

An Overview: The Nine Steps of Internal Cultivation in YiRen™ Qigong

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Introduction

A human being is a unity of Qi, mind, body, and spirit. Spirit refers to the prenatal intelligence and wisdom as the original light of consciousness. The body is the temple and the vehicle of the spirit. The mind is the postnatal manifestation of the spirit. In the view of the postnatal state, there are two aspects of the mind: the intellectual mind and the intuitive mind. The intellectual mind is the function of the frontal lobe of the brain, which manifests itself as thought, ego, logic, reasoning, and so forth; the intuitive mind is the consciousness of the body and the previous memories of the internal organs, tissues, and cells, including sensory awareness, emotions, personality, character, and so forth. Qi functions as a form of subtle energy which works through an energetic network for coherent communication between all the body's cells, tissues, and organs; between the mind and the body; as well as between the body and the living environment.

Human beings are clearly different from animals in that we have a developed brain. The human brain has great learning ability, creative power, amazing memory, thinking, reasoning, decision-making, and self-awareness. Even though human beings have a greatly advanced brain, it seems that today many people don't use their brain appropriately and wisely. What is the reason for this? Human beings are facing a serious dilemma: a disharmonized and imbalanced state of mind between the intellectual mind and the intuitive mind. Recently, scientific studies have shown that two separated information access pathways in the human brain cause a disharmonized state of mind. The two separated information access pathways are the low road—the thalamo-amygdala pathway—and the high road, the hypothalamus-hippocampus-neocortex pathway. In general, the thalamo-amygdala pathway doesn't involve the cortex at all; it allows us to act first and think later. This low road system can protect us from danger, but it can also be harmful, or counterproductive in many cases.

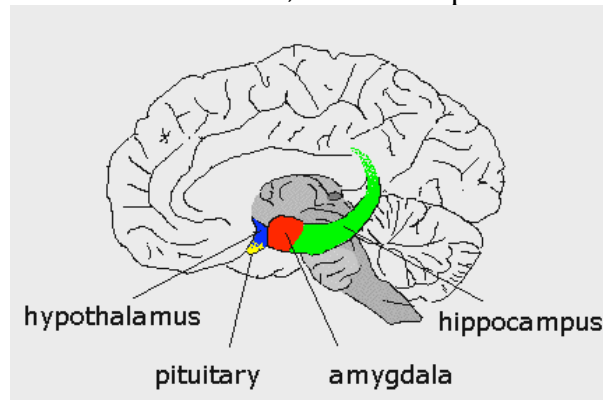


Figure 1 the locations of the hypothalamus, amygdala and hippocampus by Dr. C. George Boeree (<http://www.ship.edu/~cgboeree/limbicsystem.html>)

Many individuals have experienced how their emotions dominate their thoughts when they are activated emotionally, whether by fear or by craving or by sexual attraction, for example. These emotions can cause personal and social problems if they lose self-control. Thus, in our human history, many thinkers aimed to put reason (the high road) in charge and to minimize the emotions and instincts (the low road), even if they couldn't completely eliminate them.

In the view of Yi Ren Qigong practice, self-control and self-mastery are not simply denying, ignoring, or repressing our instincts and emotions. Self-control and self-mastery are a crucial part of self-cultivation; they are the precondition for spiritual development. But in order to take control of ourselves, we need to deepen our understanding of our nature within. Once we know our inherited nature, we can control our instincts and emotions appropriately and can use them wisely before they control us. From the perspective of Yi Ren Qigong practice, a disharmonized and imbalanced state of mind is not only caused by the two separated information access pathways (low road and high road) in the human brain, but is also caused by separated situations between the left side of the brain and the right side of the brain, between the back area of the brain and the front area of the brain, between the mind and the body as well as between different internal organs at the subtle energy level. The unique aspect of Yi Ren Qigong practice is that the energetic practices not only integrate the mind with the body, but also unify all of the separated parts of the body together at the subtle energy level, thereby restoring internal balance and harmony. This balanced and harmonized state of the mind and the body plays a significant and important role in allowing us to better understand our instincts and true feelings and to use them more effectively and wisely in our daily life.

