



## Chi Kung – energy for life Anna Nangle

When I was invited to hold Chi Kung workshops at the AHPB Summer Festival I was not expecting to be faced with the conditions we eventually encountered. In a strange way, however, the mud and the testing conditions seemed to earth us all more forcibly and thus the energy, when raised through doing the Chi Kung, had an enhanced quality of richness. I felt very honoured to facilitate such a great group of people and while I am sure some readers will be familiar with Chi Kung I hope they may allow me to extol its history and its virtues a little more expansively than I had the opportunity to do at the Festival itself.

Chi Kung is an ancient Chinese system that exercises, relaxes and balances the body.

It evolved over thousands of years, a secret practised and cherished by a chosen few, passed orally from generation to generation, only spreading to the West in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The ancient Chinese were aware of a system of internal energy that travels throughout the body, through meridians or pathways, known as chi. Chi, like water, is abundantly healthy when flowing but soon becomes lifeless if left to stagnate.

Translating the word Chi (Qi) into English is difficult as we do not have the vocabulary to express the concept. In simple terms chi means breath/air, but it also denotes energy and vitality as it is less a reference to the mechanical process of breathing and more a philosophical concept of breathing life into something.

In the book 'Reflections of Qi' the author, Gary Khor, describes chi as 'the animating energy that drives all activity and change within the universe'. So chi

is 'all things' – the analogy of water (H<sub>2</sub>O) is helpful as it reveals itself to us in many ways – as sea, lakes, rivers, streams, clouds, rain, snow, ice, steam, rainbows and on and on, yet these variations are nothing compared to the diversity of chi. Everything we experience is a reflection of chi.

The word Kung (Gong) is a general term meaning work and is used to refer to any technique that requires time, patience, effort and practise. Therefore Chi Kung may be translated as 'energy work', or more precisely as 'energy cultivation' as the skill of breath control is the key to cultivating the flow and balance of energy in the body. It is the harmonising of human energy with the energies of the cosmos (heaven) and nature (earth).

Chi Kung evolved mainly for health and healing but the range extends from accruing power for martial prowess through to refining energy for spiritual development.

The two main categories are Nei Dan and Wei Dan.

Nei Dan – static or internal Chi Kung is a meditation using relaxation, breathing

and standing exercises. Changing the body functions from energy consuming to energy restoring – enabling the body to self regulate, self repair and self regenerate.

An example that you can try for yourself is the 'Healing Smile':

1) Sit in a comfortable position – feet flat on the floor, knees shoulder width apart and hands resting in your lap. This can also be practised lying down.

2) Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths in and out through the nose. Pay attention to how you feel but do not let your mind attach to thoughts.

3) Find a thought, a memory, an image or picture which makes you smile – a warm smile which softens the corners of your mouth.

4) Allow the warm, soft, gentle energy of this smile to grow and accumulate.

5) Visualise this smiling energy to a point on your forehead between your eyes – allow the smile to increase and spread like warm water slowly filling a deep bowl.

6) Move the healing energy of your smile through your body. Hold it in each area for as long as you wish; for the count of a certain amount of breaths, or until you feel it overflow.

7) Directing the energy with your mind send this warm, smiling energy from your forehead to your throat and neck. 'Hold the chi there.'

8) When you are ready move it to your chest/heart region. 'Hold the chi there.'

9) To the diaphragm/ solar plexus. If you have some anatomical knowledge use this to focus the energy in the different organs. Feel the soft, warm,

smiling energy spreading and filling these areas.

10) Finally use your mind to move the smiling energy to your abdomen just below the tummy button. Feel the warm energy filling the abdomen. Concentrate on the feeling of it deep in your centre.

11) Ask yourself 'How am I feeling?' Think of a word, phrase, image or symbol to describe it. This is your personal internal 'key' to your own chi. You can call on it at any time to tap into the relaxation you have experienced through this exercise.

12) Take a few deep breaths. Be aware of your feet planted on the ground or if lying down your body resting on the floor or bed. Become aware of the sounds around you, slowly open your eyes, and return to the outside world.

The second category Wei Dan is dynamic or external Chi Kung. It uses all the practises above, the breathing, the posture and the visualisation and combines them with gentle movement and self massage. There are many thousands of variations on a theme ranging from ancient to modern, similar to playing a piano. The same notes and chords are available to everyone but the interpretations are innumerable.

