

NATIONAL QIGONG (CHI KUNG) ASSOCIATION USA - 4TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE.

Having spent a number of years both organising and attending Taijiquan and Qigong events and conferences in various European locations, I was delighted to be invited to attend the 4th Annual Conference of the National Qigong (Chi Kung) Association USA, otherwise known as NQA, in Portland, Oregon. The Board of Directors of NQA had invited me to represent the European Federation of Taiji and Qigong and The Tai Chi Union of Great Britain, as a European Ambassador.*

Arriving at the venue, The Living Enrichment Centre, set in the heart of beautiful woodland, I was greeted by NQA's Administrative Director, Rebecca Kalinowski who was busy registering the eager attendees. Being one of the first to arrive I wandered for a while around the pleasing and picturesque grounds and then helped Gloria and Joanna set up the bookstand.

By Friday morning over 200 people were in attendance for pre-conference one-day workshops which began at 9.00am prompt. The array of material being presented was incredible, with 13 highly experienced practitioners from 95 year old Master Duan Zhi Liang who had travelled specially from China - Wuji Hundun Qigong - Self Healing with Joyful Chaos, through to Jianye Jiang - Yin/Yang Medical Qigong, Jeff Nagel - Nei Kung Chi Liao, Gaspar Garcia - The Hands of 18 Luohans and many more of equal quality.

As I spent time in the morning in conversation with some Board members, getting to know each other, it was after lunch before I was able to actively participate. With these wide choices in front of me it was a difficult decision but I eventually plumped for Gaspar Garcia. The 18 Luohans proved to be very strong and powerful with much stretching and twisting. Gaspar had excellent quality of movement that has obviously come from his many years of martial training. His teaching was clear and precise and delivered with a relaxed, confident manner. The workshop did me much good but, unfortunately, the blisters which had formed on my feet, from a week of walking the length & breadth of San Francisco prior to the conference, prohibited me from doing more than two hours work.

After dinner we gathered to hear the Welcoming Address and Conference Announcements by Michael Winn, retiring President, and Roger Jahnke, Chair of the Board. This was followed by two Keynote Addresses.

Gunther Weil Ph.D., Founding Chairman of the Board of the NQA is an internationally recognised organisational consultant in leadership, executive wellness and teacher of Tai Chi and Qigong of some 25 years standing. His presentation "A Western Qigong? The Art and

Science of Heartmath®". Acknowledging that Qigong and Oriental Medicine has recognised the psychosomatic implications of an imbalance of Qi in the heart, and its impact on physical and emotional health, Gunther presented the research findings of the Institute of HeartMath®'s breakthrough discoveries on the physiological mechanisms by which the heart energetically communicates with the brain, and its influences on our perceptions, emotions and health. The lecture was stimulating, thought provoking and enthusiastically received by a riveted audience.

In contrast 'Qigong and Chi Healing' was informally presented by highly respected Chunyi Lin who had practised Qigong for over 20 years. Of Chinese origin, but now living in the USA, Lin opened by telling us how important it was for him to retain his Chinese accent. He jokingly related that in teaching Qigong it was important that he not only looked Chinese, but also talked with his Chinese accent; this, he assured us, would help him to be taken seriously as a Chinese Master. Through the use of amusing, yet effective demonstrations, he illustrated the effects of Qi transmission and talked about the various ways it could be used to aid our health & well being.

Early Saturday we were introduced to the teachers presenting the morning and afternoon workshops. Once this had been done I delivered a presentation providing an overview of the current situation with Qigong in Europe. I began my presentation by showing a map of Europe illustrating the many countries, pointed out the British Isles and re-affirmed that, contrary to the information on my name badge, I actually came from a country called Scotland, which was not in fact part of England! I then went on to report on regulations, or lack thereof, that governed practice; the amount of teachers and practitioners; styles taught and promoted; media interest and public awareness; and the hopes and aspirations of the respective member countries of the Taijiquan and Qigong Federation for Europe. I concluded by encouraging closer links between the USA (NQA) & Europe (TCFE) in the interchange of information to promote a worldwide understanding of Qigong.

As I needed to prepare for some important meetings in the afternoon I was unable to attend the extremely tempting array of morning workshops, of which there were an incredible range of high quality presenters to choose from. These included Jim Concotelli on Qigong Therapy, Roger Jahnke on Vitality Enhancement Method and Bruce Kumar Frantzis on Taoist Breathing for Chi Kung & Meditation - together with at least another 10 highly qualified instructors.

