Healing Bodies, Healing Hearts with Qigong and Tai Chi Chuan



Janice Doppler

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Janice Doppler

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This book provides content related to qigong, tai chi chuan, and Chinese philosophical topics. As such, use of this book implies your acceptance of this disclaimer.

Dedicated to

Margaret Jane, Lijun, and Mary Amanda
whose hearts light my way

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I want to thank two people who edited this book. Tall Bill Kirkpatrick edited grammar, flagged areas needing clarification, and identified gaps created when connections were in my head rather than on paper. Round after round of edits each contributed to the clarity to the evolving book. It was as if he removed weeds so that flowers could flourish. Margery Gerard edited the last couple of drafts with a focus on ensuring the book had emotion. She named what grabbed her heart and pointed out what didn't.

Douglas Valentine helped me find the courage to adopt this project as my own when it was clear that Master Cheng was called to teach, not write. Doug also helped me to find the confidence to complete it.

Master Cheng contributed directly to this book by telling me about her life. After we agreed the project was mine rather than hers-with-my-assistance, we continued to work together occasionally on this or other qigong or tai chi chuan projects, some of what she said in those sessions ended up in *Healing Bodies, Healing Hearts with Qigong and Tai Chi Chuan*.

Sometimes we worked alone during work sessions regardless of which project was the focus. More and more we worked through a translator. Master Cheng preferred it because she did not have to work as hard to communicate her ideas or to understand me. Several people assisted with translating. Master

Cheng's husband, Wen Tao Wei, dropped whatever he was doing and helped us if we got stuck while working alone. Daughter-in-law, Ning Cheng, assisted if she happened to be visiting at the time of a work session. Jean Chu, also known as Jing Qing, spent countless days translating as did Shuk Chan. Yaping Sun and Shuk Chan both spent hours typing translations of documents written by Master Cheng or me so that we both could read them.

This book could not have been written without the support of Master Cheng's husband, Wen Tao, and my wife, Peg. Wen Tao created the space for Master Cheng and me to work together at their home. Our sessions were often all-day affairs that involved socializing, doing qigong, and working. Wen Tao always had an assortment of fruit and nuts on the table when I arrived; served hot tea throughout the day; and cooked, served, and cleaned up after lunch and dinner. Attending class three times a week and spending long hours with Master Cheng for private qigong instruction or working together consumed immeasurable amounts of time that I normally would have spent with Peg. It was difficult for her and yet, without complaint, she gave me the space to do what I needed to do. Words cannot express my gratefulness for her gift of time.

Janice Doppler
November 2014
Easthampton, Massachusetts

USE OF PSEUDONYMS

Elizabeth, Trish, Thaxter, Anna, and Jeffrey are pseudonyms used to protect the privacy of those whose stories are told in this book. Each is or was a student at International Center for Harmony and Living Arts.

Actual names are used for everyone else who is mentioned.

ROMANIZATION OF CHINESE WORDS

Reading Mandarin words written with Latin letters can be confusing because multiple systems exist for making the meaning of Chinese characters accessible to westerners. Pinyin and Wade-Giles are the two systems that appear most commonly in print. Pinyin was developed in the People's Republic of China in the 1950s and accepted as the international standard in the 1980s. The Wade-Giles system was developed by Thomas Wade in the late 1800s and formalized in a Chinese-English dictionary by Herbert Giles in the early 1900s. Pinyin is used in the most recently published books while older ones used Wade-Giles.

For the most part, the Pinyin system for Romanizing Chinese words is used in this book. The English translation appears first followed by its Pinyin equivalent in italics and parentheses. For example, *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine* (*Huang*

Di Nei Jing) is the name of a foundational text on traditional Chinese medicine written in English followed by Pinyin. In a few instances in which Chinese names are commonly known in Wade-Giles Romanization, the Romanization is given in Pinyin followed by Wade-Giles as in *The Book of Changes* (*Yi Jing/I Ching*).

Some books or people are known by their Chinese names. There is no commonly used translation of *Dao De Jing* so it appears only in its Pinyin form. There is no English translation for the name of legendary founder of tai chi chuan so his name is given in Pinyin followed by his Wade-Giles name in italics - Zhang San Feng (*Chang San Feng*)

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INTRODUCTION

Master Lijun Cheng and I shared the common dream of preserving traditional Chinese wisdom in a way that is accessible for modern, western people. We thought we shared a vision of how to bring the dream to fruition – writing. For years, she had been promising her qigong and tai chi chuan students at the International Center for Harmony and Living Arts that she would write a series of books. I jumped at the opportunity when she asked me to assist.

We began our work with the story of how her life was impacted by qigong, tai chi chuan, and traditional Chinese medicine. Master Cheng talked, I wrote. After something interrupted the momentum of our weekly work sessions, months passed before she was ready to get back to work. Bursts of weekly work interspersed with lapses became our norm. Over time, interruptions became more frequent and lasted longer. I realized that while Master Cheng dreamed of writing books, she had more energy for her self-described mission of planting seeds, with each of her students being a seed that would contribute to preserving traditional Chinese wisdom through qigong and tai chi chuan. I, on the other hand, felt compelled to write. During lapses in our joint work, I wrote what I observed about how Master Cheng applied ancient Chinese wisdom in her daily life and I conducted a qualitative research project about the impact of qigong in the lives of my classmates. Both were my way of providing evidence for the usefulness of ancient teachings in modern life. Eventually, I grasped that I was working on my own

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book. Master Cheng agreed with my conclusion and encouraged me to carry on. We continued working together whenever she had time and energy, but mostly, we each traveled our own paths toward our shared vision of making ancient Chinese wisdom accessible to modern people.

