

SPRING QIGONG

The Liver governs the smooth and harmonious flow of qi and blood.

(The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine)

Any disruption of vital blood and qi flow can result in muscle pain/cramps, erratic movements, joint stiffness, emotional irritability, and more. To correct these conditions we need to release any stagnation or obstructions of qi and blood in the Liver. These knots can be undone with qigong practice, acupuncture, and herbs. The Liver naturally opens to external influences—both good and bad—in springtime; therefore, we should take this opportunity to positively affect its health. Spring Qigong practice uses “external qigong” exercises that emphasize muscle movement, opening the chest and expelling stagnant qi from the MDT. The “internal qigong” exercise, Enhancing Liver Qi, effectively balances the yin and yang aspects of the Liver Network.

Do eight repetitions of each exercise unless otherwise noted.

Awakening the Qi

Lower Dan Tian

Use your right palm to rub 36 times clockwise around your navel. Then replace your right palm with your left and rub 36 times counterclockwise.

Beat the Heavenly Drum

Cover your ears with the heels of your hands. Then tap with the fingertips on your occipital bone for about 10 seconds.

Massage the Kidneys

Form loose fists with your hands, then massage up and down over your lower back 36 times.

Do Awakening the Qi only once.

Sunrise—Sunset

Stand with your feet hip-width apart. Bend over from your waist, let your hands hang down toward the floor (Figure 6.3). Interlace your fingers so your palms are facing your head. Your fingers remain interlaced throughout the entire exercise.



Figure 6.3: Sunrise—Sunset

Inhale as you straighten up. Lift your hands close to your body, turn them over at chest level, and raise your arms overhead (Figure 6.4). Lift your heels off the floor, palms facing heaven.

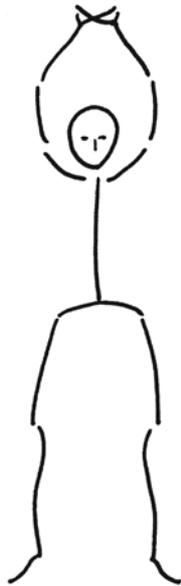


Figure 6.4: Sunrise—Sunset

Exhale as you return your heels to the floor. Bend over at the waist, keeping your arms/elbows straight as you bring your hands down toward your feet, then turn the palms toward your head. That is one repetition.

Visualize bringing energy up from the earth, through your body, and up to heaven.

Spinal Cord Breathing

Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, and your hands at your sides.

Inhale as you bring your hands up to ear level, with the fingers spread wide and palms facing forward (Figure 6.5). Your upper arms are at 45 degrees, and your forearms are vertical. At the same time, pull your shoulders back and tilt your head back. Your sacrum is thrust backward, and your full spine is in extension.

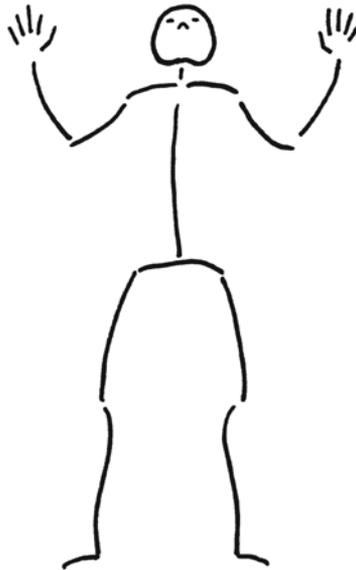


Figure 6.5: Spinal Cord Breathing

Exhale loudly as your spine goes into flexion. Bring your forearms together, forming your hands in fists (Figure 6.6). Your elbows press into your ribs, your chin is tucked into your chest, and your hips are curled under. That is one repetition.



Figure 6.6: Spinal Cord Breathing

Visualize the chest opening and closing, the spine fully extending and flexing. Begin slowly, and then pick up the pace a little. Always exhale forcefully through your mouth.

Press Back to Banish all Illness

Stand with your feet close together, your arms crossed at the wrists with your hands open and your palms against your chest (Figure 6.7). Step forward with your right foot and place the toes lightly on the floor, keeping your weight on your left leg.



