



from Ken Cohen's "The Essential Qi Gong Training Guide"

How Do I Know It's Qi?

You know you are successful at cultivating qi if, during or after practice, you feel any of the classic "Qi Sensations" (*Qi Gan*):

- Pleasant warmth, which is a sign of improved blood and qi circulation.
- Tingling or a feeling of vibrating, pulsing energy, most commonly in the hands.
Distinguish this from numbness, which is a sign that you are practicing too long and that your extremities are falling asleep.
- Heaviness in lower body, lightness in the upper, as though you have become a tree with deep roots and tall branches that can easily sway in the breeze.
- Expansiveness, a feeling that you are no longer limited to your body. Your energy and awareness extend into nature.
- Tranquility, centeredness, and stability. Qigong can give you greater confidence, awareness, and presence in everyday life.

Slow Is Beautiful

The Three Tunings are in themselves an excellent qigong practice, but they are also the foundation of virtually any style of qigong. That is, whether you are practicing a qigong exercise designed to calm the mind, improve health, or increase the power of your football tackle, always begin with the Three Tunings. Once your instrument is tuned, you can learn the intricacies of qigong and begin to make beautiful music.

Don't try to learn too many styles. It is better to emphasize quality than quantity. A few notes played clearly are far more enjoyable than many notes played off-key. And as with music, slower techniques may look easier but actually require the most skill. Musicians worry most about performing the slow *andante* movement because it is here that mistakes are most glaringly obvious to both the audience and the musician. "Slow is beautiful," said the artist Rodin. But it takes great patience to achieve this beauty.

Benefits and Dangers

After 100 days of qigong training, you are likely to experience any or all of the 12 Benefits of qigong.

The Twelve Benefits of Qigong

- 1. Well-being and improved health.** Qigong emphasizes whole body, whole system health. While it is true that qigong will often cure specific ills, this is not the primary reason for practice. Even if a disease cannot be cured, qigong improves quality of life and helps you find greater happiness. It is not only a matter of adding years to your life, but life to your years.
- 2. Clear and tranquil mind.** When the mind is at peace, the whole universe seems at peace. World peace begins with you; it is your responsibility to find a peaceful heart and mind. Then you can heal and transform others just through your presence. I am not suggesting that you use meditation as a substitute for political action (such as voting), but rather, if you have tranquil mind, you will make better decisions and have the skill to know when to act and when to be still.
- 3. Deeper, more restorative sleep.** Sleep is becoming more and more a challenge in our hectic, quick-paced, wired world. Qigong will help you find the deep relaxation and mental quiet necessary for sleep. However, qigong is not enough! You must also get sufficient aerobic and resistance exercise, eat well, not overwork, and be willing to enjoy leisure. Be a human being, not a human doing. As philosopher Lin Yutang once put it, "Since culture is a product of leisure, the sage is the one who loafs gracefully."
- 4. Increased energy, including sexual vitality and fertility.** Qigong people have more energy. In Chinese terms, qigong can *fan lao huan tong*, "reverse aging and restore youthfulness." Part of this youthful quality is a feeling of sexual potency and both male and female fertility. Let me share an anecdote with you. I was taking a lunch break during a science conference and enjoying a conversation with some of the attendees and with my daughter (then age 17), who was sitting next to me. An attractive young woman walked over to my table and extended her hand, I presumed to shake hands. When I grasped her hand, she sandwiched it between her two and, looking warmly in my eyes, said, "Thank you so much for getting me pregnant." My daughter exclaimed quizzically "Dad?!" She knows her dad is "weird", but not immoral. The woman explained, "Oh, you may not remember me, but I was at this conference last year and complained about my inability to become pregnant. Both my husband and I had been tested, but the doctors could find nothing wrong. You recommended some qigong exercises, and now I have a healthy boy!" If anything makes me want to continue teaching qigong for the rest of my life, it is testimonials like this.
- 5. Comfortable warmth.** Qigong is great for cold hands and feet. Circulation improves, and the body generates more internal warmth when it is cold. I heard of a famous qigong master who used to teach his classes outdoors in Tokyo, even in the winter. If a student got too cold, he or she had only to grasp the master's hand, a natural hand warmer! Until you reach this stage, if cold weather makes you uncomfortable, you may wish to take advantage of a Japanese secret: during cold winter days, keep a scarf wrapped around your lower abdomen, under your jacket. You have probably heard that it is good to wear a warm hat because heat escapes from the head. True. However, you can also increase internal heat by keeping the body's energy furnace (the abdominal dan tian) warm.

