



Qi-Netics - Rhythms Of The Tao

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As spring thunder rolled across the rugged landscape of the French Gariegue, I huddled under the eaves of a mountain- top hermitage watching the storm come in through the night. I felt the awesome power of her approach as much in the wild gusts of swirling air as in the moments of absolute stillness when the trees, the rocks, the very air itself seemed to withdraw inward.

This was the second night of a two-week spell away from the hub-bub of the city to collect my thoughts and feelings about my work, Qi- netics. I was preparing a book of practical exercises to inspire holistic well - being whilst communicating the spiritual root of Qi- netics, the Tao, as something vital and alive, the way I live and breathe it.

There are already so many clever books on Taoism, which seems strange for a philosophy espousing direct and juicy experience rather than dry, intellectual appreciation. The concept of Tao as a philosophy of spontaneity, effortless action and natural simplicity first emerged in China around the 6th century BC, so how is it that such an ancient philosophy can hold any interest for people today?

Part of the reason for the abiding relevance of the Tao may lie with the classic Taoist texts' use of poetry, paradox and humorous tales to suggest, rather than pin down, the elusive spirit of this 'watercourse way' . The concept of Tao has been imbued with the flexibility and strength of bamboo, able to bend to the tempests of change and slip through the grasping hands of orthodoxy.

The first words of the Tao Te Ching are: 'The Tao that can be told is not the true absolute Tao' . What I have developed in Qi-netics is a way of moving with the rhythms of the Tao, dancing in the bright light of experience rather than plodding through the mire of meaning. It is the difference between analyzing the storm front and being caught in the rapture of the lightning flash, the thunder bolt, the clamor and smell of rain.

The Tao is a mystery eternally unfolding, offering itself for discovery. Even the calligraphic character of Tao can be explored intuitively. It appears to me as a drop of rain falling on high ground, tumbling down a waterfall and flowing into an ever - widening river, watched over by the head of a shamanic chief with feathers in his hair.

Seen in this light, it portrays a conscious and balanced individual in harmony with the essential flow of things. This is the quality of being that I aim to draw out from my students. I have coined the name Qi-netics to describe this process.



"Qi" pronounced 'chee' is a Chinese holistic concept of energy intimately concerned with flow. Good health is promoted by releasing stagnation held in the body as tension, being sensitive to and learning to guide this cosmic energy at all levels of our being; -

'Netics' designates the eclectic system of dance, moving meditation, and bodywork techniques that I have designed to enhance this flow in a modern urban setting, using the three pillars of Tao:

- spontaneity
- effortless action
- natural simplicity.

I have become increasingly aware of the characteristic energies and expectations that people bring into the Qi-netics classes and workshops I run. In urban environments this tends to manifest as a protective shield: hunched shoulders, black clothing, knitted eyebrows and shallow breathing.

My first task is to crumble the defensive walls and build a few bridges to allow people to relate to each other, and themselves, in a light- hearted and fun way. We often start by working in pairs, shaking up the energy with some invigorating percussion massage, 'playing' our partner like a drum.

The initial stiffness dissolved, we can glide into the unity of a circle and shake up the energy with a fast and fiery workout. Analytical concentration gets lost, gives up and hands it all over to the body-mind. This is the magical moment when people who previously regarded themselves as awkward find that their body innately knows how to groove to the rhythm. A warm and sharing group energy emerges, creating the receptive atmosphere required to benefit from the slower discipline of Tai-Ji Qi-gong.

Over many years of study in China and the Americas I have formulated a series of exercises dubbed 'Qi-centering', designed to connect calm breathing with the movements, feelings and elements of the natural world in a slow and meditative rhythm. I have brought together the evocative imagery and mood of Native American ceremonies with the ancient, graceful forms of Qi-gong, Tai Chi and Yoga, to create a form suitable for Westerners who wish to calm the pace of modern life and reconnect with the nourishment of elemental nature. Thus we include movements to honor the four directions, the earth and sky, the masculine and feminine. We circle in the sky as the eagle does, swoop to the river, rise as the cobra and play with the clouds, invoking the inspirational quality of these images as we move. It's really about reclaiming those moments of sheer awe and expansion so common in childhood, yet so sadly forfeited as a 'busy' adult.

In Qi-netics we come to relish the practice of what we preach, and create the space to give to ourselves the jewel of our being. In today's climate of de-sensitization we must actively create life-affirming nourishment for our soul, or face the consequences of the searching psyche turning in on itself. 'Tai Ji' literally means 'the great ultimate in everyday living' and this is the sense in which we practice it.

Some people come to a class expecting to learn the exacting movements of Tai Chi Chuan and are delighted to find themselves gyrating their hips to Arabic music or getting down to the pumping heart of African rhythms. It is not the outward performance that really matters, but the inward feeling of connection, freedom and flow.

