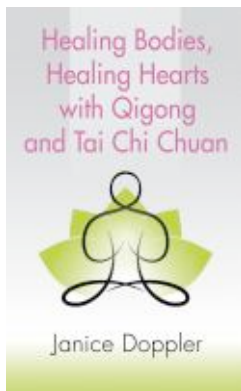


Healing Bodies,
Healing Hearts
with Qigong
and Tai Chi Chuan



Janice Doppler



Healing Bodies, Healing Hearts with Qigong and Tai Chi Chuan explores the lives of Master Lijun Cheng and her students to reveal how qigong and tai chi promote the health of body, mind, and spirit. Narratives of survival, physical and emotional healing, and profound spiritual change illustrate how qigong and tai chi chuan can be vehicles for making life more meaningful regardless of the ups and downs of life.

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Janice Doppler

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SECTION I

CHANGE CALLS

The one great story is our search ... to be in accord with the grand symphony that this world is, to put the harmony of our own body in accord with that harmony.

Joseph Campbell, American Mythologist

I once tried standing up on my toes to see far out in the distance, but I found that I could see much farther by climbing to a high place.

Xunzi, Chinese Philosopher

CHAPTER 1 – FOUNDING CENTER FOR HARMONY

Master Cheng became lonely soon after immigrating to the United States to obtain medical treatment for her eyes. She spoke little English and knew only her son, Qun. He suspected his friend, Jing Qing, would befriend his mom because she had been so kind to him when they first met in a copy shop several months earlier. Jing Qing had immediately invited him to have dinner with her family upon discovering he had no family or friends in the area. Qun took his mom to meet Jing Qing who was astonished at how intensely familiar Master Cheng felt. It was as if they'd known each other before. They quickly became close friends.

When Master Cheng met Jing Qing's mother, upon shaking hands she said, "You have arthritis. I could teach you qigong to decrease the discomfort." Jing Qing, who had dreamed of learning the ancient art of qigong since she was a girl, realized that her opportunity had finally arrived. She gathered several family members and friends and Master Cheng began teaching qigong three months after her arrival in Connecticut in January 1994. Teaching tai chi chuan followed soon after.

Jing Qing served as the translator for Master Cheng at an ever-expanding schedule of teaching qigong and tai chi chuan at senior centers, churches, and fitness centers in Connecticut and Massachusetts. In 1999, at

the age of sixty-one, Master Cheng established the International Center for Harmony and Living Arts in western Massachusetts to teach qigong, tai chi chuan, and the traditional Chinese health culture.

Master Cheng says “I teach qigong because I am living proof of the power of qigong. Qigong helped heal my injuries from beatings during the Cultural Revolution, illnesses related to malnutrition during long stretches when limited food was available, a spinal injury that x-rays showed was so serious that my physicians could not believe I was walking, and even cancer.” She views teaching as “an opportunity to make up for the lost years during the Cultural Revolution that should have been the golden time of my life.” She explained that, “Traditional masters in China are old and keep quiet in public about their knowledge because they fear drawing the attention of the government. As a result, there are few, if any, young people learning qigong. I am deeply saddened by the decline of qigong so I feel a deep responsibility to nurture qigong at the Center for Harmony along with tai chi chuan and the traditional Chinese culture.”

Master Cheng further explained, “When I saw the situation in the United States I began to teach tai chi chuan in addition to qigong. I noticed that many people wanted to learn tai chi chuan, but many teachers did not truly understand it. I was invited to a party where they did tai chi chuan, but it was not really tai chi chuan. I saw that some people were learning from videotapes and I worried that they would not understand enough to reap the health benefits of tai chi chuan and might even damage their bodies. A Chinese

man who claimed to have extensive background in tai chi chuan invited me to teach at his school, but his skills were poor and he admitted to me that none of his claims of expertise were true.”

