent so you have a feeling of sitting down on your legs. The arms make a circle that's parallel to the ground, with palms facing you and fingers lined up but not touching. Feel into your circular, globular self!

Visualizations, metaphors & variations to explore:

1) "Stand like a Mountain;" 2) imagine standing in gently swirling water; allow the water to move you ever so slightly, randomly as it swirls: micro-movements; 3) plant imagery: stand like a tree, a stalk of bamboo, open the head top as a flower opens to the sunshine, root into the earth, etc. 4) imagine being suspended between heaven and earth; 5) tune in to your breath: where can you feel it? where can't you feel it?

Movements with fixed feet

The Bear

Feet are comfortable underneath you, knees gently bend. The center leads, turning left and right, and the body follows. Arms naturally follow the body. It's ok for heels or even the whole foot to come off the floor; it's also ok for them not to. Feel the air as if it is as heavy as water.

The Constant Bear

Feet are parallel and shoulder width. Soften and spread the feet; allow all toes to connect with the ground. Knees stay directly above the feet. Sit down on your legs, bending knees and ankles as much as is comfortable; torso remains upright. Center turns and body follows to comfortable limit, but knees stay over the feet (structure does not collapse). This is a much more internal and subtle variation of the Bear, and the hip joints alternately open and close with the turning of the torso.

Variations: You can be playful and swing improvisationally; you can make soft fists and swing your arms around as if your fists were balls at the ends of ropes, and allow them to swing freely and then connect with your body in comfortable, stimulating pats or taps--you regulate the force to keep it wholesome and beneficial. Hands can be open and fingertips can similarly tap various place on the body as your arms swing around.

The Breathing Exercise

This movement begins with and returns to the "Basic Stance," or "Preparation." Feet are parallel and shoulder width. Soften and spread the feet; allow all toes to connect with the ground. Knees are directly above the feet.

Inhale and allow arms to float up and out effortlessly, riding the breath, with backs of wrists leading the movement. As the breath becomes full, elbows hang down, which straightens wrists and extends fingertips. As you exhale, elbows continue to fall move in towards the torso and hands, drooping from the wrist, follow and move in towards the body. At some point you cannot comfortably continue with this, so you follow the natural tendency to change, leading now with the inside of the wrists as the hands, palms facing outward, come down the front of the body. Wrists open and return to Preparation at end of exhale.

Walking and moving around the room

Ice Walking --stepping empty, imagining the floor to be covered in slippery, wet ice that has an inch of freezing cold water beneath it: you don't want to crack the ice and fall through!

Variation: Stepping into the opposite hand-as you shift weight into your foot, imagine you feel the weight of the foot in the opposing hand

Yamuna walking test: rolling into the foot (with gratitude and due credit to Yamuna, the inventor of this valuable exercise)- heel touches and takes some weight into it, then add more weight as you touch and add the outside of the foot, the little toe, the next toe, the next toe, the second toe and the big toe, at which point all of the weight should have shifted onto the new foot. Experiment with inhaling on the shift or exhaling on the shift.

Variations: 1) imagine this spiral continuing around to the bubbling well point in the center of the bottom of the foot, then allow the foot to relax, open and spread out from this point. 2) Add imagining a similar feeling in the opposite hand as you step. 3) combine with ice walking: put the foot down fully but empty and then trace the spiraling connection pattern with your mind as you shift into the foot

Breathing

The breath should be long, fine, slow and quiet.

Chuang Tzu said "the wise man breathes to the bottom of his heels."

The breath, the qi and the blood are intimately connected

Ted Cibik, a medical qi gong practitioner known for his success with cancer patients, teaches "6 direction breathing." Breathe into not just the front of the torso, but each of the two sides, the top, the bottom, and the back. Mindfully take 2-3 slow breaths into each of the 6 directions, then try breathing in all 6 directions at once.

from the

Tao Te Ching: Chapter 10

translated by Tolbert McCarroll (1982)

While carrying your active life on your head
can you embrace the quiet spirit in your arms,
and not let go?

While being fully focused on your vital breath
can you make it soft like that of a newborn babe?

While cleaning your inner mirror
can you leave it without blemish?

While loving the people and ruling the country
can you dispense with cleverness?

While opening and closing the gates of heaven
can you be like a mother bird?

While penetrating the four quarters with your insight
can you remain simple?

Help the people live!

Nourish the people!

Help them live yet lay no claim to them.
Benefit them yet seek no gratitude.
Guide them yet do not control them.
This is called the hidden Virtue.

5. Ideas and principles from the classics and other places:

Cultivate relaxation. The more relaxed we are, the more we can feel and cultivate the flow of qi (ch'i) in and through the body.

Stand Like a Mountain, Move Like a Great River

Wear the moon like a hat. / Press the top of your head against the sky. / Feel as if suspended from above.

In stillness, there is movement, in movement, there is stillness.

When one thing moves, everything moves.

Allow the mind and heart/mind to rest in the lower tan t'ien. Wolfe Lowenthal says the qi and the heart/mind mutually guard each other in the tan t'ien.

The tip of the tongue touches the roof of the mouth or the top of the back of the front teeth. Jaw and face relax; lips together; breathe through the nose.

The breath should be long and fine and slow and quiet.

Staying within your comfortable limit prevents injury, allows for maximum relaxation, and promotes healing and increased awareness,

Feeling around the knees should be neutral--no effort or strain in this area (actually, no effort or strain in any area, but the knees are often habitually neglected).

Allow sacrum to release and lower back (ming men / gate of life area) to be full and open.

Shoulders usually stay over the hips.

Cultivate cross-lateral awareness.