Following lunch the annual Business Meeting was held. The Board of Directors has 15 members, and each year 5 members step



GROUP MEDITATION PRACTICE

down and 5 new ones are elected. This year Joanne Coyle, Ginny Ferreira, Malvin Finkelstein, Francesco Garri Gallipoli and Bernard Seif were elected for three year terms. Mark Johnson was also appointed as a special member.

In the afternoon I attended, as representative of TCFE and TCUGB, a number of high-level discussions on Teaching, Instruction and Clinical Treatment. The dialogue focussed on the responsibilities of teaching Qigong with regard to minimum acceptable standards of competence to ensure that no harm could come to students or patients. The Panel reported that various medical organisations and insurance companies want to be able to recommend Qigong, but are concerned about how they can ensure the quality of instructors. Currently insurance companies in the US are looking for an organisation that is in a position to offer guidelines for qualified practitioners. However, although they are happy to recommend Qigong and Tai Chi, they are not, as yet, willing to pay for it. The Panel differentiated between two levels of classification required - one for teaching Qigong and another for applying Qigong as a healing art. One suggestion for teaching Qigong as a health exercise was a minimum of 2 - 3 years training based on a minimum of 100 hours training.

In considering the requirements for applying Qigong as Healing Art (referred to as Medical Qigong for the purpose of those discussions) they considered rules currently being applied by a number of recognised teaching schools of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine. The College of Oriental Medicine of California requires a minimum of 200 hours training or two years experience, whilst another training school required 3 levels of training over 2 - 3 years. The NQA is trying to create an 'Approved Modality' for practicing Qigong as a recognized clinical treatment. The irony was pointed out that in many states one simply had to register as a 'preacher' to be legally able to heal whom you like in any way you care. Another School of Oriental Medicine, which included Medical Qigong, required 700 hours training for practitioners. Bruce Kumar Frantzis ran training courses for Qigong teachers that required 2 - 5 years training plus 100 hours teaching. The second level of this teaching program required 3 - 10 years' experience and a further one-month training for treating. Healing Tao required 100 hours training, and Gaspar Garcia reported that in Spain they applied 120 hours minimum training.



RONNIE ROBINSON, EFFIE CHOW, MALVIN FINKELSTEIN, ALEX FENG, GASPAR GARCIA & JAMES MACRITCHE.

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The discussions looked at a number of areas including whether practitioners were dealing with simple or complex systems that could perhaps require a two-tier approach to regulation. Effie Chow, of the American Qigong Association and one of fifteen representatives for the National Institute of Health governing body for Alternative Medicine in the USA, emphasised that, as well as carefully considering the professional skills of practitioners, one must not lose sight of the fundamental need of caring for the patient.

The next section, which was led by Damaris Jarboux of The Body-Energy Centre in Boulder, Colorado, was an open forum for individual practitioners, teachers and schools to present their work, ideas and proposals on Chi Kung Healing/Medical Qigong. Damaris, who had spent much time in China, visiting and working in hospitals where Clinical Qigong was applied, informed the group that it was now becoming a two-way exchange of information - with Chinese Qigong doctors showing interest in how Qigong and other related methods were being used by Western practitioners. Jerry Alan Johnson Ph.D., Director and Founder of the International Institute of Medical Qigong, who had just published the first Western comprehensive training manual on Medical Qigong (coming in at over 1,000 pages!) emphasized the need for thorough, professional training for all practitioners of Medical Qigong.

The final discussion of the day was a panel presentation entitled 'Medical Qigong, Chi Kung Healing, Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine - Standards, Credentials and National Examinations' that was facilitated by Malvin Finkelstein, co-chairperson of the Medical Qigong sub-committee of the NQA and member of the Oregon Board of Medical Examiners Acupuncture Committee. The panel included representatives of the NQA, the American Association of Oriental Medicine, the American Qigong Association, the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, the World Academic Society of Medical Qigong (Beijing) and my good self representing Europe. Each panelist presented a brief report of the criteria applied by their respective organisations and questions were taken from the floor. This was a very fruitful discussion facilitating a lively exchange of interesting information. Over the course of the four hours in which the presentations and discussions took place, many views were expressed and many different ideas of how Medical Qigong/Chi Kung Healing could be taught and practiced, as well

as lengths of training, supervision and prospective governing rules. Whilst at times challenging and demanding the debates were conducted in an open, healthy and creative atmosphere. Each participant seriously considered the many points of view and the Qigong world will surely stand to greatly benefit from the subsequent results of these stimulating discussions.

