

18 Step **Taiji Qigong**

Simple,
yet highly
effective
exercises
for health
and vitality.



with **Ronnie Robinson**

18 Movement Taiji Qigong

Taiji Qigong (also known as Shibashi) consists of a series of 18 simple, yet highly effective, exercises which can help to promote the body's natural healing energy, reduce stress and create a feeling of well-being.

Qi Energy

The Chinese have, for thousands of years, been aware of a system of internal energy (Qi) which travel through a network of meridians or pathways in the body. Each meridian feeds the energetic system of a particular internal organ. If you think about these pathways as rivers, when a river flows freely everything is fresh but if it becomes stagnant everything begins to decay as the vitality drains from it. The practice of qigong works to regulate the flow of energy through these meridians, ensuring you feel fresh, healthy and with positive vitality.

Positive Effects

Having studied Taijiquan for over 30 years, more than half of which as a professional instructor I have seen positive results in students of all ages and physical abilities. With these simple, easy to learn exercises I have witnessed often dramatic changes in the health and well-being of students. The duration of time I work with students can vary greatly, from one-off sessions, terms short-term courses of a few weeks, and on-going classes where individuals come on a weekly basis, often for many years.

One things I'm certain of, the results of practicing these exercises is instant, immediately after practicing, even following a short session, students have told me they feel relaxed, at peace, energised and fresher.

Simplicity

The simplicity of the exercises is an important aspect that makes them effective, anyone can do them and everyone can feel better! Whatever your physical condition, even if you're new to exercise, you can find great benefits, even by practising for 10 minutes a day.

Points to Note

If you pay attention to the following aspects you will also be able to attain these benefits.

1. Listen to your breath

The movements of qigong should be practised with soft, natural breathing. By taking a little time to listen to the pace, quality and rhythm of your breathing you will be better able to move in harmony with it.

2. Be aware of your body

Pay attention to what your body feels like. You may have little aches or pains from time to time, or perhaps a little restricted somewhere, being mindful of what you feel like allows to gauge how much movement is required. Never stretch or try to over-do things.

3. 'Sink' your weight and 'lighten' your upper body

Take the time to establish a sense of connection to the ground by imagining your weight dropping deep into the earth while allowing your upper body to feel light and open floating upwards towards the heavens. Often the reverse is the reality when stress and tensions get held in the upper body and the sense of 'grounding' becomes less.

4. Maintain alignment

Try to get a sense of a clear line from the base of the spine to the crown of the head. Try to avoid 'crinking' the neck, 'bowing' the back or allowing the head to drop forward. Humans have evolved to be upright and the more you can maintain a feeling of being in alignment, the better your body will be able to do its job.

5. Focus and Intent

Once you become familiar with the sequences try to maintain a sense of focus or intent when practising. If you are pushing forward, have a sense of where you are going and imagine yourself clearly pushing in that direction. At the points when your hands come together, or come close to particular points in your body, have a sense of the connection to them.

6. Be natural

Try to think about the natural movements of animals; take a look at your cat or dog or even how birds fly. These creatures don't carry the stresses and strains in their bodies that we humans do. Try to emulate the smooth, easy, natural movement that you can see in the rest of the natural world.

Acupoints & Meridians

During the practice of Taiji Qigong it is helpful to be familiar with key acupoints and meridians. This diagram illustrates the key areas you should be aware of when practising.