Master Cheng learned qigong from traditional masters who fled to the safety of the mountains during the Cultural Revolution. Political turmoil spared those areas so qigong remained unchanged. After the Cultural Revolution, the old masters came out of the mountains and qigong became popular. The masters modified some qigong practices to make them accessible to people who were new to qigong. In that tradition, Master Cheng integrated the principles of traditional qigong, techniques she learned from old masters, and what she believes is most acceptable to modern people to create a sitting qigong called Happy Heart Qigong (*le xin gong*). It contributes to being calm and relaxed, balancing yin and yang, and promoting the health of internal organs by balancing the five elements or energetic phases. These concepts will be described in chapter three, *Chinese Wisdom*.

Master Cheng's first American students joined Center for Harmony to learn tai chi. Elizabeth, whose story you'll read later in this chapter, described the early days of qigong class. "None of the Americans knew what qigong was. We did it because Master Cheng said we should. We simply sat on cushions on the floor for an hour listening to music. We did not know what we were doing or why, but we kept coming back! At the start it was just a time to relax and be quiet, but it evolved. At the beginning, most of the students were Chinese and what was said was in Chinese. More and

more, Master Cheng started speaking in English and guiding us to relax each part of our body. Over the years, she gradually added components.”

By the time I joined Center for Harmony in its eighth year, it had grown to nearly fifty students with classes in two locations – Thursdays in a church hall, Tuesdays and Saturdays on the campus of a private boarding school in a building had once been the home of an affluent family. There was a marble fireplace in every room and oriental rugs that students rolled up before each class, but the opulent building was not well-maintained. Most windows did not open and those that did had to be opened by two people - one who held the heavy window open while a second propped it open with a chunk of lumber. The first half of Thursday and Saturday classes was sitting qigong. Tai chi was taught in the second half of these three-hour long classes. Tuesday classes were demanding tai chi chuan classes.

Master Cheng had experienced the power of qigong and tai chi chuan in her own life and she wanted her students to squeeze all possible benefit from these practices so she encouraged students to attend class frequently. If you attended once a week, she wanted twice. If you attended twice, she wanted three times. Some students quit because of the relentless pressure while others increased their frequency of attendance and were glad they did.

During qigong, Master Cheng sat with legs crossed in the lotus position on a round cushion. Once, she unzipped its red cover and displayed a lotus on her

cushion. She explained, “The lotus roots in lake-bottom mud and grows its leaves and flowers on the water’s surface. This symbolizes reaching for light without being bogged down by the mud of life.” Students sat around her in a semi-circle - some on cushions on the floor, some in chairs without leaning against the back support. Everyone covered their legs to keep them warm during qigong. Master Cheng used a yellow blanket edged in red on which students had written their names which were then embroidered permanently onto the blanket by the student who created it.

The main component of qigong class was a forty-five minute sitting qigong - *Le Xin Gong* or Happy Heart Qigong. It was accompanied by music – songs written and sung by Master Cheng’s qigong master Kong Tai, who had a gift of healing through his singing of Buddhist music. Unlike the early days of Center for Harmony, Master Cheng spoke English and guided students through three phases – adjust your body by relaxing, adjust your breathing by imagining inhaling qi to your *dantian*, and adjust your spirit by imagining becoming one with the universe. Master Cheng worked hard to be able to lead in English; she wrote the words in Chinese, had them translated them into English, and then spent hours memorizing and practicing.

Marrow Washing, a series of self-massaging movements that assist the circulation of qi in the body, followed immediately after *le xin gong*. In my early days at Center for Harmony, qigong and Marrow Washing was followed by a question and answer period. It was in-the-moment teaching that resulted in piecemeal instruction since the range of questions was wide – I

saw this color, this shape, or that person; what does that mean? Why do I always fart or burp during qigong? What are the best foods to eat at this time of year to be in rhythm with the flow of nature? What does it mean if my hands feel cottony during qigong? I felt this or that difficult emotion during qigong; can you tell me what to do? Occasionally, the questions bordered on the metaphysical. Sometimes the answers were fascinating, often repetitive. "It is good energy for you" was a frequent answer.

When I started doing qigong it was months before I could sit through *Le Xin Gong* without my back hurting yet I persisted because I sensed something profound yet indescribable happening within me. I often wished I could express my own questions more clearly to elicit a deeper answer. I eventually realized "It is good energy for you" was the answer. I let go of trying to make meaning of my qigong experience which freed me to relax and enjoy whatever happened. My qigong improved.