Writing this book took six years. It took that long to shift from assisting Master Cheng on her writing projects to finding my own vision. It took that long for the disparate pieces that I wrote during lapses in our work to merge into a story worth telling. It took that long for me to change enough to tell it.

Master Cheng teaches that qigong and tai chi chuan are ancient practices grounded in ancient wisdom that can be found in the *Dao De Jing* and the *Book of Changes* (*Yi Jing/I Ching*). She teaches that there is a great deal of ancient wisdom about how to use the improved health, increased calmness, and other benefits of qigong and tai chi chuan to live meaningfully. She teaches that qigong and tai chi chuan are powerful practices that can change the bodies, hearts, and lives of practitioners.

A few paragraphs ago, I said I needed to change enough to tell the story communicated in this book. A major change was letting go of my belief that ancient sages developed an interpretation of unchanging, absolute Truth and qigong was part of it. When I began working with Master Cheng on this project, I thought Truth was passed through the millennia relatively unchanged as masters passed it to students who became masters who passed it to another generation

of students. I was surprised when Master Cheng explained the traditional expectation that students build upon and go beyond what they were taught. Obviously, this meant qigong had to evolve through the millennia. In keeping with that tradition, Master Cheng developed Happy Heart Qigong (*le xin gong*), the primary qigong she teaches. I was disappointed when I discovered that Happy Heart Qigong was not a secret technique passed from the ancients even though I recognized that it was grounded in Daoist and Buddhist principles passed for centuries through the tradition of oral transmission from masters to their students and their students.

I had long known that philosophical truths evolve based on the social and political needs of each society within its time in history. In a transformative moment, I realized that desiring absolute Truth that passed unchanged through the millennia was an error that was probably a remnant from my childhood during which I had been indoctrinated with the belief that God's Truth had not changed since the day He created Earth. This realization opened my mind so that I could ask the most important question in this book. If unchanging, absolute Truth that can be relied on for guidance does not exist, is there a guiding question for life?

The answer became clear during a discussion over a lunch of Thai stew, when a classmate asserted, "Something happened thousands of years ago in China. Somebody got home. I want to know what truths they realized." He explained that there is a "home" that is common to all people in all cultures and hypothesized, "How to get home is the most important

spiritual question pondered by philosophers. Individuals experiment with it over and over in their daily lives." His face radiated the pleasure of sniffing a rose as he quoted a line from T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, "We shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time." To me, more important than truths that the ancients knew about the nature of home is grasping their understanding of how to make the journey to home. The important question is "How can one live in a way that makes life more meaningful?"

Master Cheng answers the question by suggesting we can live meaningfully by cultivating our virtue and improving ourselves every day. She frequently reminds students that "qigong improves your virtue and cultivating virtue improves your qigong." Qigong is a tool for aligning with the energies of the cosmos. Ancient Chinese wisdom offers guidance for how to use the tool and how to act well. Qigong and tai chi chuan can be vehicles for becoming quiet enough to perceive what your heart knows. Tai chi chuan, when done quite slowly and meditatively, is a type of qigong. Cultivating virtue is a way of acting on what your heart knows. The combination of qigong, tai chi chuan, and cultivating virtue contributes to making life more meaningful.

Healing Bodies, Healing Hearts with Qigong and Tai Chi Chuan explores what Master Cheng learned about using ancient Chinese wisdom, qigong and tai chi chuan to make her life more meaningful and how she passed her learnings, heart-to-heart, to her students. It

is a story of how hearts were changed – especially mine. The first section, *Change Calls*, introduces Master Cheng, her qigong and tai chi chuan school, and some students. Chapter One, *Founding Center for Harmony*, chronicles how Master Cheng started the International Center for Harmony and Living Arts after emigrating from China. It includes narratives from four students about how qigong and tai chi chuan impacted their lives. Chapter Two, *Finding Master Cheng*, describes how I became Master Cheng's student and includes a vignette that reveals ability well beyond the capability of most people.

The second section, *Looking Back*, sets the stage for the journey of change experienced by Master Cheng and her students. Chapter Three, *Ancient Wisdom*, explains key concepts – qi, yin and yang, the five elemental phases, summarizes ancient cosmology, and highlights the giants of ancient Chinese wisdom and their wisdom texts. In addition, a brief history of tai chi chuan includes information about the fifth and sixth generation of Yang style tai chi that has not been published previously. Chapter Four, *Becoming Master Cheng*, tracks growing up with ancient values embedded in daily life, learning qigong and tai chi chuan as a young adult, leaning on qigong for the strength and courage to survive the Cultural Revolution and serious illness, and eventually becoming a qigong and tai chi chuan master. Chapter Five, *Out with the Old, In with the New*, is my own story of rejecting the fundamentalist Christian values of my family, incorporating political activism as a component of a new brand of spirituality only to find it did not fit me, and walking through the door opened by Master Cheng

into a way of life that resonated within me and filled my ever-present hunger for a spiritually-grounded life.