What is Yi Ren Qigong?

Yi Ren Qigong is the practice of mind-body integration through a growing awareness and enhancement of "Qi" within the body, as well as surrounding the body. The word Qigong (气功 pronounced chee kung) is a combination of two Chinese characters: the first character, "Qi," (气) refers to the subtle energy of the body which works through an energetic network for coherent communication between all the body's organs, tissues, and cells as well as between oneself and one's living environment. The second character, "gong," (功) refers to the skill or the achievement of self-discipline. The Chinese character "Yi" (易) means change, the upper part symbolizes the sun and the lower part symbolizes the moon. Through the dynamic interactions of Yin and Yang, the character "Yi" graphically suggests how change occurs in the natural world. The character "Ren" (人) means human. Literally, Yi Ren Qigong is the practice of mind-body integration through a growing awareness and enhancement of "Qi" within the body, as well as surrounding the body for developing better functioning human beings. Yi Ren Qigong functions to access, transform, circulate, store and utilize energy as well as to facilitate the internal and external communications at the subtle energy level. A subtle form of energy can be manipulated for an individual to perform self-healing or to heal another person in Yi Ren Qigong for example.

Yi Ren Qigong consists primarily of internal energy developing exercises, breathing exercises, meditation, stretching, and physical movements, all pursued with a heightened sense of feeling, focus and awareness. This state of being present, alert and aware, in turn plays an important role in self-mastery, self-care and self-fulfillment.

The Purpose of Yi Ren Qigong

The ultimate goal of Yi Ren Qigong practice is to fulfill the individual's highest potential in accord with the Dao (the Way), the laws in nature and the universe so that the individual may contribute to the betterment of humanity. The purpose of Yi Ren Qigong practice is summarized with 12 Chinese characters, as follows: 炼气健身 (Lianqi Jianshen), 悟道立德 (Wudao Lide), 造福人类 (Zaofu Renlei) which translates as follows: Refine Qi, promote health; understand the Way, accumulate virtues; and contribute to the betterment of humanity.

Spirituality and Yi Ren Qigong

Spirituality means different things to different people, sometimes even within oneself, depending on the ages and stages of his or her life.

Keeping these thoughts in mind, the following is offered as a **central definition of spirituality in Yi Ren Qigong practice**:

- To increase our awareness of Qi, the consciousness of the body, and to explore our inner identity.
- To realize our purpose and place in living:
 - A. Learn and upgrade our knowledge and update our information system.
 - B. Correct errors, which occurred in the past.
 - C. Recharge our energy system and accumulate the virtues for nourishing our spirit and for improving our longevity.
- To understand Oneness through our energetic practice and life experience, and to develop greater relationship with our ancestors, other people and communities, higher beings/a higher power, and our living environment.

Towards the Goal

The ultimate goal of Yi Ren Qigong practice is to fulfill the individual's highest potential in accordance with the Dao (the Way), the laws in nature and the universe so that the individual may contribute to the betterment of humanity. The question is how can we achieve our goal?

The Nine Steps of Internal Cultivation in Yi Ren Qigong

Step 1 Internal Energy Revolution--Build Up the Energy Field and Activate the Internal Power Station

In the Yi Ren system of Qigong, first, we build up our energy field by practicing the *Energy Field Construction Exercise*, and we increase our internal energy levels by *Turning the Internal Power Station on*. These unique practices initiate the internal energy system, which in turn strengthens magnetic energy and produces electricity in the body. Our intent is the navigator of the internal energy flow. In general, the internal energy serves the mind; when we wake up and go to work, we expend energy toward the outside of the body. Usually, we have been trained intellectually rather than energetically in our educational system. Thus we are used to directing our mind outward all the time, with an intensive focus or concentration. If this condition continues for over certain period of time, it not only can create excess stress in the body but also cause a loss of too much energy from the internal body. In order to maintain good internal balance and harmony, we learn how to relax the mind, and re-train the mind from outward to inward. At this stage, we directly use our intent to build up an energy field between the hands and arms, and then practice focusing the mind, finding an appropriate degree of concentration which allows us to feel the energy field between the hands as an energetic rubber band stretching between our hands and arms. Thus, we are forming a magnetic field between our hands and arms. Once we have built up a magnetic field successfully, we can energize every center in the body with the *Internal Energy Centers Activating Exercise* and turn the internal power station on and experience the increased energy and aliveness within. This first step of Yi Ren Qigong practice is called "training the intent for building up the internal energy system." In Chinese it is called "Lianyi Deneng" (炼意得能).

