

Qigong for Today's High-Stress World

Jack Risk

Qigong takes us back to ancient China and the beginnings of Chinese medicine. But it works so directly on the body, mind and spirit that there is nothing lost in translation. It's relevance for today's high stress world is apparent to anyone who tries it.

The Chinese word qigong ("chee gong") is composed of two parts. "Qi" refers to the subtle energy that circulates through and around the body. Science has not yet been able to describe qi closely but there is no doubt that it exists. Electromagnetic fields associated with the human heart or brain, for instance, can be measured at considerable distance from the body. Pathways or "meridians" that the qi follows through our bodies have been mapped using fMRI. The electromagnetism around a qigong master's hands can be one thousand times as strong as in the case of an untrained person. So, qi is definitely something that can be developed. This is what the "gong" part of the word has to do with — practice or cultivation to develop a healthy flow of qi.

It only takes a few hours of training to get started with qigong. I found this was much different from the months it had taken me to learn the taiji set or the effort that went into yoga. Awareness of the flow of qi can take years to get in touch with in the case of more complicated practices but in qigong this is precisely where we start. To make this happen one simply has to learn a series of easy, calming movements. The movements directly increase the flow of qi and balance the meridians. Blockages in the flow of qi are removed. From the qigong way of looking at things all illnesses and discomfort originate with such blockages. Restoring healthy qi flow, then, is the basis of health and healing. The beneficial effects of qigong begin as soon as you start practicing. If you keep up your practice, they are cumulative and lasting.

Clinical studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of qigong in treating a large range of conditions considered difficult in western medicine: anxiety, depression, fibromyalgia, degenerative disc diseases, rheumatoid arthritis, cardiovascular diseases, pain, diabetes, symptoms of stress, the effects of aging, and many more.

Health, healing, reducing the effects of aging, achieving peace of mind, overcoming pain, feeling better — all these are possible. Qigong gives you a way to train yourself in self-healing. The surprising thing about qigong is that it is not at all difficult to learn.

I have been teaching qigong and meditation since 2004 in Nova Scotia, Manitoba, Ontario and Alberta. Currently, I am holding a course in Kentville that will meet on four Sunday afternoons in January and February. You can check out this and other training opportunities at www.jackrisk.ca/LearnQigong.html.

Jack Risk is an Anglican priest. He and his wife Christine Willette recently relocated to Kentville. Jack leads free, open meditation sessions with instruction at the Vaughan Memorial Library, Acadia University every Tuesday at noon.