The third section, *Journeying Together*, focuses on how Master Cheng navigated difficult situations in her life and how interacting with her challenged me to become a wiser, better person. Chapter Six, *Jeffrey*, tells how qigong and tai chi chuan provided hope as well as healing energy to a beloved student who was coping with serious illness. Chapter Seven, *Health Crisis*, recounts how Master Cheng explored both eastern and western medicine as a way of healing her own serious illness before choosing qigong as the healing modality upon which she would depend. Chapter Eight, *Master Kong*, describes how the reunion of Master Cheng with her long-lost qigong master, Kong Tai, sparked within me a new understanding of qi and generated new perspectives on the place of qigong and cultivating virtue in one's life.

The final section, *Return*, makes meaning of my journey with Master Cheng. Chapter Nine, *A New Story*, recounts the story I created about how to make my own life meaningful, how it became obsolete, and the new questions that emerged in the process of beginning to create a new story. Finally, the *Epilogue* becomes the jumping off point for a new journey at the same time that it settles chaos activated by an unexpected event.

How did I gather enough information to make this my own book when my original responsibility was simply to record my teacher's teachings for her book? The first

chapter, *Founding Center for Harmony,* combines information from Master Cheng and two of her earliest students. The third chapter, *Ancient Wisdom* integrates the teachings of Master Cheng and the work of many authors whose work I read during the past six years. There is so much overlap among these sources that it was not feasible to attribute information to specific authors other than to acknowledge them in the bibliography. The fourth chapter, *Becoming Master Cheng*, is told in her own words. It is a synthesis of what she revealed during our joint work sessions and anecdotes she shared informally. Some information from sixth chapter, *Jeffrey*, is from conversations while riding to or from class and a lecture preserved on YouTube. Everything else is based on my interactions with Master Cheng or my own experiences.

A few questions are explored in this book: Can westerners unacquainted with eastern metaphysical concepts like qi, yin and yang, and the five elements find value in qigong? In tai chi chuan? For healing? For finding truth? For finding more meaning in life? If the roots of qigong and tai chi chuan are in philosophy and medicine are they spiritual practices, health practices or both? How can ancient practices be relevant to modern people?

SECTION I

CHANGE CALLS

The one great story is our search ... to be in accord with the grand symphony that this world is, to put the harmony of our own body in accord with that harmony.

Joseph Campbell, American Mythologist

I once tried standing up on my toes to see far out in the distance, but I found that I could see much farther by climbing to a high place.

Xunzi, Chinese Philosopher

CHAPTER 1 – FOUNDING CENTER FOR HARMONY

Master Cheng became lonely soon after immigrating to the United States to obtain medical treatment for her eyes. She spoke little English and knew only her son, Qun. He suspected his friend, Jing Qing, would befriend his mom because she had been so kind to him when they first met in a copy shop several months earlier. Jing Qing had immediately invited him to have dinner with her family upon discovering he had no family or friends in the area. Qun took his mom to meet Jing Qing who was astonished at how intensely familiar Master Cheng felt. It was as if they'd known each other before. They quickly became close friends.

When Master Cheng met Jing Qing's mother, upon shaking hands she said, "You have arthritis. I could teach you qigong to decrease the discomfort." Jing Qing, who had dreamed of learning the ancient art of qigong since she was a girl, realized that her opportunity had finally arrived. She gathered several family members and friends and Master Cheng began teaching qigong three months after her arrival in Connecticut in January 1994. Teaching tai chi chuan followed soon after.

Jing Qing served as the translator for Master Cheng at an ever-expanding schedule of teaching qigong and tai chi chuan at senior centers, churches, and fitness centers in Connecticut and Massachusetts. In 1999, at

the age of sixty-one, Master Cheng established the International Center for Harmony and Living Arts in western Massachusetts to teach qigong, tai chi chuan, and the traditional Chinese health culture.

Master Cheng says "I teach qigong because I am living proof of the power of qigong. Qigong helped heal my injuries from beatings during the Cultural Revolution, illnesses related to malnutrition during long stretches when limited food was available, a spinal injury that x-rays showed was so serious that my physicians could not believe I was walking, and even cancer." She views teaching as "an opportunity to make up for the lost years during the Cultural Revolution that should have been the golden time of my life." She explained that, "Traditional masters in China are old and keep quiet in public about their knowledge because they fear drawing the attention of the government. As a result, there are few, if any, young people learning qigong. I am deeply saddened by the decline of qigong so I feel a deep responsibility to nurture qigong at the Center for Harmony along with tai chi chuan and the traditional Chinese culture."

Master Cheng further explained, "When I saw the situation in the United States I began to teach tai chi chuan in addition to qigong. I noticed that many people wanted to learn tai chi chuan, but many teachers did not truly understand it. I was invited to a party where they did tai chi chuan, but it was not really tai chi chuan. I saw that some people were learning from videotapes and I worried that they would not understand enough to reap the health benefits of tai chi chuan and might even damage their bodies. A Chinese

man who claimed to have extensive background in tai chi chuan invited me to teach at his school, but his skills were poor and he admitted to me that none of his claims of expertise were true."