Step 2 Strengthening the Energy Field for Producing the Essence (hormones and medicine) of the Body

Once we are able to sense the energy field between our both hands and arms, we begin to take our breathing more deeply, slowly, and smoothly for increasing the oxygen levels within, for releasing accumulated toxins and waste products, and for enhancing the strength of the energy field. With regular Qigong practice (repeating the *Internal Energy Centers Activating Exercise* with a clear energy sense for about 40 minutes), our body remembers the gentle movements naturally. With enhanced energy sensations, our mind gradually relaxes, and with the intensity of our focus at the appropriate degree, we experience how the internal energy flow leads the physical movements instead of the physical movement being led by the intent. At this moment, we experience enhanced saliva flow and a great freedom and joy within. During this state of Qigong practice, the stronger sensation of the magnetic energy field between the hands,

the deep and smooth breathing, and the integrated physical movement with the free energy flow in the body, all promote the functions of the parasympathetic nervous system and empower the endocrine glands. With the amplified energy field stimulation, and reduced/readjusted intellectual focus or concentration, the parasympathetic nervous system and the endocrine glands can be empowered and encouraged to function better, so the endocrine system can produce the necessary hormones and medicine for nourishing the body. This practice--to enhance the internal energy flow and to relax the intellectual mind for producing necessary hormones and medicine in the body--is called "strengthening the internal energy for producing more essence of the body." In Chinese it is called "Lianneng Shenjing" (炼能生精).

Step 3 Refine the essence and convert it into Qi

During our regular Qigong practice, the relaxed mind and enhanced saliva flow indicate that it is the right time to move forward and to deepen the internal energy cultivation. With *the Internal Energy Grounding Exercise*, we further activate and energize the Life Gate "to light the fire of the life gate and activate the energetic functions of the kidneys for generating more energy within" and then ground that energy firmly. The deeper activation and stimulation of the Life Gate can transform the refined essence into energy. And then, with the *Internal Energy Balancing Exercise*, we balance and harmonize the internal energies at a new level and store the increased energy in the Dantian. This practice to upgrade the power of the Life Gate and to activate the energetic function of the Kidneys for generating more energy and for storing the refined energy in the Dantian is called "Refining the essence and converting it into Qi." In Chinese it is called "Lianjing Huaqi" (炼精化气).

Step 4 Nourish the Mind with the refined Qi

With regular and disciplined practice, the increased energy in the body can be stored and accumulated in the Dantian. At this stage, practitioners may experience a warm and solid and swirling sense of energy at the Dantian area. Usually the reproductive organs can be stimulated and strengthened by the increased energy in the Dantian. At this step, when a sense of sexual energy arouses during Qigong practice, it would be great timing to circulate the energy around the Du-meridian and Ren-meridian in the body with the *Small Universe Opening and Developing Exercise* and *Small Universe Enhancing Exercise*. During the practice of these exercises, practitioners may experience a sense of tingling or electric vibration or warm current that travels from the earth center along the Du-meridian to the head, then enters into the back area of the brain, and then continues to flow into the front lobe of the brain to integrate the functions of the back of the brain with the front of the brain together. This internal energy circulation not only supports the functions of the brain but also helps increase self-awareness and harmony between the intellectual mind and the intuitive mind. Additionally, as the energy lowers down along the Ren-

meridian to the Dantian and to the bottom of the torso, it forms a circulating and repeating loop around the torso. This circulation enhances communication between the mind and the body (this circulation of the internal Qi was translated as “Microcosmic Orbit” in *Awaken Healing Light of the Tao* by Mantak & Maneewan Chia; and “Small Circulation” in *Qigong meditation* by Dr. Yang Jwing-Ming). This practice of circulating the internal energy around the Du-Ren meridians is called “Nourishing the Mind with the refined Qi.” In Chinese it is called “Lianqi Yangshen” (炼气养神).

