

DAOIST NEI GONG

The Philosophical

Art of Change

DAMO MITCHELL

FOREWORD BY DR CINDY ENGEL



DAOIST NEI GONG

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SINGING
DRAGON

London and Philadelphia

First published in 2011
by Singing Dragon
an imprint of Jessica Kingsley Publishers
116 Pentonville Road
London N1 9JB, UK
and
400 Market Street, Suite 400
Philadelphia, PA 19106, USA

www.singingdragon.com

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 1 84819 065 8
ISBN pdf eBook 978 0 85701 033 9

*I dedicate this book to all sincere practitioners of the internal arts.
May the search for truth be fruitful and rewarding.*

DISCLAIMER

The author and publisher of this material are not responsible in any way whatsoever for any injury that may occur through reading or practising the exercises outlined in this book.

The exercises and practices may be too strenuous or risky for some people and so you should consult a qualified doctor before attempting anything from this book. It is also advised that you proceed under the guidance of an experienced teacher of the internal arts to avoid injury and confusion.

Note that any form of internal exercise is not a replacement for conventional health practices, medicines or any form of psychotherapy.

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FOREWORD

Throughout history numerous cultures have developed processes of human transformation using only aspects of mind. Practitioners are able to transform their nature – their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual selves – using attention and intention. All of these transformative techniques demand one thing – practice. The amount of practice that is needed requires a certain type of person – a dedicated, dare I say, obsessive person, who will put all of their attention and intention in the desired direction.

This level of focus is extremely difficult in a modern multi-media, information-overloaded life style. It takes perseverance and determination to make progress. This work is not just an interest for Damo. It is his life.

As a fellow Qi Gong student, I underestimated Damo's abilities, put them down to youthful confidence; but as soon as I saw him move and felt the effect of his intention on my energetic system, it was obvious he was working on a very different level to anyone else I had so far encountered. He was doing more than just learning about the internal arts. He was exploring, experiencing, expanding and developing the teachings he received for hours a day, everyday. Whereas I was being taught the same thing over and over and still not getting it, he only needed the slightest exposure to information in order to understand it.

Over the years, I have watched him expand and develop the wealth of traditional knowledge into a system that can be expressed in a modern world. This long-awaited book is the first to share these explorations without the cloak of secrecy normally surrounding the topic.

Dr Cindy Engel
Author of Wild Health

PREFACE

Since my early childhood I have been studying the Eastern arts in one form or another. I was fortunate enough to be born into a family of martial artists and seekers of the way. I was exposed to the arts of combat, medicine and spirituality early enough that their logic and practices began to seep into the deeper layers of my psyche.

This practice blossomed into a passion which often borders on an obsession. Throughout my early and mid teens I studied the martial systems and sought to obtain raw physical power. By my late teens and twenties my interest had been taken over by the path of the internal systems. In particular the link between practices such as Qi Gong and meditation caught my interest and I realised how all of my martial studies had only been laying the foundation for this aspect of the Daoist arts. The result of these studies, which have taken me across Europe and Asia, is the system which I teach within my own school which is based in the United Kingdom. The foundation of this system is Nei Gong.

Nei Gong is the attainment of real internal skill through the practice of the internal arts. It is the awakening of the energy body and cultivation of our consciousness. It is the philosophical art of change which permeates all Daoist practices.

In this book I present the principle and practices of Daoist internal arts. I outline various exercises which may be used as tools to understand Nei Gong. It is my hope that readers will explore the guidelines and practices from this book and see how it fits in with their own practices. Perhaps practitioners will take some aspects of the training only or recognise elements of the training which they are already studying. This is fine. Nei Gong is not a system of exercises. It is a series of internal changes which a person may go through in order to follow a path to Dao. The way onto the Nei Gong path is through practices like Taiji or Qi Gong. I hope that by the end of the book readers will be able to understand how Taiji and Qi Gong are only tools to bring about change; understanding this is the key to understanding Nei Gong.