On Saturday evening we were treated to a number of demonstrations: David Leung who started his Tai Chi training at the age of nine (40 years ago) performed a very interesting composite form which included aspects of a number of styles, Lyudmila Belova from Russia displayed an exotically flamboyant Qigong form, Gary Clyman of Chicago showed his unique Temple Style Tai Chi and some very intensive Nei Gung exercises, Jill Heath from Canada did a very polished performance of a Fan Form, yours truly did Dayan Qigong. The highlight of the evening for many, was the 95 year old Master Duan's very unusual sword form which culminated in him virtually break-dancing on the floor with the sword being passed under his astonishingly lithe body.

Following these demonstrations a special award was presented to James MacRitchie. Originally from Liverpool but resident in Boulder, Colorado for the past 20 years, Jim is an Acupuncturist, Chi Kung teacher and author of a number of books on Chi Kung. He is also the Founder of NQA. For many years he has worked relentlessly, at great personal expense of time, energy and resources to promote a cause that he firmly believes is of great benefit to all. He was made an Honorary Member of NQA, the highest award the association can bestow, given to individuals deemed to have performed extraordinary service to the field of Qigong/Chi Kung. He received a standing ovation from the 250 people gathered together.

The remainder of the evening featured a concert of Karma Moffet's Tibetan Bell Experience. This involved a unique collection of instruments which provided an enthralling experience for many but I ended up indulging in some welcome push hands practice.

On Sunday morning I attended Dr Jerry Alan Johnson's Healing Qi Deviations seminar. Jerry is one of the USA's foremost practitioners and educator on Medical Qigong and Oriental Medicine. His style of delivery was amusing, self-assured and thoroughly entertaining. He looked at how practitioners of Healing Qigong can be prone to picking up negative energy from patients, often accumulating aspects of the problems they are treating in their own bodies. He went on to demonstrate and teach a number of dynamic exercises for expelling negative energies.

On Sunday afternoon I was teaching and in the evening I went for dinner with representatives of NQA's Advisory Council, Gunther and Jim plus Gaspar Garcia representing the World Academic Society of Medical Qigong. Jim's partner and wife, Damaris, joined us. This time together, away from the conference, helped to develop closer relationships between not only us as individuals, but also the respective organisations and bodies which we represented.

Monday morning I attended Li, Jun Feng's Turning Inner Alchemy and Kwan Yin Standing Qigong Meditation workshop. Li spent 15 years as Head Coach of the Beijing and China National Wushu teams. He paid close

attention to detail when teaching and moved with the fluidity of water.

After the end of the conference I extended my stay in the US by three days to enable me to spend some time together with the newly elected President of the NQA Solala Towler and his gracious wife Christine, at their home in Eugene Oregon. Jim and Damaris also stayed.

Solala is editor of The Empty Vessel magazine, which focuses on aspects of the Tao. As we had much in common the two days flew by with discussions on the technicalities and logistics of magazine production. In the evening we all traded stories regarding our recent visits to various parts of China. On the final evening we attended Solala's regular Wuji Qigong class where the evening began with Damaris leading a powerful meditation session. I was the lucky recipient of the extra energy that abounded having spent my nights sleeping in the wonderful little temple located in the back yard.

Attending the NQA Conference was a wonderful experience for me. I met some interesting, some entertaining and some very inspiring people. The event was professionally organised with a varied and stimulating programme. Everybody was keen and willing to exchange information with no fear of that much-vaunted western quality of competitiveness.

The NQA is actively developing links between not only China (where they are helping to keep some Qigong Hospitals viable), but also with the UK, Europe and other groups and countries around world. Together we can create a new global culture that can transform health care, medicine, education, spirituality, the way we raise children, and both personal and social evolution - for the greater good of all.

Next year's NQA Conference is next October in Omega, New York state from 4th - 9th October 2001. I thoroughly recommend attending it. Maybe we in Europe can send a whole delegation next year, and there will be reciprocal visits and exchange in the coming years.

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SOLALA, JIM & RONNIE