Step 5 Achieve the Peaceful or Near-Empty State of Mind with Peaceful Mind Meditation

The Qi circulation in step 4 can bring our work into clear focus: the state of peaceful mind not only allows us to be aware of any thoughts coming in and going out of our mind, but also provides the condition for us to see our emotions, sub-consciousness, habitual patterns, and previous memories that have been stored in the body. The *peaceful mind meditation* plays an important role in holding up this mirror. During the peaceful mind meditation, it is necessary and important to observe the nature of the mind with a detached attitude. Whenever a thought or an image or an old memory appears in your mind, you do not respond to it—you just keep your peacefulness and calmness and do not let the passing thought lead you. Once you are able to stabilize your state of peaceful mind without being disturbed from other factors, you have achieved a great deal in your internal cultivation. You are ready to move forward to discover and explore your intrinsic nature and your inner self. The process of achieving the peaceful state of mind is called “Lianshen Huanxu” (炼神还虚) in Chinese.

As Laozi stated: “One who knows others is intelligent; one who knows him/herself is enlightened. One who conquers others is strong; one who conquers him/herself is truly powerful.” (*From chapter 33 of Lao Zi’s Dao De Jing*). One of the goals of internal cultivation is to know who we are, to nourish our spirit and to live with greater joy and freedom at the soul level. However, the way of self-discovery, self-care, and self-fulfillment is not always easy. It would be wise to be fully prepared mentally and physically for this meaningful and significant journey. Meditation practice is the mental preparation and precondition to go to the next step. In many cases, preparation at the physical level is also necessary and important in order to have the strength to go through this internal cultivation. All of the internal martial arts such as Tai Chi, Xingyi, and Bagua are very beneficial and helpful in internal cultivation. In addition, Yoga, Pilates, Dance, Aikido, etc. also are complementary practices. It is helpful to take the courses *Harmonizing Qi with Movement, or Developing the Internal Power of “Jing” and “Rou”* and/or *Personal Boundaries Practice* in the Yi Ren system of Qigong. These practices are useful and helpful, particularly when your energy/information system is getting very sensitive to others and the living environment. Thus, these practices help to build up a strong foundation for internal cultivation.

Step 6 Understand the Intrinsic Nature of Oneself and Experience Internal Realization

One of the ways to know our intrinsic nature is to investigate our gifts, talents, intelligence, wisdom, previous experiences and memories within the internal organs through our Qigong practice. In order to enter into this course of self-discovery, self-recognition, and internal realization at the fullest and deepest possible level, we must open and activate the four gates: the *Life Gate, Wisdom Gate, Marrow Gate, and Brain Gate* as well as open and activate the 12 Qi pathways of the internal organs with *the Large Universe Exercise*. Among these energetic exercises, the *Wisdom Gate Meditation* and *Internal Organ Meditation* play very important roles for internal realization. Step 6 is the most challenging stage in the entire internal cultivation process, because many individuals have to face previous memories including their own family lineages; they may have to deal with some intense emotional experiences from the past. In many cases, it takes a lot of emotional strength, intelligence, knowledge, and time to overcome the difficulties and challenges. Even though this course of self-discovery could be tough in certain situations, it can be a great opportunity for healing illnesses. It also can be a great opportunity for liberation from the suffering brought on by tragedies and unhealthy experiences, and the errors of the past, etc. This practice of understanding one's intrinsic nature and experiencing internal realization is called "Lianxu Liaoxing" (炼虚了性) in Chinese.