Figure 6.7: Press Back to Banish all Illness

Inhale as you turn your body to the right while pressing forward with your left palm and backward with your right palm, looking over your right hand (Figure 6.8). All fingers are pointing upward.

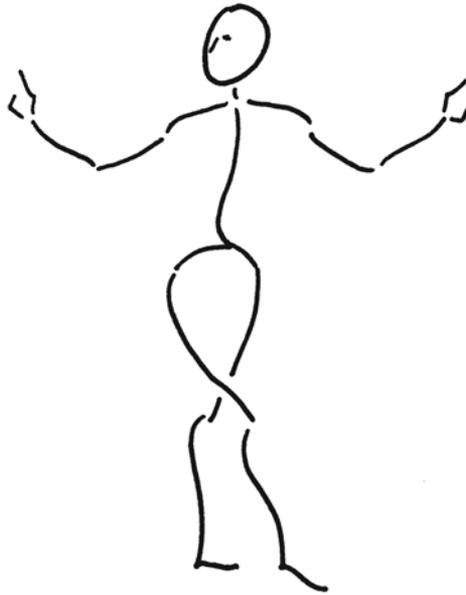


Figure 6.8: Press Back to Banish all Illness

Exhale and return to the starting position, with arms crossed. Step forward with your left foot and place the toes lightly on the floor. Keep your weight on your right leg with the knee bent. That is one repetition.

Inhale as you turn your body to the left while pressing forward with your right palm and backward with your left palm, looking over your left hand. All fingers are pointing upward.

Exhale and return to the starting position, with arms crossed. Step forward with your right foot and place the toes lightly on the floor. Keep your weight on your left leg with the knee bent. That is the second repetition.

Visualize rotating on the spinal axis, opening and closing the chest.

Shoot the Bow

Stand with your feet together, and your hands at your sides.

Inhale as you bring your palms together in the prayer position at chest level (Figure 6.9). Bend both knees slightly.



Figure 6.9: Shoot the Bow

Exhale loudly as you step to the side with your right foot, toes pointing to the right (Figure 6.10). Your weight shifts to your right leg. Your left palm lightly slaps your ribcage on your right side. Your right hand extends to the right with the index finger pointing to the right. Look over the pointing finger. This is one repetition.



Figure 6.10: Shoot the Bow

Inhale as you step back to the center. Straighten your knees, and circle both hands down and then up to prayer position. Then bend both knees.

Exhale loudly as you step to the side with your left foot. Your weight shifts to your left leg. Slap your left ribs with your right palm, point and look over your left finger. This is the second repetition.

Visualize expelling stagnant qi from the MDT.

Enhancing Liver Qi

The three basic ingredients of qigong—movement, breathing, and intention—come into play equally in this potent exercise. The hand/arm *movements* bring healing qi from the environment into the three *dan tians*; then the hands gather and store more qi into the MDT; and finally the *laogong* points in the palms make a rooted connection between the earth and you. *Laogong* functions as the most powerful acupuncture point on the human body for projecting and receiving qi. The *breathing* component of this qigong exercise manifests as the healing sounds. These sacred vocalizations synchronize with the downward movement of the hands to resonate with the three energy centers, causing an infusion of acoustic qi specific to that region of the body. *Intention*, in step with the moving hands, brings energy down the *Taiji Axis* to augment the *dan tians*. Intention also packs qi into the MDT and the Liver through the *qimen* point. *Qimen* is located on the bottom edge of the ribcage at a hand's width distance from the midline of the torso. According to the textbooks from the Shanghai College of Traditional Medicine, stimulation of *qimen* "facilitates the spreading of Liver Qi, transforms and removes Congealed Blood" (O'Connor and Bensky 1985). Enhancing Liver Qi reigns as one of the best exercises for relaxing and opening up the Liver, expediting qi flow through the *Taiji Axis*, and settling the mind in the body.

Begin by standing with your feet hip-width apart, and your hands down at your sides.

Inhale and raise your arms out to the sides, then overhead to bring your palms together (Figure 6.11).