Master Cheng learned qigong from traditional masters who fled to the safety of the mountains during the Cultural Revolution. Political turmoil spared those areas so qigong remained unchanged. After the Cultural Revolution, the old masters came out of the mountains and qigong became popular. The masters modified some qigong practices to make them accessible to people who were new to qigong. In that tradition, Master Cheng integrated the principles of traditional qigong, techniques she learned from old masters, and what she believes is most acceptable to modern people to create a sitting qigong called Happy Heart Qigong (*le xin gong).* It contributes to being calm and relaxed, balancing yin and yang, and promoting the health of internal organs by balancing the five elements or energetic phases. These concepts will be described in chapter three, *Chinese Wisdom.*

Master Cheng's first American students joined Center for Harmony to learn tai chi. Elizabeth, whose story you'll read later in this chapter, described the early days of qigong class. "None of the Americans knew what qigong was. We did it because Master Cheng said we should. We simply sat on cushions on the floor for an hour listening to music. We did not know what we were doing or why, but we kept coming back! At the start it was just a time to relax and be quiet, but it evolved. At the beginning, most of the students were Chinese and what was said was in Chinese. More and

more, Master Cheng started speaking in English and guiding us to relax each part of our body. Over the years, she gradually added components."

By the time I joined Center for Harmony in its eighth year, it had grown to nearly fifty students with classes in two locations – Thursdays in a church hall, Tuesdays and Saturdays on the campus of a private boarding school in a building had once been the home of an affluent family. There was a marble fireplace in every room and oriental rugs that students rolled up before each class, but the opulent building was not well-maintained. Most windows did not open and those that did had to be opened by two people - one who held the heavy window open while a second propped it open with a chunk of lumber. The first half of Thursday and Saturday classes was sitting qigong. Tai chi was taught in the second half of these three-hour long classes. Tuesday classes were demanding tai chi chuan classes.

Master Cheng had experienced the power of qigong and tai chi chuan in her own life and she wanted her students to squeeze all possible benefit from these practices so she encouraged students to attend class frequently. If you attended once a week, she wanted twice. If you attended twice, she wanted three times. Some students quit because of the relentless pressure while others increased their frequency of attendance and were glad they did.

During qigong, Master Cheng sat with legs crossed in the lotus position on a round cushion. Once, she unzipped its red cover and displayed a lotus on her

cushion. She explained, "The lotus roots in lake-bottom mud and grows its leaves and flowers on the water's surface. This symbolizes reaching for light without being bogged down by the mud of life." Students sat around her in a semi-circle - some on cushions on the floor, some in chairs without leaning against the back support. Everyone covered their legs to keep them warm during qigong. Master Cheng used a yellow blanket edged in red on which students had written their names which were then embroidered permanently onto the blanket by the student who created it.

The main component of qigong class was a forty-five minute sitting qigong - *Le Xin Gong* or Happy Heart Qigong. It was accompanied by music – songs written and sung by Master Cheng's qigong master Kong Tai, who had a gift of healing through his singing of Buddhist music. Unlike the early days of Center for Harmony, Master Cheng spoke English and guided students through three phases – adjust your body by relaxing, adjust your breathing by imagining inhaling qi to your *dantian*, and adjust your spirit by imagining becoming one with the universe. Master Cheng worked hard to be able to lead in English; she wrote the words in Chinese, had them translated them into English, and then spent hours memorizing and practicing.

Marrow Washing, a series of self-massaging movements that assist the circulation of qi in the body, followed immediately after *le xin gong*. In my early days at Center for Harmony, qigong and Marrow Washing was followed by a question and answer period. It was in-the-moment teaching that resulted in piecemeal instruction since the range of questions was wide – I

saw this color, this shape, or that person; what does that mean? Why do I always fart or burp during qigong? What are the best foods to eat at this time of year to be in rhythm with the flow of nature? What does it mean if my hands feel cottony during qigong? I felt this or that difficult emotion during qigong; can you tell me what to do? Occasionally, the questions bordered on the metaphysical. Sometimes the answers were fascinating, often repetitive. "It is good energy for you" was a frequent answer.

When I started doing qigong it was months before I could sit through *Le Xin Gong* without my back hurting yet I persisted because I sensed something profound yet indescribable happening within me. I often wished I could express my own questions more clearly to elicit a deeper answer. I eventually realized "It is good energy for you" *was* the answer. I let go of trying to make meaning of my qigong experience which freed me to relax and enjoy whatever happened. My qigong improved.

Master Cheng has said, "After I came to the United States I felt strongly that I have a mission to pass Chinese wisdom to the next generation. I see benefits in both eastern and western medicine and believe that *together* they could do wonders. I am in my seventies now and too old to carry out my entire vision, but each of my students is a seed I am planting to unite east and west."

Qigong and tai chi has changed the lives of Master Cheng's students. People bring unique needs and interests to class. Typically, once they begin practicing,

they satisfy their original need. Those who persist discover additional benefits as in the following four stories from students. Each is told in the student's own words.

Elizabeth

When I was a child I didn't have an answer when asked what I was going to be when I grew up. I majored in cello performance in college and was happily going along being Elizabeth-the-cello-player with no idea for my future other than that I'd graduate and something would happen.

Something happened. I was riding in a car that was struck by a drunk driver. I couldn't sit in a chair so I couldn't play my cello. I left school and went to live with my parents. Three years of increasing debilitation followed. I went from not being able to walk well to having to lift my leg with my hands when I climbed stairs. A team of orthopedic surgeons said I would eventually lose the ability to walk. Breathing became increasingly difficult because my lungs were being squeezed as my spine gradually folded over on itself. I could not brush my own hair or get into the bathtub.

To do something with the limited physical capacity I had, I hobbled to the YMCA across the street from my parents' house to attend the disabled swimming program. One day in the lobby there was a sign that said "Beginning Tai Chi – all ability levels welcome." I have no idea what possessed me to think I could possibly do that, but I went to tai chi class instead of swimming. It was a pivotal moment in my life.