There are many teachers today who seek to adapt exercises to suit modern people. Qi Gong and Taiji were changed to suit the masses and systems were developed which could be learnt in a much shorter time than their traditional counterparts. This is a positive development which has enabled the internal arts to flourish and countless people, who would otherwise have found these arts inaccessible, to experience the benefits they may bring. However, there are many people out there who are frustrated with this situation. They have read accounts of the skills of the past masters and join internal arts classes in order to pursue this path. They are soon disappointed when they find that traditional skills like this require traditional teaching which is increasingly scarce, either here in the West or in Asia. When putting this book together I have not

shied away from discussing the lengths of time required for understanding each stage of Nei Gong nor the inherent risks attached to this kind of training. Whilst practitioners may take some of the health benefits from Nei Gong with only a moderate amount of practice, true skill can only come to those who train diligently over a long period of time.

Some aspects of Nei Gong training are controversial, in particular some of the skills which can be drawn from these practices. Many practitioners do not believe such skills exist. The Chinese compare this state of mind to being like a frog in a well. The frog cannot see the outside world and so believes his tiny environment to be all that exists. Like the frog in the well, many practitioners limit their own growth and development through training with a closed mind. This is not the way to Dao.

Throughout the book I have dotted poignant lines from the *Dao De Jing*. I did not feel that any attempt to outline traditional Daoist practices would be complete without some words from the 'original Daoist' himself.

I myself am a perpetual student of the Dao. I continue to study and develop as well as teach. I hope that this book will serve to help others on their path or act as a catalyst for their own personal exploration of the Daoist arts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to express my gratitude to the many teachers and guides I have had over the years; without their guidance I would not be the person I am today. Thank you to my friends and parents, Paul and Chris, for starting me on my journey into the martial arts at the age of four.

Thank you to the various people who helped me in the writing and production of this book. Thanks to my good friend Dr Cindy Engel who has provided encouragement and support through the whole project as well as kindly writing the Foreword for this book.

Much gratitude to Daniel Reid whose writing has always been an inspiration and whose words of endorsement mean a great deal to me.

Thank you to my good friend Spencer Hill who has been involved in this project from its outset and who helped me turn my thoughts into writing in the first place.

Thank you to Joe Andrews for his excellent line drawings, and to Lydia Beaumont who kindly posed for the photos on page 129.

Thank you to Steve 'Zom' Galloway who helped with proofreading and suggestions on how the text could be made more accessible.

Thank you to the good people of Singing Dragon publishers and especially Jessica Kingsley for having faith in the book and for bringing my teachings to print.

Last but not least, thank you to my partner and best friend, Roni, for her support and putting up with the piles of paper dotted around our study.

NOTES ON ROMANISATION OF PINYIN

Throughout this book I have used the Pinyin system of Romanisation for the majority of Chinese words. Please note that much of the theory in this book differs greatly from Western science. The Chinese approach to understanding the organs of the body, for example, is based around the function of their energetic system rather than their physical anatomy. To distinguish the two different uses of organ descriptions I have capitalised the terms when they are meant from a Chinese point of view. For example: ‘Heart’ means the energetic system whilst ‘heart’ means the physical organ from a Western point of view.

Nei Gong theory differs a little from Chinese medicine theory with which an acupuncturist would be familiar. These differences are largely due to different aspects of the energetic system being emphasised in the training.

Many of these teachings come from the original guidelines outlined by Laozi and his contemporaries. Where relevant I have included short sections from the *Dao De Jing*, the classical text of Laozi. These sections are from my own translation from the classical Chinese and so any errors in translation are my fault entirely. Any lines from the *Dao De Jing* are indicated in italics.

INTRODUCTION TO NEI GONG

When President Nixon travelled to China in 1972 (Buell and Ramey 2004) he witnessed Traditional Chinese Medicine being practised within hospitals and saw how, through the use of acupuncture needles, surgeons were able to carry out operations on fully conscious patients without them feeling pain. Since this time, various Chinese internal arts have been spreading to and becoming popular within the West.

One of these arts is Qi Gong (Chi Kung) or ‘Energy Skill’. Qi Gong is practised by tens of thousands of people every day in parks, their homes or even as part of a recommended daily routine prescribed by Western medical practitioners. Through a combination of controlled breathing, slow gentle movements and a calm mind, practitioners of Qi Gong enable their internal energy (Qi) to flow more efficiently through the various internal pathways of the human energy system. This leads to increased health, a stronger immune system and lower stress levels, amongst other benefits.

In the West, Qi Gong or the associated art of Taiji and the benefits of these two practices can be felt by anyone willing to look for a local class. What is far less known is another Chinese practice: that of Nei Gong.