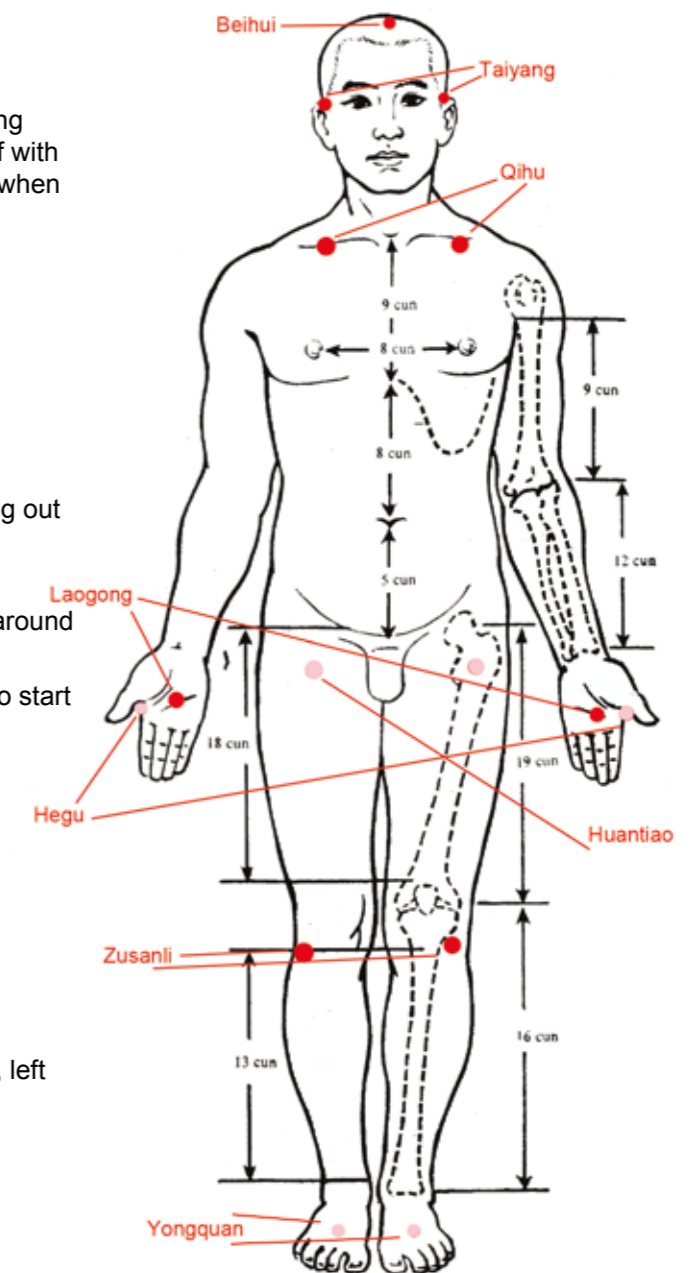
The areas marked lighter, in pink, are on the reverse side of the body.

1. The hegu point is located at the juncture at the top of the outside of the pointing finger, opposite of bottom knuckle joint on the thumb.
2. The Huantiao point is located in the recess of the hips, just at the top of the legs.
3. The Yongquan point is located on the soles of the feet, underneath the point marked in pink on the top.

Familiarising yourself with the acupoints.

Study the illustrations and texts accompanying the movements and try to familiarise yourself with which acupoints you should be focussed on when practising the routines.

1. Laogong & Yongquan
2. Laogong
3. Laogong over Beihui
4. Laogong towards centre of body
5. Hegu passes Taiyang
6. Laogong & Yongquan
7. Hegu aligns with Huantiao whilst focussing out from the Laogong
8. Bring Laogong points together
9. Keep hands open to allow Hegu to pass around waist area
10. Let the Laogong points face each other to start with and face the body when in front
11. The Laogong rests over the Zusanli
12. Hegu aligns with Qihu and focus through Laogong when pushing upwards
13. Laogong
14. Yongquan
15. Laogong & Yongquan
16. Laogong
17. Laogong & Yongquan
18. Finish with Laogong over Lower Dantien, left male, right hands female



Lift Hands

Think of drawing the energy from the earth through the Yongquan point and stay focussed with lightness in the hands and an awareness on the Laogong point. Good for calming the mind and helps to settle the liver qi which can become blocked and agitated causing you to lose your composure. Blocked liver qi creates anger and frustration.



Opening the Chest

Again you should maintain a focus of the Yongquan & Laogong points whilst moving slowly and gently, being mindful of any upper body restrictions so you can gently extend your range of movement. Good for strengthening the heart and lungs which helps to reduce depression. With a relaxed, open chest area our qi moves more freely and we literally feel 'more open', happier and contented.



Rainbow Dance

Maintain a focus of the Laogong point whilst letting it align with the Beihui point. Be mindful of any restrictions or discomfort in the neck and shoulder, by slowly working this exercise you can help to loosen this area. (Repeat both sides) Strengthens the stomach and aids digestion, strengthens the heart, helps to reduce headache and shoulder ache and improves your resistance to disease.