That class was the first time in three years that I did not feel pain every minute. I joined tai chi and the qigong class that preceded it. Both became instrumental in my healing. When performing tai chi, I could move my body without pain in ways that I otherwise could not. During qigong, qi moved my body in ways I couldn't move outside the qigong space. I was encouraged because I believed if I could do it during qigong and tai chi, I could move freely someday.

Over the past dozen years, I have regained my health and become strong enough to function normally in daily life. I still have pain from the injuries caused by the accident; however, I can live through pain in a way that it doesn't take over my whole existence. Doing qigong keeps healing energy flowing. I use the qigong breathing technique to calm myself and relax muscles when they begin to spasm.

Physical and emotional healing from the accident is only part of my story. For the past several years I have been teaching cello to elementary through high school students in a school district others describe as impoverished, drug-infested, and depressed. I see heartbreaking things every day. A kindergartener got in trouble for stuffing his pockets full of packets of cereal to take home to his little sister who didn't have enough food. A girl in third grade saw a baby thrown out of a window because her high-on-drugs parents were mad at her.

I describe my school district as exciting, fun, exceptional, and full of talent because the students are so amazing. They come to school happy to be there

and anxious to learn. Students frequently tell me they thought they could never do anything, but learning to play cello gives them hope.

I am able to handle the heartbreak I see every day and help my students because, through acceptance of my own problems, I developed the calmness and acceptance that this is how it is and everybody does the best they can. I cannot describe how, yet somehow qigong melts away the nonsense and gets to what is true. What is true is that in the simplest way, we are all people trying to live together. For me, it is important to help where I can. You can't feel bad if you are helping someone else feel better.

I would not have learned these things and would not be capable of my work physically or emotionally without my qigong and tai chi practice. I thought I just needed to heal my back and the rest of my body after the accident. I couldn't have healed as much as I did without the calmness, relaxation, and knowing within myself the feeling of safety from doing qigong and tai chi. I teach music all day long and have a life I never dreamed of even when I was at my healthiest before the accident.

Trish

I searched for a spiritual path or tradition for many years, but didn't find what I was looking for so I developed a practice of my own. When my father was diagnosed with terminal cancer I was concerned that his impending death could potentially worsen the posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) I was already suffering due to the battering and sexual abuse he

perpetrated on me when I was a child. My self-developed practice was no longer enough. A friend recommended qigong.

Initially, qigong class was a safe place to experience the enormous pain I felt because my dad, whom I both loved and hated, was dying. I became aware of emotional pain that I had previously blocked from my mind, and I cried during every class for a long time. Awareness is the first stage of making change since you must be aware of something before you can change it. Once I became aware of painful emotions, I learned to allow them to pass through me instead of becoming knotted inside me. I am learning how to relax and calm my mind and spirit when I become aware of anger, fear, or sadness during qigong. I believe that if I can do this during qigong, I can learn to do the same when I'm upset in my daily life.

Qigong helps me be present in my body. During episodes of abuse I was able to anesthetize my feelings by dissociating from awareness of my body. Blocking these feelings helped me survive, but at the cost of internal tension that ultimately developed into fibromyalgia, an autoimmune illness related to the trauma I experienced. The blockages that create this illness are deeply ingrained in my body and nervous system and are difficult to unlearn even though they are no longer necessary. My physical pain from fibromyalgia is a constant presence. If I focus on it, it takes over. If I dissociate from this pain I cut off part of who I am. I want to experience joy in spite of the presence of pain.

When I do qigong my breathing changes and I focus on sensations in my body. I allow my posture, guided by my breath, to shift and change as it wants and needs to. I open my mind to allow images, sensations of colors, smells and sounds to flow in and through many parts of my body. Although this means I am more aware of the pain from fibromyalgia, I am learning to hold joy and body pain together in the same space. Before qigong they felt very separate. My body is gradually becoming less guarded and increasingly resilient as I relax into the consciousness of the safety and comfort in my life. The constricted, burning, and achy feelings I still frequently experience in my body are slowly giving way to feelings of lightness, softness, and flexibility. Accepting rather than fighting the constant discomfort of fibromyalgia makes it possible to simultaneously be at peace with myself and be present with the beauty and love that exists in the world.

I am in the infancy of taking the awareness dawning via qigong and transferring that into my daily life. It is an enormous challenge, but I already see changes. For example, I am awake with insomnia from fibromyalgia for a portion of almost every night. In the past I got up and did things to distract myself. Now, when I awaken during the night I focus inwardly and relax with qigong-like breathing – long, slow, deep. It helps me quiet my mind and I continue to rest which feels like I'm getting some of the benefits I would if I were still sleeping even if I can't sleep.

When I started qigong I hoped it would increase my energy and connection to life. Part of the lingering effect of what happened in my childhood is that I need

a lot of alone time and I keep my life small for safety. That's very typical for survivors. I am working toward having a bigger life and not having to be so defended and solitary. I'm not bursting with more energy, but the energy I have to be out in the world is growing in quality because I'm healing through the inner work I'm doing.

What I would most love to see happen in my lifetime is the human species moving toward cooperation, harmony, peace and generosity towards all species. I contribute to that dream by bringing the world more joy through writing, teaching, and performing music. My music is becoming more joyful and hopeful. I'm enjoying my students more and my students are enjoying me more. My audiences are enjoying my performances more. Music can be an expression of emotion, a way to express all kinds of things both pleasurable and painful. I see audiences light up when I perform joyful music. I believe it reminds them that even if their present day life is sad, it is possible to feel better.