In China there are three main spiritual traditions: Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism. These three great philosophies have dictated Chinese culture and their arts for centuries. For the most part these three traditions have managed to live and flourish alongside each other and this has resulted in a pooling of methods and philosophies. It is for this reason that it is impossible to say that any of the Chinese arts is born from any one of the three. Qi Gong, Taiji and Nei Gong are no exception; although primarily Daoist in nature, they also have elements of Confucianism and Buddhism contained within them.

WHAT IS NEI GONG?

Nei Gong can be translated as ‘Internal Skill’. Defined simply it is: ‘The process by which a person may condition their physical body, cultivate their internal universe and elevate their consciousness.’

Nei Gong has long been considered the most advanced and most complete of the internal practices of China. It was kept a closely guarded secret long after Qi Gong and Taiji were leaked to the public of China and the West. Only in recent times have people begun to be aware of the term Nei Gong and there is still a great deal of confusion as to what it means within the internal arts community.

Nei Gong is not a specific set of exercises or movements. Rather it is a series of stages that a person may move through in their practice given the correct instruction. In many ways it is similar to the more advanced processes inherent within Indian Yoga once a practitioner has moved past the basic training of Asanas. The Qi Gong

exercises which are being practised every day by so many people serve as the tools for working through this process. Practising the movements of Qi Gong on their own will give you good health and mental clarity but they will not take you any further than this unless you understand the principles of Nei Gong and how to implement them into your training. This book will outline the principles of Nei Gong and give practitioners of Qi Gong, Taiji and other internal arts a better idea of how these arts fit together and where they can lead.

Nei Gong first serves to condition the physical body and then the energy system. These two stages serve to provide the foundation for the third step which is direct work with the very elements which make up our consciousness. It is important that we keep in mind the three stages of development shown in [Figure 1.1](#).

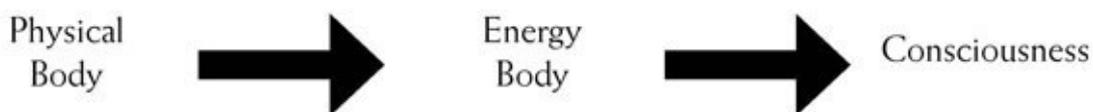


Figure 1.1 Three Stages of Nei Gong Training

Each of the three stages in our training requires that we work with and increase our body's ability to produce three substances which we know as Jing, Qi and Shen within Daoism. They are linked to the three stages of development as shown in [Figure 1.2](#).

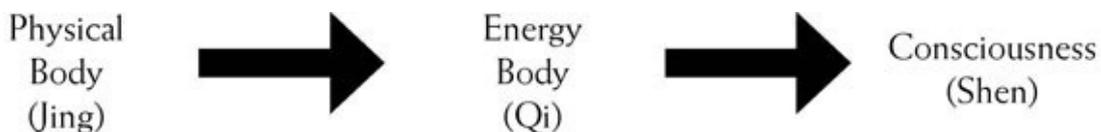


Figure 1.2 Three Nei Gong Substances of Daoism

During the practice of Nei Gong you will go through various changes and stages in your development. The first change you will begin to notice is an improvement in your overall health and well-being. From here you will begin to notice differences in your personality and outlook on life. The higher stages of training begin to alter the way your mind works and perceives existence. It is at this stage that the Daoist meditative practices of internal alchemy become entwined within Nei Gong.

What follows is a brief list of the changes that are most likely to take place within you during the course of your Nei Gong practice. This list was drawn from my own personal experiences as well as from observation of my students over the years.

- First, your muscles begin to relax and soften. Old tensions begin to release and the mobility of your joints increases dramatically. After several months practice it begins to feel as though you have limbs which are made of jelly.
- Old injuries begin to vanish. In my case it was injuries sustained during my martial arts practice which began to slowly fade away. It is surprising to see exactly how much discomfort you have been living with. I often find within my classes that people have unconsciously been living with great amounts of pain and they only realise when their old injuries begin to fade.
- Your immune system begins to improve dramatically and some long-term

illnesses begin to vanish. The Nei Gong training at this stage has empowered your body to begin working more efficiently. It begins to seek out and get rid of pathogens and toxins which most people have stored for many years.