Separating Clouds

Begin by aligning the Laogong point with the lower Dantian and slowly bring the hands up the front of the body, opening to the sides when you reach the top, turning the palms downwards as you bring the arms back down. Good for the heart and lungs because you are flushing qi along the lung, heart & pericardium channels in the chest. Also helps to clear the head and awakens the brain as it increases the flow of oxygen to the head.



Rolling Arms

Focus on the Laogong point and allow the Hegu point to pass the Taiyang point with your hands passing just below your ears. Try to avoid engaging the shoulders which should be relaxed and 'down.' (Repeat both sides) Good for headaches & migraine as it helps to clear blocked qi in the gall bladder in the head. The liver & gall bladder channels also have a strong connection with the eyes.



Rowing the Boat

Start by bringing the arms up in line with the head, level with the ears. 'Soften' the lower back and start to bend forward keeping the arms in line with the body. Gradually increase your range of movement with each bend. Good for the kidneys and gall bladder as bending forward and back stretches the kidney and bladder areas. Helps to combat stress whilst gently exercising the lower back.



Lift the Ball

Start with your hand by your side and turn your body to the corner in front of your left. Let the intent of your mind lead the forward arm as if you were about to pitch a ball underarm. With the back hand the Hegu point aligns with the Huantiao point. (Repeat both sides) This exercise allows you to feel more open and 'uplifted' thereby increasing confidence and general well-being.



Looking at the Moon

Begin with your palms facing each other, close to your 'centre' or Dantien. Turn around behind yourself keeping the palms facing each other with the arms equidistant to each side of your body, above your head. Come back down to the Centre and repeat to the other side. Tonifies the spleen, whilst stretching the liver and gall bladder. Helps to increase circulation and the energy flow in the chest and upper body, leaving you more



Pushing Palms

Focus from the Laogong point with Hegu point open to the sides of your body. Lead the mind lead the movement and follow to each corner in front of you, whilst the Yin hand comes around the waist as it turns. Aids digestion and regulates bowel movement because of the attention and focus around the lower Dantien.



Cloud Hands

Start at one side with the palms facing each other, shoulder and waist-height. Rotate the trunk and allow the lower hand to come up in front of the chest to the upper Dantien whilst the lower hand faces the lower Dantien. Repeat to the other side with palms facing each other. Calms the mind & relaxes the body through the soft movement and quiet mind.

Touch the Sea, Look at the Sky

Place the Laogong over the Zusanli as the weight 'sinks' through the front foot and the upper body remains 'empty.' Slowly transfer the weight backwards, whilst raising the arms up and outwards. (Repeat both sides)

Good for depression and melancholia because it increases the flow of energy in the heart & lung meridians. Also helpful for the lower back.



Pushing the Waves

Focus on extending out from the Laogong point while the Hegu point is aligned with the Qihu point. Push upwards from the back foot as if trying to pitch a basketball, focussing upwards and outward. (Repeat both sides) *Helps to clear tensions and anxiety, increases positivity whilst 'grounding' and connecting to the earth.*



Flying Pigeon

Start with both palms facing each other aligning the Laogong points and the weight predominately on the front foot. Gradually transfer the weight backwards while gently opening the arms to a point that feels relaxed, comfortable and open.

(Repeat both sides) *Helps to reduce depression by increasing the flow of energy in the upper body and along the heart meridian.*



Punching

Start by holding 'soft' fists at both sides of your waist. Slowly and softly turn your arm to bring the punch out from your body at eye level whilst focussing out along the arm.

(Repeat both sides) *Aids digestion, regulates bowel movement and helps to build resistance against adverse weather conditions as the defensive qi is strengthened.*



Flying Wild Goose

Start with the hands either facing the Dantien or at either side of the outside of the legs. Slowly raise them just below shoulder height on the in-breath and breath out naturally as you allow them to come back to the starting position. *Opens and expands the qi in the upper body, strengthening the lungs and reducing depression or feelings of isolation.*



Rotating the Wheel

Start by leaning forward as far as you feel comfortable and continue to turn your body to the side and upwards in a circling manner extending the arms upwards and outward. Imagine you are rolling round the outside of a cartwheel. (Repeat by going both directions.) *Moves the qi and blood through your hands and is good for dispersing stagnant qi in the liver and gall bladder meridians. Improves vitality through the elimination of waste products.*