Master Cheng has said, "After I came to the United States I felt strongly that I have a mission to pass Chinese wisdom to the next generation. I see benefits in both eastern and western medicine and believe that *together* they could do wonders. I am in my seventies now and too old to carry out my entire vision, but each of my students is a seed I am planting to unite east and west."

Qigong and tai chi has changed the lives of Master Cheng's students. People bring unique needs and interests to class. Typically, once they begin practicing,

they satisfy their original need. Those who persist discover additional benefits as in the following four stories from students. Each is told in the student's own words.

Elizabeth

When I was a child I didn't have an answer when asked what I was going to be when I grew up. I majored in cello performance in college and was happily going along being Elizabeth-the-cello-player with no idea for my future other than that I'd graduate and something would happen.

Something happened. I was riding in a car that was struck by a drunk driver. I couldn't sit in a chair so I couldn't play my cello. I left school and went to live with my parents. Three years of increasing debilitation followed. I went from not being able to walk well to having to lift my leg with my hands when I climbed stairs. A team of orthopedic surgeons said I would eventually lose the ability to walk. Breathing became increasingly difficult because my lungs were being squeezed as my spine gradually folded over on itself. I could not brush my own hair or get into the bathtub.

To do something with the limited physical capacity I had, I hobbled to the YMCA across the street from my parents' house to attend the disabled swimming program. One day in the lobby there was a sign that said "Beginning Tai Chi – all ability levels welcome." I have no idea what possessed me to think I could possibly do that, but I went to tai chi class instead of swimming. It was a pivotal moment in my life.

That class was the first time in three years that I did not feel pain every minute. I joined tai chi and the qigong class that preceded it. Both became instrumental in my healing. When performing tai chi, I could move my body without pain in ways that I otherwise could not. During qigong, qi moved my body in ways I couldn't move outside the qigong space. I was encouraged because I believed if I could do it during qigong and tai chi, I could move freely someday.

Over the past dozen years, I have regained my health and become strong enough to function normally in daily life. I still have pain from the injuries caused by the accident; however, I can live through pain in a way that it doesn't take over my whole existence. Doing qigong keeps healing energy flowing. I use the qigong breathing technique to calm myself and relax muscles when they begin to spasm.

Physical and emotional healing from the accident is only part of my story. For the past several years I have been teaching cello to elementary through high school students in a school district others describe as impoverished, drug-infested, and depressed. I see heartbreaking things every day. A kindergartener got in trouble for stuffing his pockets full of packets of cereal to take home to his little sister who didn't have enough food. A girl in third grade saw a baby thrown out of a window because her high-on-drugs parents were mad at her.

I describe my school district as exciting, fun, exceptional, and full of talent because the students are so amazing. They come to school happy to be there

and anxious to learn. Students frequently tell me they thought they could never do anything, but learning to play cello gives them hope.

I am able to handle the heartbreak I see every day and help my students because, through acceptance of my own problems, I developed the calmness and acceptance that this is how it is and everybody does the best they can. I cannot describe how, yet somehow qigong melts away the nonsense and gets to what is true. What is true is that in the simplest way, we are all people trying to live together. For me, it is important to help where I can. You can't feel bad if you are helping someone else feel better.

I would not have learned these things and would not be capable of my work physically or emotionally without my qigong and tai chi practice. I thought I just needed to heal my back and the rest of my body after the accident. I couldn't have healed as much as I did without the calmness, relaxation, and knowing within myself the feeling of safety from doing qigong and tai chi. I teach music all day long and have a life I never dreamed of even when I was at my healthiest before the accident.

Trish

I searched for a spiritual path or tradition for many years, but didn't find what I was looking for so I developed a practice of my own. When my father was diagnosed with terminal cancer I was concerned that his impending death could potentially worsen the posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) I was already suffering due to the battering and sexual abuse he

perpetrated on me when I was a child. My self-developed practice was no longer enough. A friend recommended qigong.