- Your mind begins to calm down and for the first time many people experience what it means to have true stillness for short periods of time within the centre of their minds. Stress is not really something we experience during the course of our lives; it is only a product of how we react to outside stimuli. The Nei Gong training has begun to change how we react to outside factors and so we begin to experience life without becoming stressed by it.
- Now your bodily alignments begin to change as deeply rooted tensions fade. Many people experience clicks and cracks during their practice as their bones begin to shift into a more natural and correct position. Much like receiving a Chiropractic session, people begin to lose even more tension around the joints. As this tension begins to vanish, people literally gain an extra inch or so in height as their bones free up and their joints open. This has the advantage of increasing the efficiency of your body and your physical strength. It always gives me joy as a teacher to see how people's postures improve and the look of relief upon their faces as they begin to straighten up.
- The energy system begins to awaken and people begin to experience the more 'unusual' side of Nei Gong training. It is at this point in their study that people begin to experience the movement of their internal energy and how it is linked to their emotions. There are various 'releases' at this stage and people find that they become emotionally more stable in their daily lives.
- Later the body begins to operate on a purely energetic level and people find that they feel very light. They feel loose and comfortable when they move and every aspect of their life begins to become fluid and natural. Daoists say that at this point they are returning to Ziran (Nature).
- The basic levels of Nei Gong training are now complete and the practitioner can begin to work directly with their Shen. These stages are explained later in the book. For now it is enough to know some of the benefits which take place during the early stages of practice.

WHY PRACTISE NEI GONG?

It is always difficult to answer this question when asked. At first I was adamant that all people should practise Nei Gong and much like a 'door to door philosophy peddler' I would try to convince anybody who would engage me in conversation. In many instances these people would attend one of my classes or courses but in the vast majority of cases they would find the training too arduous and so leave after only a few sessions. Although they recognised the benefits of the training they did not deem these benefits worth the time and effort required.

I have since come to realise that people simply move in to Nei Gong training when the time is right for them. It is more of a calling than anything else. It just seems that some people are ready to begin bringing about positive changes within the various layers of their being. Many of my students get frustrated at this; they are deeply passionate about their training and desperately want their friends and family to understand. I know that their conviction is born out of compassion, they simply want others to experience the healthy and happy benefits that they have drawn from their practice, but they begin to realise after some time that what I have said is true. People do not move into Nei Gong training through advertising or convincing, they simply come when the time is right for them. I apologise to any readers who are hoping for a better reason to practice Nei Gong but I cannot give one. If you are not drawn to the practice then the time is simply not right for you.

For those who have begun the training, they have the pleasure of experiencing the Daoist ideals of health, longevity and clarity of mind. These are truly treasures which enable us to enjoy and get the most out of the rest of our lives. These three alone are reason enough for me.

Box 1.1 Who Should Not Train

Whilst the internal arts can bring great benefits to those who practise them it is important to recognise that they are not suitable for everybody. There are some groups of people for whom Nei Gong in particular poses sometimes severe risks.

Children and teenagers should not study Nei Gong. Qi Gong on its own is fine provided that it is not used to move through the various internal processes of Nei Gong. There should be no direct work with the Dan Tien or any aspect of the energy system. Young people who wish to study Qi Gong should focus on relaxing and conditioning the body as well as stretching and learning to breathe effectively. Usually in China it is considered better for younger people to study the external martial arts which will prepare them physically for more advanced internal training in the future.

The reason for this is fairly simple. Young people and teenagers are subject to a greater amount of emotional disturbances. The teenage years in particular are full of emotional upsets, anguish and frustration for the majority of young people. The emotional aspect of the Heart-Mind has not yet fully formed and it is not until our early twenties that we begin to settle down a little emotionally. The emotional state we settle into may not be a very healthy one in many cases but at least it should be considerably more stable with fewer 'swings' from high to low. Much Nei Gong work has a direct influence on the emotions and our consciousness. We should not do anything to interfere with the emotions on this level until we have reached a sufficiently stable age.

Pregnant women should steer clear of the internal arts. Whilst the risks are low, they are still risks. The internal work can have various effects on an unborn child. An art such as Yoga is far more suitable during pregnancy.

Those with a history of mental illness should be careful when beginning Nei Gong and seek guidance from an experienced teacher throughout. Any form of work with the mind can be damaging to those with a mental illness if it is not