Tai Chi, known as a moving meditation, is probably the most familiar of the interpretations and is practised internationally. It is a complete form consisting of a series of rhythmic movements and postures.

Many of the forms or exercises emphasise natural movement of which we have an innate knowledge. For example: on rising we often stretch, which opens the meridians or energy pathways and then rub our eyes,

stimulating many acupoints or energy points in the areas.

Of the thousands of exercises, one of the most effective but simple sets are the 'Tai Chi 18 Exercises' based on Tai Chi movements. They can be performed as a complete set or as individual exercises aiding particular health problems.

For example:

'Separating the Clouds' which can aid chest, lung and head problems.

'Looking at the Moon' which strengthens kidneys and stomach and improves circulation.

'Scoop sea, look at sky' for flexibility in the back, improved circulation and preventing headaches.

'Cloud Hands in Horse stance to enhance co-ordination and mind balance.

...and what of the quaint names? They are also part of the holistic nature of Chi Kung as the ancient Chinese were well aware that imagery and visualisation not only focus the mind giving us a break from our inner chatterboxes but also lift the spirit and have a profound effect on the flow of Chi.

So who can practise Chi Kung?

For me this is one of the most exciting aspects – EVERYONE can practise Chi Kung, young or old, the fit and strong or the incapacitated and fragile. Once one has understood the principles of Chi Kung every exercise is adaptable and accessible in any environment; from mountain top to traffic jam, from running the marathon to lying in bed. Exercising without straining or tiring, focussing on helping to heal and strengthen different parts of the body, is available to all.

In China Chi Kung is widely practised by 60 million people on a regular basis, for health and longevity, and is used as part of hospital treatment for Cancer, Aids and even Alzheimers. Here in the West it is now recognised as an effective system of exercise for combating stress, preventing disease and for promoting fitness and relaxation.

In 2005 whilst in San Francisco I visited Golden Gate Park where at weekends people gather to practise Chi Kung, Tai Chi and other martial arts and I joined a group of Cancer patients practising 'walking Chi Kung' in one of the gardens.

Chi Kung's ability to deeply relax the body and focus the mind also makes it a useful tool in the field of mental health; particularly with anxiety and depression.

Every exercise works energetically, physically and mentally and through practise it can benefit emotional equilibrium. In Traditional Chinese Medicine emotion is viewed as e-motion or 'energy in motion' and when allowed to run rampant through the system causes dis-ease physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

In the Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine, written around 2697 – 2597 BCE, it states

Anger causes energy to rise

Joy causes energy to slow down

Grief causes energy to dissipate

Fear causes energy to descend

Fright causes energy to scatter

Exhaustion causes energy to wither

Worry causes energy to stagnate

In modern day living the autonomic nervous system, which manages all involuntary processes, can become stuck in the stress related 'fight or

fright' mode of the sympathetic branch. Research has shown Chi Kung has the ability to switch the autonomic nervous system to the restorative, healing mode of the parasympathetic branch, aiding emotional problems like anxiety and panic attacks but also restoring balance physically by tapping into our innate healing powers and strengthening us constitutionally. Studies in China and the USA have demonstrated that post Chi Kung practise there is a significant increase in the essential neurotransmitters, imbalances of which can be a factor in depression, insomnia and addictions.

Chi Kung has the potential to make us feel good, and when we do we feel

more balanced, energetic and joyful. Its relevance is still as vibrant and appealing today as 5000 years ago – offering to all who practise, young or old, rich or poor, happy or sad, the highly prized rewards of health and longevity and a deeper connection with mind, body and spirit.

Many of you who joined me at Green and Away certainly expressed the hope that you would be able to continue practising Chi Kung in your daily lives. I do hope some of you have managed to. For those who have never tried it – why not give it a go? – and enjoy the art of breathing and that feeling of pure, healthy energy!

**Anna Room-Nangle** has 30 years' experience in movement, health and healing. With a background in contemporary dance and McTimoney chiropractic she practises as a cranio-sacral therapist and natal hypnotherapist and teaches Chi Kung to groups and individuals.


For DVDs and videos  
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There are many books to choose from. A few I have used are:

Qi Gong the Chinese art of working with energy. B Brown and G Knoferl. Thorsons

Secrets of Qi Gong. Angus Clark. Dorling Kindersley

Chi Gung – harnessing the power of the universe. D Reid. Simon & Schuster



"Chi Kung was a lovely way to start the day"