Initially, qigong class was a safe place to experience the enormous pain I felt because my dad, whom I both loved and hated, was dying. I became aware of emotional pain that I had previously blocked from my mind, and I cried during every class for a long time. Awareness is the first stage of making change since you must be aware of something before you can change it. Once I became aware of painful emotions, I learned to allow them to pass through me instead of becoming knotted inside me. I am learning how to relax and calm my mind and spirit when I become aware of anger, fear, or sadness during qigong. I believe that if I can do this during qigong, I can learn to do the same when I'm upset in my daily life.

Qigong helps me be present in my body. During episodes of abuse I was able to anesthetize my feelings by dissociating from awareness of my body. Blocking these feelings helped me survive, but at the cost of internal tension that ultimately developed into fibromyalgia, an autoimmune illness related to the trauma I experienced. The blockages that create this illness are deeply ingrained in my body and nervous system and are difficult to unlearn even though they are no longer necessary. My physical pain from fibromyalgia is a constant presence. If I focus on it, it takes over. If I dissociate from this pain I cut off part of who I am. I want to experience joy in spite of the presence of pain.

When I do qigong my breathing changes and I focus on sensations in my body. I allow my posture, guided by my breath, to shift and change as it wants and needs to. I open my mind to allow images, sensations of colors, smells and sounds to flow in and through many parts of my body. Although this means I am more aware of the pain from fibromyalgia, I am learning to hold joy and body pain together in the same space. Before qigong they felt very separate. My body is gradually becoming less guarded and increasingly resilient as I relax into the consciousness of the safety and comfort in my life. The constricted, burning, and achy feelings I still frequently experience in my body are slowly giving way to feelings of lightness, softness, and flexibility. Accepting rather than fighting the constant discomfort of fibromyalgia makes it possible to simultaneously be at peace with myself and be present with the beauty and love that exists in the world.

I am in the infancy of taking the awareness dawning via qigong and transferring that into my daily life. It is an enormous challenge, but I already see changes. For example, I am awake with insomnia from fibromyalgia for a portion of almost every night. In the past I got up and did things to distract myself. Now, when I awaken during the night I focus inwardly and relax with qigong-like breathing – long, slow, deep. It helps me quiet my mind and I continue to rest which feels like I'm getting some of the benefits I would if I were still sleeping even if I can't sleep.

When I started qigong I hoped it would increase my energy and connection to life. Part of the lingering effect of what happened in my childhood is that I need

a lot of alone time and I keep my life small for safety. That's very typical for survivors. I am working toward having a bigger life and not having to be so defended and solitary. I'm not bursting with more energy, but the energy I have to be out in the world is growing in quality because I'm healing through the inner work I'm doing.

What I would most love to see happen in my lifetime is the human species moving toward cooperation, harmony, peace and generosity towards all species. I contribute to that dream by bringing the world more joy through writing, teaching, and performing music. My music is becoming more joyful and hopeful. I'm enjoying my students more and my students are enjoying me more. My audiences are enjoying my performances more. Music can be an expression of emotion, a way to express all kinds of things both pleasurable and painful. I see audiences light up when I perform joyful music. I believe it reminds them that even if their present day life is sad, it is possible to feel better.

The practice of qigong is what I have been looking for during my entire life. Qigong has become a powerful tool for meeting enormous challenges associated with abuse by my father and the unceasing pain of fibromyalgia. It is also a tool for cultivating an attitude of acceptance of what I've been given in this life instead of being resentful. This acceptance increases access to the abundant joy that I believe is my birthright. It replaces trauma-related patterns that helped me survive my childhood with ones that foster connection to the world. It is a slow process.

Sometimes it feels like nothing is changing, but I know it is. It is like gently steering an extremely large ship pulling something heavy. If I steer too much and try to make change too fast I create tidal waves of unintended consequences. The gifts I receive through qigong are rippling into the world through me and will continue to ripple and ripple.

Thaxter

I came to Center for Harmony to rekindle a lapsed tai chi practice of twenty-five years. For the first several weeks I arrived when people were doing qigong and waited outside for them to finish. Then, I came in and did tai chi. I decided adding qigong would help me become part of the community.