The practice of qigong is what I have been looking for during my entire life. Qigong has become a powerful tool for meeting enormous challenges associated with abuse by my father and the unceasing pain of fibromyalgia. It is also a tool for cultivating an attitude of acceptance of what I've been given in this life instead of being resentful. This acceptance increases access to the abundant joy that I believe is my birthright. It replaces trauma-related patterns that helped me survive my childhood with ones that foster connection to the world. It is a slow process.

Sometimes it feels like nothing is changing, but I know it is. It is like gently steering an extremely large ship pulling something heavy. If I steer too much and try to make change too fast I create tidal waves of unintended consequences. The gifts I receive through qigong are rippling into the world through me and will continue to ripple and ripple.

Thaxter
I came to Center for Harmony to rekindle a lapsed tai chi practice of twenty-five years. For the first several weeks I arrived when people were doing qigong and waited outside for them to finish. Then, I came in and did tai chi. I decided adding qigong would help me become part of the community.

Qigong was hard! Trying to get one's body to be relaxed is a physical aspect of qigong. It did *not* come naturally to me. I read Zen literature before I came to Center for Harmony and it sparked a desire to live in a place of deep, subtle calmness rather than occasionally getting to such a place. Master Cheng can do that. My desire is to be calm like she is calm. The fact that qigong was hard meant I needed it. If I couldn't sit calmly and relax then that's what I needed – to sit calmly and relax. I'm not always calm, but I am calmer.

The first challenge was getting so that I could do qigong without hurting. I told myself even if I'm just sitting here thinking about my back hurting, I'm thinking about a real thing in the moment and it gives my mind a rest from everything that is out there. I told myself to trust that there is a benefit and stay with it. Another

challenge was not being a talented qigonger. After qigong, students were invited to ask questions. My sense was that there were people who reported having unusual, interesting, or deeply qigongish experiences not available to the rest of us. Nobody was raising their hand and saying, "I was just sitting here," but that is what I was doing. It was like being in an art class and not being good at art.

I persisted in spite of the difficulty. Part of it was I don't like to quit. It would be a hard admission for me to watch forty people doing qigong with no problem and say "this is too hard for me." I assumed that if these people can get something out of this I can get something out of this and I decided I *can* do this. I'm *not* going to give up.

Whatever is happening to me is happening in slow increments yet there have been multifaceted benefits. I have greater awareness of my body. During qigong I tune into what is happening with my body because there is nothing else to tune into. I feel what's going on with my body a lot of the time – where it's aching, where the problems are. If you're busy, busy, busy you don't necessarily notice. Qigong is sort of an early warning system that helps me notice things so I can take care of them before they become problems.

For me, the health aspect of qigong is about maintenance. I was healthy when I joined and have stayed well as I have gotten older. Friends are amazed that even though I'm in my mid-sixties that I don't take any medication, can put salt on my food, and don't have high blood pressure. I still have places in my body

that tend to bind up. I have a place in the middle of my back just to the right of my spine that tightens into a knot when I do qigong. It's very hard for me to release that. I have parts of my body that I am learning to relax and qigong is a place where I can work on that.

I am more attentive to my emotions, which gives me more control of ones that can be disruptive. I don't know that it actually makes me calmer, but it means I don't get worse. Qigong helps me get old, but not crotchety. For example, becoming angry over little things such as jars not opening or inconsiderate drivers is new for me so I suspect it gets worse when you get older. Being aware of my own anger enables me to watch myself being angry instead of just being angry, and that changes everything. The change is that I can let go of the anger more quickly rather than still having the anger after the situation ends.

There's a strong connection between my view of striving for excellence as virtue and defining myself as not being a talented qigonger. I want to be good at what I do. As I said, if my classmates can do this, I want to be able to do this. There is a paradox in wanting to be excellent and needing to let go of wanting to be excellent in order to be calm. Both desires are operating within me. Trying my way out of it won't work. I can't try harder not to excel. The way out of it is to continue my practice and sit and not worry. Just do what I do. When I do tai chi, one of the things I like is that I'm not thinking about whether I am better or worse than someone else. When I play tennis I have to think about that since I'm playing with someone I am trying to beat. I'm not beating anyone when I play tai

chi which is one of the things that attracted me to it. It took me out of the adversarial, competitive mind set of trying to be the best. One of the reasons I do tai chi and qigong is to get out of that place of having to be the best so I can define myself as good. Having to be the best is not the best place to live and becomes self-defeating when you get older because you're not going to be the best any more.

I slowly shed the sense that I am not a talented qigonger. I've had more than one person say "I couldn't sit still for an hour of qigong. I couldn't do that." I can, so I'm beginning to think "I really can do this" and it makes me think differently about myself. I do qigong every single day and recently increased from twenty to thirty minutes a day at home.

In all the times I've done qigong, I got myself in a totally good place once. My body relaxed. My mind relaxed. I remember consciously thinking "this is really nice in here" it lasted for about forty-five seconds. It happened just once, but it keeps me motivated.

Anna

For much of my life anger, fear, or grief would arise within me when situations occurred that I couldn't control. Qigong helped me be calm regardless of my life situation because I experienced everything from a calmer starting point. After six months of daily qigong I was no longer easily frustrated with myself or irritated with other people and rarely experienced emotional over-reactions that used to be commonplace.