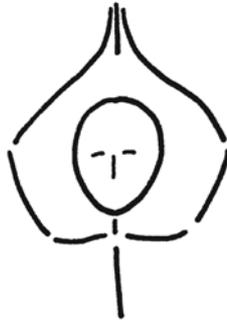


Figure 6.11: Enhancing Liver Qi

Exhale and begin to bring your praying hands down in front (Figure 6.12). Vocalize OM as your hands slowly pass by your head; then AH as they pass your throat; and then HUN (hoon) at your chest as your hands turn over with the fingers pointing down. Continue exhaling and lower your hands to the LDT. The three-syllable sound has an even tone until the end of “hoon,” where the pitch slightly drops. Finish the exhalation with your palms together and fingers pointing down at the level of the LDT.



Figure 6.12: Enhancing Liver Qi

Inhale as your hands separate and move forward at chest level with the palms facing each other.

Exhale as you bring your hands back until your elbows are near your ribs and your shoulders are relaxed (Figure 6.13). Hold your hands there and *take three breaths*. *Feel the movement in the MDT and ribs*: the hands move slightly apart with the inhalation and come within inches of each other on the exhalation.



Figure 6.13: Enhancing Liver Qi

Inhale as your hands make a scooping action toward the back (Figure 6.14), then finish inhaling as the palms turn up and the little fingers touch the edge of the lower ribs (Figure 6.15).

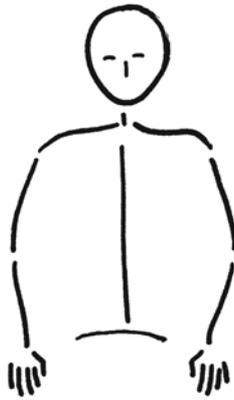


Figure 6.14: Enhancing Liver Qi

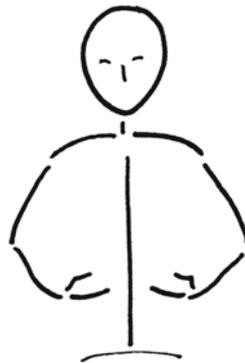


Figure 6.15: Enhancing Liver Qi

Exhale, relax, and think of sending qi from your hands into your body through the qimen point. Hold that position for one breath, *inhale* and *exhale*.

Then *inhale* again.

Exhale as you press your elbows against your ribs, then move your hands forward with the palms up to chest level. Think of squeezing out turbid qi from the body. Finish exhaling as the palms turn down and your forearms are parallel to the ground. Your index fingers are slightly elevated above the other fingers (Figure 6.16).



Figure 6.16: Enhancing Liver Qi

Relax and stay in this position for *three breaths*. Feel that the *laogong* points are anchored to the earth, the whole body is strong, the MDT spacious. Think of energy connecting the *laogong* points with the earth.

Do Enhancing Liver Qi three times.

Sealing the Qi

Whole Body Tapping

Use your palms to tap over each arm, your trunk, outer legs, inner legs, abdomen, lower back (use your fists on your back). Do this three times.

Arms Horizontal

Put your arms straight out to the sides, with your fingers pointing up, for one breath.

Heaven and Earth

Inhale and lift your hands laterally and then overhead, with the palms pointing to heaven. Rise up on your toes and hold your breath for a few seconds. Slowly exhale, lower your heels, and with palms facing the earth, lower your hands to the LDT.

Seal

Cover the LDT with the palm of your right hand. Place the palm of your left hand over your right hand with the thumb tucked under your right hand. Stand quietly for three breaths.

Do Sealing the Qi only once.

NEIGONG PRACTICE—ENTERING TRANQUILITY

Internal qigong and meditation often blend together in the practice of *Qigong Through the Seasons*. They both nourish qi in all of its yin–yang manifestations—abiding in tranquility or freely circulating—by using inwardly directed intention and visualization. Inner Nourishing and Rising Yang Qi exemplify this fusion of qigong and meditation.