6. Clear skin. The skin, like the intestines, is an organ of elimination. According to Chinese medicine, as your qigong improves, your body eliminates toxins, and the skin becomes clear, smooth, and youthful. Qigong is excellent for the complexion.

7. Happy attitude. There is an old Tibetan saying, "You can tell a Yogi by his or her laugh." I believe the same is true of a qigong master. Although there are certainly serious, obsessive, and even morose qigong teachers, correct and moderate qigong practice usually creates an optimistic and joyous disposition. Deep learning brings humility before the great unknown (the Tao) and the vast amount still to be known. The more you know, the more you know that you don't know, and the less seriously you take yourself.

8. More efficient metabolism. Digestion improves, and hair and nails grow more quickly. Students commonly remark that after a few months of qigong, they need to use their nail clippers twice as often. The traditional explanation is that the body is throwing off dead cells more quickly. Would you like to hear some Taoist mystical trivia? When a Taoist master dies, his or her body disappears in a flash of light, and all that is left is hair, nails, and clothes. Or so the story goes.

9. Greater physiological control. This means that aspects of the body that were imbalanced or out of control begin to normalize, for example, breathing rate, heart rate, blood pressure, hormone levels, and states of chronic inflammation or depletion. "Control" means greater control over the body's functions, generally not by conscious effort but naturally from within, as a side effect of qigong practice. As biological functions normalize, you become more flexible and resilient. One of my colleagues put it this way, "If I want to fast for a few days, no problem! If I want to enjoy a feast, no problem! I can sleep peacefully for eight hours or, when necessary, I can miss sleep for a night without ill effects."

10. Bright eyes. The qigong master's eyes are said to glow in the dark, like a cat's. The eyes also appear "bright" because the spirit and soul are luminous and the heart is open.

11. Intuition and creativity. I believe that intuition and creativity generate each other and come from the same source, an awakened brain and being, an ability to think with the gut, to feel with the mind. Our society stresses compartmentalization, a specialized education, family life separate from work, church separate from state. We spend much of our lives living in compartments—home, school, workplace, and car. Qigong teaches us to reclaim the wholeness of who we are. Instead of fitting into a neat box, we are willing to exercise our intuition and creativity, to "boldly go where no person has gone before."

12. Spiritual effects. Advancement in qigong is often accompanied by a variety of spiritual experiences. For example; synchronicity or meaningful coincidences, become more common. When the qi is abundant, clear, and flowing, the senses perceive and are permeated by a sweetness, as though a divine nectar perfumes the skin and is generated in the mouth. Some students see a radiance or aura around people. Be thankful for such experiences but do not become egotistical about them; neither awe nor excitement are necessary. You are indeed special, but no more special than every person. Each individual, like each flower in a field, has a unique beauty.

Common Temporary Reactions

Qigong is safe as long as you practice moderation, follow good commonsense, and listen to your health care provider's advice. Nevertheless, during the first few months of practice some students may experience the following temporary unpleasant phenomena, signs that your body is adjusting to a new and better energy level:

Itching. The skin may itch as it discharges old and unneeded qi.

Trembling. Trembling occurs because your energy circuits are carrying a higher current. Or trembling may be a sign that you are using excess effort or awakening muscles that have not been exercised for a long time. When trembling occurs, pay attention and relax. If it continues, stop your practice and resume later or the next day.

Nausea. You have more nerve cells in your abdomen than in the spinal cord. As you awaken your mind and body, your digestion may feel different for a few months. The stomach may gurgle; you may burp or fart more often. This is only temporary.

Remember that Chinese medicine (acupuncture and herbs) are excellent adjuncts to qigong practice. To accelerate your progress in qigong, you may wish to occasionally get an acupuncture "tune up" from a licensed practitioner.