Step 7 Develop Character and Integrate the Personal Mind with the Mind of the Universe

On the basis of the internal investigation and realization of Step 6, practitioners have recognized their inherited gifts, talents, strengths, weakness, and so forth. With the practice of step 6, practitioners truly develop themselves and become awakened persons: awakened mind, awakened body, and well-developed Bio-Energy-Information System. These outcomes of internal cultivation can be used in step 7 effectively for personal growth and self-development. The core practice at this stage is to develop character and personality with internal virtues. Virtues reside in the deepest layer of the internal organs and synchronize with the Dao--the mind of the universe. Virtues are the nutrients and power for spiritual development. With *Internal Virtue Cultivation* and with *Emotional Well-Being Practice*, we develop our character-- the "virtue of character" such as compassion, integrity, courage, and so forth in order to experience the code and power of the virtues in assembling the energies of the universe. Through the experiences of the code and the power of virtues, practitioners gain an experiential understanding about the development of the "virtue of character" as the foundation of one's spiritual development. This experiential understanding accelerates our synchronization with the Dao. Internal virtue cultivation practice develops character and integrates the personal mind with the mind of the universe, and is called "Lianxing Wudao" (炼性悟道) in Chinese.

Step 8 Accumulate the Virtues in Accordance with the Dao—the Natural Laws of the Universe

The Dao is the natural laws of the universe. When one acts and lives in accordance with the Dao, he or she accumulates virtues that assemble energies within and nourish the soul; when one acts and lives against the Dao, he or she creates chaos and conflict in the body that cause a loss of energy and suffering of the soul. Confucius stated: "One who is benevolent finds the Dao of virtue and rightness and calls it benevolence; One who is wise examines the natural laws of change and calls them wisdom. The Dao acts upon everyone, but ordinary people do not know it." Qigong practice helps us to understand the natural laws of life, particularly the relationships between the energy flow and one's consciousness. With *Extraordinary Meridian Opening and Developing Exercise (Extraordinary Universe Exercise)*, with *Wuwei Meditation*, with *Sound/Energy Center Correspondences Practice* and *Yijing Studies*, practitioners are able to experience the unity and oneness between oneself and others, as well as between oneself and the living environment. Once practitioners have had an experiential understanding of the benefits of the unified field and the meaning of oneness, they are able to share their gifts and talents appropriately and correctly. Thus, they are not only able to accumulate the "Virtues of Merits" but also able to accumulate the "Virtues of Oneness." The nature of virtue refers to assembly power. Thus, the accumulation of virtues in Yi Ren Qigong practice can be considered as the process of recharging energies and upgrading the intelligence of the spirit. The process of accumulating the virtues in accordance with the Dao is called "Zundao Lide" (尊道立德) in Chinese.

Step 9 Fulfill the Highest Potential and Contribute to the Betterment of Humanity

Once practitioners have experienced the unity and oneness between oneself and others, as well as between oneself and the living environment as described in step 8, she or he gradually and naturally gains new insights and perspectives on "self" and "others." Individuals begin to become aware of many different levels of consciousness in different individuals, different groups, different cultures, different countries and beyond. The experiences of "oneness" at different levels provide us opportunities to break the limits of self again and again. Practitioners realize that "self" and "others" and "self" and living environment, all are connected at the subtle energy level. What you think, what you say, and what you do all contribute to the collective energy field and cause certain effects in other people's lives and the world. This is, therefore, a huge responsibility to oneself, to others, and to humanity, once you have cultivated yourself as an awakened person with a well-functioning bio-energy-information system. What do you want to contribute to humanity? The importance of mindfulness at this level of cultivation cannot be overstressed. The main point here is that one's thoughts and words and deeds do not go against the natural laws. There are consequences: one can accumulate virtues, or one can accumulate karma at a

personal level. There are many different ways to contribute to the betterment of humanity, such as working for a better living environment including reducing toxic pollution and protecting animals; or, one can develop greater relationship with others working for world peace to avoid wars and so forth. In Yi Ren Qigong practice, the way of contributing to the betterment of humanity is to accumulate virtues for nourishing human spirits, and if one becomes a teacher—to help individuals in refining their subtle energy, improving their health, and thereby increasing their personal awareness levels of the Dao. To help individuals fulfill their highest potential and contribute to the betterment of humanity is called “Zaofu Renlei” (造福人类) in Chinese.

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