My daily practice at home lapsed when I lost my momentum after being hospitalized for several days with a serious infection. The calmness I'd developed gradually dissolved. I returned to being easily frustrated and irritated. I felt more anxious, had a shorter temper. The stark contrast in myself with and without qigong motivated me to resume my daily practice and I reclaimed the more easy-going self I had become with the daily discipline of qigong. I was enjoying life and feeling grateful every day when I woke up. And then, I lost my job as part of a huge lay-off at the hospital where I worked. In spite of the dire outlook, I was able to maintain an overall sense of happiness and trusted the universe to open to the right thing rather than feeling like a rag doll helplessly blown about by the wind. This is the way I've always aspired to be. I didn't think I could ever get there because I've been trying my whole life, but the effects of qigong helped me get there!

Soon after, I faced an even bigger challenge when I suddenly lost hearing in my right ear and developed constant tinnitus. There were times of grieving the loss and times of optimism when I told myself that healing is not about returning to what was, but about being with what is now and allowing that to bring me closer to my true self. My nervous system took a long time to adjust to my hearing loss, yet I eventually became accustomed to the difficulties of hearing through one ear and I stepped slowly back into the stream of life.

As I've rebuilt my life after losing my job and part of my hearing, I realized happiness is not just about circumstances. When I lost my job and lost my hearing

I was able to maintain my happiness and calmness. Devoting time to a meditative practice such as qigong helps me be happy regardless of life circumstances.

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The following chapter is my own story of spending seven years learning tai chi chuan with American teachers before finding Master Cheng. It also describes an interaction with her that reveals a bit of her exceptional internal power.

CHAPTER 2 – FINDING MASTER CHENG

During the drive home from blueberry picking in 1998, my friend mentioned she had recently registered for a tai chi class. I responded that I'd thought for years that I'd do the same someday. When I arrived home, my mailbox held an announcement of a tai chi class forming just one mile from my home. Apparently, "someday" had arrived. I signed up immediately.

I was hooked on tai chi the first time I tried it. Sometimes, I felt like I was coming home to something I'd known long before. One morning as I practiced in my driveway it dawned on me that just as tai chi movements constantly shift between forward and backward, life constantly flows between times of ease and difficulty which means I can trust that life's difficulties will *always* pass. In that moment, I sensed a deep relaxation that marked my transition from tai chi simply as a method of promoting health to tai chi as a spiritual practice.

Seven years later, it was time for a new teacher. My

room the size of a basketball court. At the far corner of the room a couple dozen people were sitting in a semi-circle around Master Cheng who was answering questions about qigong. Most of the group wore blue t-shirts with a stylized lotus on the front and the Chinese character with the dual meaning of happiness or music on the back. Master Cheng watched me intently as I approached the group and slipped into a seat.

I joined in when Master Cheng led a moving qigong called *Le Gong*, Happiness Qigong, done standing with arm movements that were easy to follow. It was developed by her qigong master, Kong Tai, to promote circulation in invisible meridians. A ten-minute break for green tea freshly steeped from leaves imported from China punctuated the transition from qigong to tai chi chuan class. Everyone did the "twelve form" developed by Master Cheng and the "twenty-four form" developed in 1956 in China to make tai chi accessible to the general population. Both were new to me; however, I was able to follow. Next, we broke into two groups for instruction. Master Cheng's husband, Wen Tao, worked with an advanced group on the traditional Yang style long form while Master Cheng worked with the other on the twenty-four form. Her manner was gentle and smiles were frequent yet her expectation that tai chi would be done well was clear. After about twenty minutes, she told my group to practice while she worked with the other group. Wen Tao switched to our group and answered questions that emerged as we practiced individually. Later, she returned to our group to see how we'd progressed and made corrections for us to work on at home.

Master Cheng approached me when class ended. I had a hard time understanding her English. She said qigong and tai chi are powerful tools for healing and revealed that she used them to heal herself from cancer. She indicated she could tell I had been doing tai chi for a long time, but my tai chi had many flaws. She tapped my sternum as she said "I fix!"

Long ago, I sensed that a special Teacher would enter my life at some point. Each time a new teacher came into my life I wondered whether this was my Special Teacher. Each time, the answer was no. When I left class that night I was so exhausted that I feared my legs wouldn't carry me down the steps, but in my heart I was dancing because this night, the answer was yes! Master Cheng was my Special Teacher. The journal entry I wrote that night reflects both excitement and reluctance.

> *10/14/05*
>
> *I hope this is not time for new motion to begin in my life. I feel like I am just reaching a place of quiet – happy with Peg, the overwhelming stress at work has passed, exercising more, eating better, and now my Special Teacher has arrived in my life. I hope a time of quietness is coming to let these good things swirl together into a new pattern.*

I had no idea that night how much I would learn or the deep relationship that would develop between Master Cheng and me, but how could I possibly have hoped

that new motion would not be created by finally finding the teacher for whom I'd searched for twenty-five years? The following week I began attending qigong class in spite of my reluctance for new motion.

