

Qigong, Tai Chi and Mind-Body Unity

Rob Sayre
February 12, 2018



My wife and I became students of *tai chi* nine years ago. We attend one class per week, which lasts one hour with our teacher and practice at home several times a week.

I'd like to share how it has benefited us as well as how this ancient practice fits into some popular trends of mindfulness and from Father Moon's teachings on Mind-Body Unity or the First Blessing.

Taming or fostering a focused mind is at the core or the first steps in achieving unity between our

thoughts and actions.

From *The Way of Unification*:

“You may feel your mind changing many times in the course of a day. Because your mind varies, your direction also varies, and because your direction varies, your purpose varies too. You cannot fulfill one purpose when your mind varies. It is not simple to fulfill a goal with one mind; how much more difficult it is to fulfill it with two! Thus one mind is necessary.”



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Once our mind is focused and calm, we can focus it on love or heart and connect to God. The unity of our thoughts and actions is the place where love can abide and we can connect with God. So there are really two steps involved.

From the chapter on Heart from *New Hope: Twelve Talks by Sun Myung Moon*:

“Which comes first, unity or love? You can love yourself when your mind and body are in harmony with each other. If you love yourself when your desire and actions are going different directions, then your love has little meaning. When your mind and body are united into one, then God will eternally protect your love. Unity is the beginning point of love, the point where love can come to abide. This is God's ideal. Unless God can find persons whose quality is in accordance with His ideal, He cannot be happy at all. He has no one He can love.”

Qigong is the practice of moving meditation, rooted in Taoism. It serves a similar role as meditation, but also has components that include self-massage and wellness. *Tai chi* is a subset of qigong and adds a martial arts component and also provides strength and flexibility training as well as balance and memory enhancement. Tai chi was originally developed as a way to practice martial arts, which was forbidden in China. The slow movements disguised the very powerful martial applications.

In tai chi, we learn “forms” or a set of movements. Our breathing is integrated with our movements and to complete a form, which may take 30 minutes, requires a focused and clear mind. By this I mean that in Buddhist terms it is “empty” or what an athlete or musician may experience as “in the zone.” It is the closest I have experienced to what Father Moon said above, the first step of mind-body unity.

These eight categories are from *The Harvard Medical School Guide to Tai Chi* by Peter M. Wayne. The purpose of this comprehensive view of this ancient practice is for our intellect and overall understanding. The comments are my experiences with these categories:

Awareness – Mindfulness & Focused Attention

As you learn to move and breath while learning a specific form or set of movements, your mind becomes both focused and free of everyday thoughts. You are living and breathing in the moment. Taming our “monkey mind” or our busy mind is one of the clear benefits of this practice. There is a lot of interest in mindfulness. This article explains the difference well:

- “Qigong is an ancient Chinese health system of healing and energy medicine. Qigong is a system practiced for health maintenance, healing and increasing vitality. It is the art and science of using breathing techniques, gentle movement, and meditation to cleanse, strengthen, and circulate qi. Regular Qigong practice leads to better health, vitality and a quiet mind.

- Mindfulness is full awareness of your thoughts, feelings and actions in each moment. It is the full presence and awareness of your experience. Mindfulness can be compared to self-awareness. You are aware of self. Being in a mindful state can also be further defined as being in a state of self-awareness without judgment.”

Another helpful concept is that of *qi* or *chi*:

“Put simply, chi (qi) is that which gives life. In terms of the body, chi is that which differentiates a corpse from a live human being. To use a biblical reference, it is that which God breathed into the dust to produce Adam. Chi is also the basis of acupuncture. A strong life force makes a human being totally alive, alert and present while a weak force results in sluggishness and fatigue. You can increase and develop your chi to overcome illness, become more vibrant and enhance mental capacity. The concept of a life force is found in most of the ancient cultures of the world. In India, it is called *prana*; in China, *chi*; in Japan, *ki*; for Native Americans, the *Great Spirit*.”

In Divine Principle terminology, the closest concepts are tapping into our Original Mind and the Universal Prime Force, in our own body. The meridians that acupuncturists use to promote healing are exactly what the exercises in qigong and forms in tai chi tap into. Tapping into chi is the same as connecting to the Universal Prime Force and touching our Original Mind; once it is calm it is the window in our psyche to connect with God. It is difficult to connect with our Original Mind and God unless our mind is first quiet and calm.

Intention – Belief and Expectation

Tai chi is not a religious system or set of beliefs. It should be thought of as a practice similar to meditation but also is a visualization tool that allows us to integrate our unique beliefs and faith systems, focuses our mind and helps us get in touch with our intentions or our Original Mind. The concepts of Yin and Yang are central, but the focus is to achieve a state of balance or *wu ji*. In this sense, a Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, or anyone else can benefit from this practice and maintain their beliefs.

Structural Integration

This primarily means balance. In my class, we have many women and a few men in their 80s and one 90 who, while looking their ages, have perfect posture, live on their own, have no cognitive disabilities beyond some spotty memories. They walk without the aid of canes, live on their own and are healthy and active as people in their 50s. Learning the forms and practicing, you learn how to stand, walk, sit, and move in ways that use the natural strengths of your body.