Marching Whilst Bouncing the Ball

Shift your weight onto one foot and gradually raise the other leg up until the thigh becomes parallel to the ground as you simultaneously raise your arm until your palm is also parallel. Alternate arm and legs. *Improves coordination and balances the left and right hemisphere of the brain.*



Sau Gong

Open the palms and focus on the Laogong points. Slowly raise your arms upwards above the head and then slowly let them come down the front of your body with a sense of 'washing' through the body into the centre and the earth. *Calms the mind, relaxes the body and 'stores' the energy at the 'centre' of the body - the Lower Dantien.*

Following the images

These images are by no means a comprehensive guide on how to do these exercises, rather they are designed to create an overall sense of the shape or form of the movements. Space here does not permit for complete step-by-step imagery to cover each transition, but you should be able to get a sense of what is required. Ideally you should try to attend a class where you will get clear instructions and corrections.

The images were taken in low light with natural light coming from behind the subject. This creates a silhouette effect where you can see the general shape and form of the postures rather than being distracted by bright colours. At a central point behind there is a solid pillar which, along with the lines of the blind, give a sense of how the postures should be and where each posture is in relation to the others used.

This small publication is primarily designed for those who are currently attending classes taught by Ronnie Robinson, or by one of his approved instructors. In many classes, particularly those which are scheduled for only a few weeks, it is not possible, or even desirable, to provide in-depth, detailed instruction, so this document could prove helpful for those who are keen to get the best from their practice.

Taking care of yourself

These exercises are, in the main, accessible to all ages and physical conditions and can be adapted to those with special requirements. Please try to resist previous considerations of what you may regard as 'exercise'. In western tradition the term 'exercise' usually implies doing something fairly vigorous which will increase the heart rate. Whilst there is also a strong validity in this type of training, other methods, particularly those from an eastern tradition, work with maintaining a smooth, natural breath. Whilst there is a physical component to this work we are also combining focus, intent and awareness to our practice. This means that we should be mindful when executing the movements, aware of how it actually feels to do the exercises, and noticing also when we may feel uncoordinated, out of synch or experiencing pain or discomfort. With these qualities in mind we can benefit from all aspects of our training.

Stillness in Motion

The work of taijiquan & qigong is concerned with establishing a balance of the qualities of Yin & Yang. Movement is Yang (active) whilst stillness is Yin (passive), the mind should remain calm and still when the body is in motion.

Prior to practice you should take a few minutes to still your mind from 'normal' everyday activities and after your practice you should take a few minutes for either standing or sitting meditation. Rest your palms over your belly, close your eyes, relax your jaw and just become aware of your breath, to where you feel its movement in your body, the pace, the rhythm and the quality of the breath. This will also allow you to be able to evaluate the effect of your training as you become more attuned to the differences before and after practice.

Background

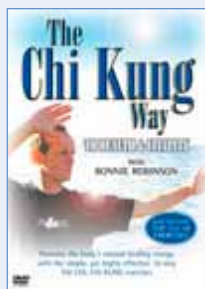
Ronnie Robinson has studied Taijiquan & Qigong since 1981 and works as a full-time professional instructor. He has taught this series of exercises to thousands of students, in many countries and has regularly witnessed how its practice has affected real positive change in their well-being. He has taught in schools, universities, prisons, health-promotion organisations, offices, hospitals, cancer care centres, massage, yoga and shiatsu training schools, working in training both students and health professionals such as physiotherapists, doctors and occupational health practitioners.

Regular classes and workshops are held throughout Scotland and Europe details of which can be found by visiting Ronnie's website at: www.chirontaichi.co.uk

For information on training for individuals, groups or organisations email: ronnie@chirontaichi.co.uk

Ronnie is an active promotor of Taijiquan & Qigong through his various endeavours including:

Principle Instructor:	Chiron Tai Chi Chuan & Qigong	www.chirontaichi.co.uk
Editor:	Tai Chi Chuan & Oriental Arts Magazine	www.taichiunion.com/magazine
Promotions Manager:	Tai Chi Union for Great Britain	www.taichiunion.com
Secretary:	Taijiquan & Qigong Federation for Europe	www.tcfe.org
Partner:	Taiji Europa	www.taiji-europa.eu
Organiser	Tai Chi Caledonia	www.taichicalledonia.com



**A 1:45 minute, in-depth training DVD
is also available, either by ordering online:
www.chirontaichi.co.uk
or by calling 07774 985411.**