Releasing unwanted tightness around the internal organs can be achieved with deep qigong practice. Qi can only circulate with maximum efficiency and greatest value when no excessive tension exists in the organs, the surrounding muscles, the web of connective tissue, or the intrinsic vessels and nerves. Physiological tranquility, gained from qigong practice, feels like an alert peacefulness melding the body and mind together into a complete whole. Dr. Jiao Guorui, a highly respected twentieth-century qigong practitioner in China, calls this state “entering quiescence” (Jiao 1990, p.61). He describes it as a major requirement for practice:

First of all, we must understand the quiescent state correctly. This state exists relatively as compared to the dynamic state. Life is movement, and the quiescent state is actually stillness in movement. It is not motionless. Therefore, qigong exercise is essentially quiescent motions. When we enter the quiescent state we are entering a special state of movement. (Jiao 1990, p.61)

Dr. Jiao refers to the movement of qi. What signifies quiescence? Think of it as a special state of inward tranquility, composure, and rest. For some people, entering tranquility feels like a frozen river that melts during springtime, thereby releasing stagnated energy, pent-up emotions, and mental dismay. Mental and emotional tranquility eliminates interferences from both inside and outside the body, providing favorable conditions for the central nervous system to carry out the active, natural regulation of body functions and cognitive abilities.

The condition of being “completely relaxed” allows the Liver to perform its myriad tasks with unfettered power. This amazing visceral structure has more functions than any other single organ: it filters and detoxifies the blood, produces hundreds of enzymes and hormones, and regulates the volume of circulating blood. Oftentimes, due to poor diet, stress, irritability, and inactivity, the Liver becomes clogged and sluggish. For this vital organ to work properly, it must become decongested and supple. The Chinese say that a healthy Liver resembles “a Free and Easy Wanderer,” responsible for the smooth and harmonious flow of blood and qi throughout the body and mind.

During spring, the concentration of qi rises up from the Kidney area and pours into the MDT. At this point, if congealed metabolic waste products clog the Liver, the Rising Qi will become trapped, thus causing Stagnated Liver Qi and Blood (more about this later in the chapter). Spring Qigong practice helps the Liver become free and easy through the use of special qigong exercises, herbs, and foods. The following practice, Inner Nourishing, combines internal qigong practice together with meditation to create whole person tranquility, thus relaxing the Liver and freeing the flow of qi.

Inner Nourishing

Inner Nourishing, *Nei Yang Gong*, developed as a secret Daoist healing method during the Ming dynasty; qigong masters traditionally transmitted it to only one select student. In 1947 Dr. Liu Guizhen, feeling that everyone should know this health-enhancing internal practice for the greater good of society, began to teach it to the public. Inner Nourishing exemplifies how *neigong* and meditation merge into a single practice through the combination of breathing, movement, mindfulness, and visualization.

Begin by sitting or lying down (Figure 6.17). Rest and be comfortable but alert.

Inhale slowly and think of bringing the qi from the tailbone area, up your back, over your head and into your mouth. While inhaling gently, place the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth just behind the front teeth, and silently say, "I am calm."

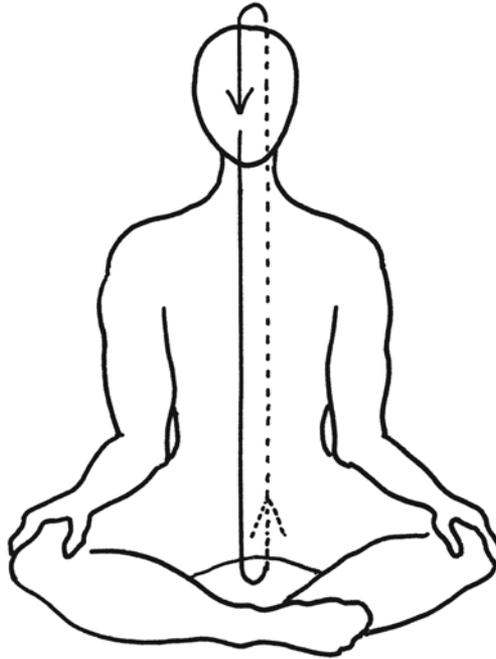


Figure 6.17: Inner Nourishing

Exhale slowly and think of bringing the qi down the front of your body to the LDT. While exhaling, let your tongue drop gently to the floor of your mouth as you silently say, "and relaxed."

Do this for a few minutes. Don't count repetitions; just breathe slowly, visualize energy moving up your back and down your front in harmony with the silent mantra. This meditative practice not only moves the qi up the Governing Meridian and down the Conception Meridian, it effectively elicits a deep relaxation response throughout the entire body. You can even do this while sitting at work, in an airplane or bus, or standing in a line waiting for something to happen.