Active Relaxation and Health

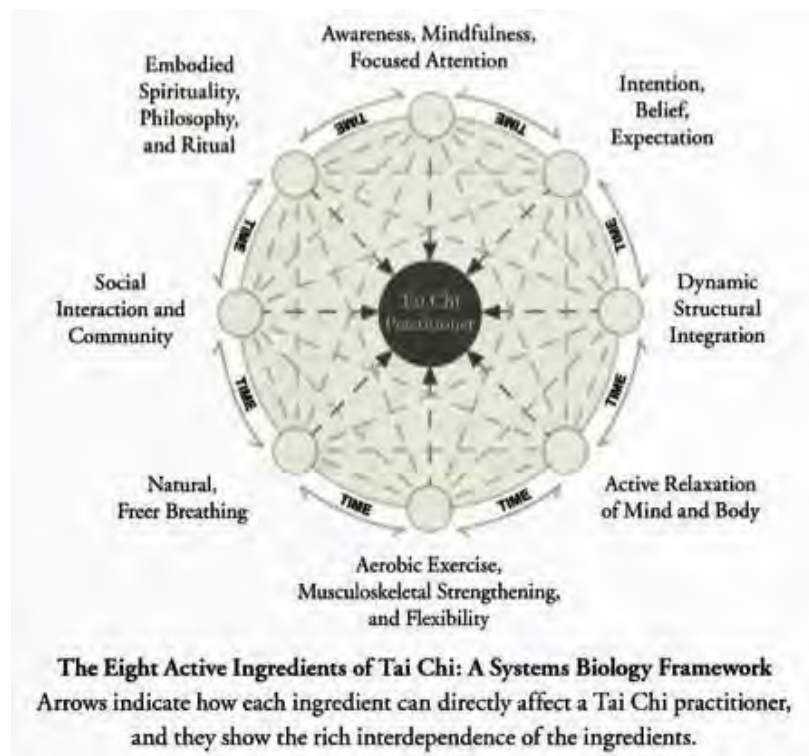
Tai chi has been shown to be beneficial to a healthy heart, providing aerobic exercise as well as active relaxation. Tai chi gives you the benefits of an active workout, but is more kind to your body. Active relaxation also helps improve your sleep and maintains and improves our cognitive abilities. Active relaxation, good sleep patterns (which tai chi helps) and new and challenging mental activities such as tai chi, learning a musical instrument, or a foreign language all help us maintain and improve our mental and cognitive facilities. Performing the repetitive movements in tai chi also helps build neural pathways and helps enhance brain plasticity. This means that our brain is creating new pathways tied directly to the healthy outcomes that the exercises bring about.

Strengthening and Flexibility

We have over 650 muscles in our body. To maintain them and keep them strong and flexible, you need to move your body in every way it is designed to. Most exercise programs, like running, bicycling and strength training, tend to make some muscles strong, but not flexible. In tai chi, you move, slowly, deliberately, and in doing so, increase both strength and flexibility. I also recommend a program called Classical Stretch, which can provide much the same strength and flexibility results as tai chi. Another good resource is *The Whole Body Cure* by Cory Kushner, published by my former employer, Rodale Press. It also contains a CD of qigong exercises you can do at home.

Natural Breathing

Natural breathing means deep inhaling and exhaling. When you do this while moving you deliver more oxygen to every muscle you move, and when you exhale, eliminate the used up oxygen. Another benefit is the active stimulation of your lymphatic system. Our lymphatic system helps eliminate wastes in our body, but unlike our circulatory system with a heart that pumps blood, our lymphatic system is activated and remains healthy when we move and breath. In this way it strengthens our immune system.



Social Support

Being part of a group of people who are learning and having the same experience builds a unique sense of community. Everyone ends up teaching and learning from each other. It takes discipline to practice something and having a group to do it with helps you keep going when you might not otherwise.

Embodied Spirituality

Tai chi provides a practical framework for living in a more holistic way. Whatever our beliefs are or what we focus our mind on, once it is united, the practice benefits all concerned. This goes to what Father Moon speaks about in unity preceding heart and

love. Once our “monkey mind” is tamed or united, we can center it on heart and love. Congregational singing, chanting or reading sacred scripts out loud can serve a similar purpose in emptying the mind or the first step of mind-body unity.

See it, Do it

It may help to see a demonstration of what this is all about. Qigong and tai chi are to be practiced. We study and practice a specific style, but whatever school or style people learn, they all have common elements and all are beneficial. This link to Yang Style Form is a basic introduction and from our classes.

We also have learned a qigong sequence called *wu chung*. It is slow, meditative and does not have a martial arts component. Our teacher also teaches several martial arts forms or weapons forms. We have learned the Cane and Fan. There is also a Sword form that we have not learned yet.

It has taken this many years to learn this much and yet we think of ourselves as advanced beginners. We have people of all ages, though most are over 50 and are women. I have seen it benefit people with very severe mobility impairments and it has helped everyone I have seen that just did their best.

What is very refreshing is you learn how to learn again. If you want to explore qigong and tai chi, I strongly recommend finding an experienced teacher to learn from (here is a site with many linked resources).

Rob Sayre met the Unification movement in 1973, was blessed in the 1982 Madison Square Garden Blessing of 2,075 couples, and has three children and five grandchildren. He helped start Paragon House Publishers as its first CFO and then worked at Rodale Press, publishers of Men’s Health and Prevention magazines, as business manager for its \$260 million book publishing division. He and his wife, Sally West Sayre (UTS Class of 1981), are one of the founding couples of the Shehaqua Ministries in Pennsylvania, an independent ministry still thriving after 23 years.