In Qi-netics we attune to the unique quality of each moment, which brings new inspiration if we can surrender to the possibility of change. So much of our culture is bound up with control, so people inevitably arrive at class with some of this cultural baggage. There is a hungry ghost called 'more', wanting to know lots of complex Tai-Ji forms, develop a more impressive physique or top up with spiritual wisdom. They are often surprised to find that the consciousness of 'less' is a big part of the Qi-netics experience. We work extensively with surrender.

I do not want you to feel privileged that by practicing Qi-netics some ancient Chinese secret is being revealed to you. Rather, I am endeavoring to guide you, as an enthusiastic participant, to the bubbling source of your own universal spontaneity. The Qi is not some mysterious energy current, open only to the most dedicated students. The Qi that I know and love is accessible to all as a moving experience cultivated through the alignment of our physicality, mentality, emotion and breath. These are aspects of ourselves that have been severed and compartmentalized in our daily routines, which may explain many people's vague sense that something is missing.

The missing thing is that these parts of our selves are not experiencing one another; they are not being integrated, which leads to a sense of separation. Qi-netics throws a party for all these strangers of the soul to meet and have some fun with each other.

You can enter into the festive spirit right now, with an exercise called Meridian Dance Massage. This is a series of exercises developed over many years working as a Shiatsu, Qi Gong and Energy Medicine therapist. I began to notice that my clients, many of whom led hectic lifestyles as film and music celebrities, were not giving themselves the space to truly relax and revitalize on a day-to-day basis. I wanted to inspire my clients to 'give' to themselves.

I drew on my childhood in Singapore, with its rich diversity movement of cultural dance and where the elders practiced the graceful art of Tai-Ji Qi-Gong, publicly demonstrating health and serenity in the shaded parks at dusk and dawn. I gradually started integrating this heritage into my work and sharing it with my clients who, to my delight, expressed their enthusiastic appreciation. Thus very gradually I came to incorporate many new exercises integrating diverse cultural experiences and methodologies, unified by and rooted in my deep affinity with the Tao, until finally giving birth to Qi-netics.

So put some rhythmic music through the stereo and stand with legs shoulder-width apart rock your hips from side to side whilst keeping the knees soft. Notice how your relaxed arms are being effortlessly swung out by this simple movement.

Exaggerate this movement while maintaining the effortless feeling (called Wu-Wei in Chinese), so that your arms swing out together, reaching head height. Watch your hands so that your thoughts stay with the movement. Moving to the rhythm, inhale one side and exhale the other, as you sweep down the outward arm with the other hand, starting at the shoulder as if sweeping fluff off the length of your sleeve on either side. The touch is firm but supple.

In this way the body moves with the effortlessness of unified action, as opposed to concentrating narrowly on one area which creates stress in other non-aligned body parts. The exercises have numerous health benefits: re-activating trapped Qi in the meridians, improving blood circulation by combining the rhythmic movements of swaying with dynamic breathing and skin massage, releasing tension and heightening sensitivity. The lymphatic system is stimulated and the rocking motion calms the nervous system by encouraging the release of endogenous opiates. The co-ordination involved also serves to promote left-right hemisphere integration in the brain. Meridian Dance Massage can be practiced vigorously, over clothes, or slowly and sensuously with aromatic oils. Its many variations cover all the major meridians of the body, can be done sitting up or lying down and also with a partner.

Most essentially, these exercises are tender, loving care for the body and soul. This is one exercise system geared to appreciating and caring for what we have, rather than chasing the latest image of the 'ideal figure'.

Indeed Qi-netics is about celebrating the essence of who we are, nourishing our souls, sharing our gifts, receiving gracefully and always remembering at the end of the cycle to lighten the load and let go! Having surrendered control, if only for a few moments, we can at last breathe easy and ride the ever-changing waves of life with a little more balance and sensitivity.

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Lydia Wong Bio:

After curing herself of asthma in 1980 through the healing movements of Tai Ji Qi gong (chinese yoga) and Shiatsu. Lydia has been dedicated to share these ancient and powerful methods of natural self-healing to the West.

Lydia is a certified E-RYT 500 Hour Yoga Alliance Trainer, specializing in Taoist Healing Arts, and author of several videos on relaxation and rejuvenation. Lydia has introduced her well being programs on network television in the United Kingdom and United States and has been featured in Yoga Journal, Elle Magazine, The Empty Vessel, Health & Fitness Magazine and many more.

With her extensive experience and intuitive healing ability, Lydia currently offers personal and online Qi healing, Feng Shui Design consultations and Qi-Netics Teachers certification programs.