Qigong was hard! Trying to get one's body to be relaxed is a physical aspect of qigong. It did *not* come naturally to me. I read Zen literature before I came to Center for Harmony and it sparked a desire to live in a place of deep, subtle calmness rather than occasionally getting to such a place. Master Cheng can do that. My desire is to be calm like she is calm. The fact that qigong was hard meant I needed it. If I couldn't sit calmly and relax then that's what I needed – to sit calmly and relax. I'm not always calm, but I am calmer.

The first challenge was getting so that I could do qigong without hurting. I told myself even if I'm just sitting here thinking about my back hurting, I'm thinking about a real thing in the moment and it gives my mind a rest from everything that is out there. I told myself to trust that there is a benefit and stay with it. Another

challenge was not being a talented qigonger. After qigong, students were invited to ask questions. My sense was that there were people who reported having unusual, interesting, or deeply qigongish experiences not available to the rest of us. Nobody was raising their hand and saying, "I was just sitting here," but that is what I was doing. It was like being in an art class and not being good at art.

I persisted in spite of the difficulty. Part of it was I don't like to quit. It would be a hard admission for me to watch forty people doing qigong with no problem and say "this is too hard for me." I assumed that if these people can get something out of this I can get something out of this and I decided I *can* do this. I'm *not* going to give up.

Whatever is happening to me is happening in slow increments yet there have been multifaceted benefits. I have greater awareness of my body. During qigong I tune into what is happening with my body because there is nothing else to tune into. I feel what's going on with my body a lot of the time – where it's aching, where the problems are. If you're busy, busy, busy you don't necessarily notice. Qigong is sort of an early warning system that helps me notice things so I can take care of them before they become problems.

For me, the health aspect of qigong is about maintenance. I was healthy when I joined and have stayed well as I have gotten older. Friends are amazed that even though I'm in my mid-sixties that I don't take any medication, can put salt on my food, and don't have high blood pressure. I still have places in my body

that tend to bind up. I have a place in the middle of my back just to the right of my spine that tightens into a knot when I do qigong. It's very hard for me to release that. I have parts of my body that I am learning to relax and qigong is a place where I can work on that.

I am more attentive to my emotions, which gives me more control of ones that can be disruptive. I don't know that it actually makes me calmer, but it means I don't get worse. Qigong helps me get old, but not crotchety. For example, becoming angry over little things such as jars not opening or inconsiderate drivers is new for me so I suspect it gets worse when you get older. Being aware of my own anger enables me to watch myself being angry instead of just being angry, and that changes everything. The change is that I can let go of the anger more quickly rather than still having the anger after the situation ends.

There's a strong connection between my view of striving for excellence as virtue and defining myself as not being a talented qigonger. I want to be good at what I do. As I said, if my classmates can do this, I want to be able to do this. There is a paradox in wanting to be excellent and needing to let go of wanting to be excellent in order to be calm. Both desires are operating within me. Trying my way out of it won't work. I can't try harder not to excel. The way out of it is to continue my practice and sit and not worry. Just do what I do. When I do tai chi, one of the things I like is that I'm not thinking about whether I am better or worse than someone else. When I play tennis I have to think about that since I'm playing with someone I am trying to beat. I'm not beating anyone when I play tai

chi which is one of the things that attracted me to it. It took me out of the adversarial, competitive mind set of trying to be the best. One of the reasons I do tai chi and qigong is to get out of that place of having to be the best so I can define myself as good. Having to be the best is not the best place to live and becomes self-defeating when you get older because you're not going to be the best any more.

I slowly shed the sense that I am not a talented qigonger. I've had more than one person say "I couldn't sit still for an hour of qigong. I couldn't do that." I can, so I'm beginning to think "I really can do this" and it makes me think differently about myself. I do qigong every single day and recently increased from twenty to thirty minutes a day at home.

In all the times I've done qigong, I got myself in a totally good place once. My body relaxed. My mind relaxed. I remember consciously thinking "this is really nice in here" it lasted for about forty-five seconds. It happened just once, but it keeps me motivated.

Anna

For much of my life anger, fear, or grief would arise within me when situations occurred that I couldn't control. Qigong helped me be calm regardless of my life situation because I experienced everything from a calmer starting point. After six months of daily qigong I was no longer easily frustrated with myself or irritated with other people and rarely experienced emotional over-reactions that used to be commonplace.

My daily practice at home lapsed when I lost my momentum after being hospitalized for several days with a serious infection. The calmness I'd developed gradually dissolved. I returned to being easily frustrated and irritated. I felt more anxious, had a shorter temper. The stark contrast in myself with and without qigong motivated me to resume my daily practice and I reclaimed the more easy-going self I had become with the daily discipline of qigong. I was enjoying life and feeling grateful every day when I woke up. And then, I lost my job as part of a huge lay-off at the hospital where I worked. In spite of the dire outlook, I was able to maintain an overall sense of happiness and trusted the universe to open to the right thing rather than feeling like a rag doll helplessly blown about by the wind. This is the way I've always aspired to be. I didn't think I could ever get there because I've been trying my whole life, but the effects of qigong helped me get there!

Soon after, I faced an even bigger challenge when I suddenly lost hearing in my right ear and developed constant tinnitus. There were times of grieving the loss and times of optimism when I told myself that healing is not about returning to what was, but about being with what is now and allowing that to bring me closer to my true self. My nervous system took a long time to adjust to my hearing loss, yet I eventually became accustomed to the difficulties of hearing through one ear and I stepped slowly back into the stream of life.

As I've rebuilt my life after losing my job and part of my hearing, I realized happiness is not just about circumstances. When I lost my job and lost my hearing

I was able to maintain my happiness and calmness. Devoting time to a meditative practice such as qigong helps me be happy regardless of life circumstances.

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The following chapter is my own story of spending seven years learning tai chi chuan with American teachers before finding Master Cheng. It also describes an interaction with her that reveals a bit of her exceptional internal power.

CHAPTER 2 – FINDING MASTER CHENG

During the drive home from blueberry picking in 1998, my friend mentioned she had recently registered for a tai chi class. I responded that I'd thought for years that I'd do the same someday. When I arrived home, my mailbox held an announcement of a tai chi class forming just one mile from my home. Apparently, "someday" had arrived. I signed up immediately.

I was hooked on tai chi the first time I tried it. Sometimes, I felt like I was coming home to something I'd known long before. One morning as I practiced in my driveway it dawned on me that just as tai chi movements constantly shift between forward and backward, life constantly flows between times of ease and difficulty which means I can trust that life's difficulties will *always* pass. In that moment, I sensed a deep relaxation that marked my transition from tai chi simply as a method of promoting health to tai chi as a spiritual practice.

Seven years later, it was time for a new teacher. My first teacher had retired and most of the students of my second teacher had moved away or quit. I noticed an announcement of tai chi and qigong classes at Center for Harmony and decided to investigate. I intended to skip qigong, but do not remember why. The parking lot for the recreation hall rented to community groups by a Catholic church was full when I arrived. I pushed my way through squeaky doors into a wooden-floored

room the size of a basketball court. At the far corner of the room a couple dozen people were sitting in a semi-circle around Master Cheng who was answering questions about qigong. Most of the group wore blue t-shirts with a stylized lotus on the front and the Chinese character with the dual meaning of happiness or music on the back. Master Cheng watched me intently as I approached the group and slipped into a seat.

I joined in when Master Cheng led a moving qigong called *Le Gong*, Happiness Qigong, done standing with arm movements that were easy to follow. It was developed by her qigong master, Kong Tai, to promote circulation in invisible meridians. A ten-minute break for green tea freshly steeped from leaves imported from China punctuated the transition from qigong to tai chi chuan class. Everyone did the “twelve form” developed by Master Cheng and the “twenty-four form” developed in 1956 in China to make tai chi accessible to the general population. Both were new to me; however, I was able to follow. Next, we broke into two groups for instruction. Master Cheng’s husband, Wen Tao, worked with an advanced group on the traditional Yang style long form while Master Cheng worked with the other on the twenty-four form. Her manner was gentle and smiles were frequent yet her expectation that tai chi would be done well was clear. After about twenty minutes, she told my group to practice while she worked with the other group. Wen Tao switched to our group and answered questions that emerged as we practiced individually. Later, she returned to our group to see how we’d progressed and made corrections for us to work on at home.

Master Cheng approached me when class ended. I had a hard time understanding her English. She said qigong and tai chi are powerful tools for healing and revealed that she used them to heal herself from cancer. She indicated she could tell I had been doing tai chi for a long time, but my tai chi had many flaws. She tapped my sternum as she said “I fix!”

Long ago, I sensed that a special Teacher would enter my life at some point. Each time a new teacher came into my life I wondered whether this was my Special Teacher. Each time, the answer was no. When I left class that night I was so exhausted that I feared my legs wouldn't carry me down the steps, but in my heart I was dancing because this night, the answer was yes! Master Cheng was my Special Teacher. The journal entry I wrote that night reflects both excitement and reluctance.

10/14/05

I hope this is not time for new motion to begin in my life. I feel like I am just reaching a place of quiet – happy with Peg, the overwhelming stress at work has passed, exercising more, eating better, and now my Special Teacher has arrived in my life. I hope a time of quietness is coming to let these good things swirl together into a new pattern.

I had no idea that night how much I would learn or the deep relationship that would develop between Master Cheng and me, but how could I possibly have hoped

that new motion would not be created by finally finding the teacher for whom I'd searched for twenty-five years? The following week I began attending qigong class in spite of my reluctance for new motion.

I do not know how I knew Master Cheng was the Special Teacher for whom I searched, but I have never doubted it. After attending class a few months I had an astonishing interaction that revealed her unique internal power. The stage for the interaction was set when I was appointed as Curriculum Director for a local school district. I was ecstatic because I'd been preparing for this role for years, but my elation turned to despair when a new Superintendent of Schools, who led by intimidation and fear, was appointed three months after I started my job. I began to feel intensely sad after qigong so I checked with Master Cheng about how to handle this unwanted emotion. She counseled that the sadness was not a problem since it was not getting stuck within me. The following week at the end of qigong I felt a dead emptiness inside and I sat in silence wondering "What do I do with feeling empty?" Master Cheng turned toward me and sternly declared, "Empty is bad energy!" then she turned away and began the usual post-qigong question and answer session. How did she know what I was feeling and even the exact word I was thinking? She obviously had abilities beyond anything I had imagined possible, so I began attending class twice a week instead of once. Soon after, she described to the class the intimacy of a traditional master-disciple relationship and added that there is deep knowledge that a master can pass only to her disciples. She said, "The student picks her teacher, but the teacher picks her disciples." I sensed it was

important for me to be picked so I would have a chance of being worthy. I began doing qigong every day.

Although I did not realize it at the time, I had reached the jumping off point for an astonishing adventure with Master Cheng. It is important to look back at how Master Cheng and I each arrived at this point before continuing with the adventure. What is the ancient Chinese wisdom that formed the infrastructure for the adventure? How did it impact Master Cheng's life and how did she become a qigong master as well as a tai chi chuan grandmaster and a sixth generation Yang style lineage holder? How did a westerner who started life as a fundamentalist Christian get to the point of embracing qigong and tai chi chuan as both a health and a spiritual practice?

SECTION II

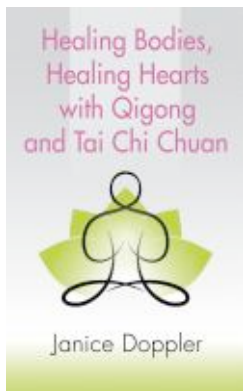
LOOKING BACK

You cannot prevent the birds of sadness from passing over your head, but you can prevent them from making nests in your hair.

*Confucius,
Chinese Philosopher*

People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that is what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our innermost being and reality so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive.

*Joseph Campbell,
American Mythologist*



Healing Bodies, Healing Hearts with Qigong and Tai Chi Chuan explores the lives of Master Lijun Cheng and her students to reveal how qigong and tai chi promote the health of body, mind, and spirit. Narratives of survival, physical and emotional healing, and profound spiritual change illustrate how qigong and tai chi chuan can be vehicles for making life more meaningful regardless of the ups and downs of life.

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