I do not know how I knew Master Cheng was the Special Teacher for whom I searched, but I have never doubted it. After attending class a few months I had an astonishing interaction that revealed her unique internal power. The stage for the interaction was set when I was appointed as Curriculum Director for a local school district. I was ecstatic because I'd been preparing for this role for years, but my elation turned to despair when a new Superintendent of Schools, who led by intimidation and fear, was appointed three months after I started my job. I began to feel intensely sad after qigong so I checked with Master Cheng about how to handle this unwanted emotion. She counseled that the sadness was not a problem since it was not getting stuck within me. The following week at the end of qigong I felt a dead emptiness inside and I sat in silence wondering "What do I do with feeling empty?" Master Cheng turned toward me and sternly declared, "Empty is bad energy!" then she turned away and began the usual post-qigong question and answer session. How did she know what I was feeling and even the exact word I was thinking? She obviously had abilities beyond anything I had imagined possible, so I began attending class twice a week instead of once. Soon after, she described to the class the intimacy of a traditional master-disciple relationship and added that there is deep knowledge that a master can pass only to her disciples. She said, "The student picks her teacher, but the teacher picks her disciples." I sensed it was

important for me to be picked so I would have a chance of being worthy. I began doing qigong every day.

Although I did not realize it at the time, I had reached the jumping off point for an astonishing adventure with Master Cheng. It is important to look back at how Master Cheng and I each arrived at this point before continuing with the adventure. What is the ancient Chinese wisdom that formed the infrastructure for the adventure? How did it impact Master Cheng's life and how did she become a qigong master as well as a tai chi chuan grandmaster and a sixth generation Yang style lineage holder? How did a westerner who started life as a fundamentalist Christian get to the point of embracing qigong and tai chi chuan as both a health and a spiritual practice?

SECTION II

LOOKING BACK

You cannot prevent the birds of sadness from passing over your head, but you can prevent them from making nests in your hair.

Confucius,
Chinese Philosopher

People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that is what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our innermost being and reality so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive.

Joseph Campbell,
American Mythologist

CHAPTER 3 – CHINESE WISDOM

Master Cheng believes, "it is important for serious students of qigong and tai chi chuan to understand the Chinese health culture." In her early years of teaching in the United States, she stressed the principle of aligning choices for food, drink, clothing, exercise, and sleep with the natural rhythm of the seasons. Eventually, she decided a critical mass of her students were ready to accept deeper information so she began to lecture on traditional Chinese medicine, cosmology, and ancient philosophy. Especially important was wisdom developed by ancient Chinese intellectual giants such as the Yellow Emperor, Fu Xi, Confucius and Laozi and ancient wisdom texts such as *The Book of Changes (Yi Jing/I Ching)*, *Dao De Jing,* and *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine* (*Huang Di Nei Jing).*

Some students value the information. Others tolerate the lectures, but they peak at their watches and interrupt when they believe too much time has been eroded from that day's tai chi instruction. Personally, I crave more depth and use the lectures to point to people, wisdom texts, and topics to study on my own. The following is a synthesis of Master Cheng's lectures and my study. A brief history of tai chi chuan includes material about the Yang Style fifth and sixth generation that has not previously been available in English.

Key Concepts in the Chinese Health Culture

Qigong and tai chi chuan improve the health of one's body, mind, emotions, and spirit by balancing qi, yin and yang, and the five elements. "Qi" is typically translated as "energy," but "energy" only approximates the meaning of "qi" which has no direct translation in English. Qi is the substance and energy of everything in the universe. Qi powers circulation and never-ending transformations in the universe as everything seeks balance and harmony. Qi being both substance and energy may seem initially strange to the western mind, but Einstein arrived at essentially the same conclusion when his equation that $E=mc^2$ showed that matter and energy are two forms of the same thing and convertible into each other. Qi inhaled during qigong is accumulated in the lower dantian, one of three invisible energy reservoirs in the human body, and then circulated throughout the body during qigong and tai chi chuan. Once acquired, qi balances and harmonizes yin and yang and the five elemental phases in your body. Balance and harmony promotes physical and emotional health.

Yin qi and yang qi, usually referred to simply as yin and yang, are the basic forces within everything. Yin and yang are constantly changing in relation to one another. When one expands, the other contracts although the relationship between them is not directly proportional and amounts of yin and yang are rarely equal. An example is the constant flux between high and low pressure weather systems. When a high pressure area moves away a low pressure area can move in. If we call a high pressure system yang and a low pressure system yin, then changes in weather are

comparable to the constantly changing relationship of yin and yang.

Early translators of Chinese texts used the term "five elements" and many others including Master Cheng followed their lead, but it is a misleading term that conveys the sense of unchangeable substances as in Mendeleev's periodic table of elements. The terms "five phases" or "elemental phases" are becoming more prevalent because they convey the sense of the changes in energy. "Elemental phases" will be used from here on in this book.

The five elemental phases are unfamiliar to most westerners; however, understanding the never-ending cycling among these phases sheds light on the self-generating processes of life. The cycle begins with Wood which symbolizes the sprouting or generating phase. Next, Fire symbolizes the phase of expanding energy. Metal symbolizes the contracting, condensing phase. Water symbolizes the phase of consolidating energy. Earth symbolizes the harmonizing, stabilizing phase that holds the other phases together.

In traditional Chinese medicine, each of the elemental phases is matched with an internal organ. Each is associated with a color, a season, and one of the five main yin organs in the human body - liver is matched with wood and green and

Phase	Color	Season	Organ
Water	Black	Winter	Kidneys
Wood	Green	Spring	Liver
Fire	Red	Summer	Heart
Earth	Yellow	Late Summer	Spleen
Metal	White	Autumn	Lungs

spring, heart with fire and red and summer, spleen with earth and yellow and late summer, lungs with metal and white and autumn, and kidneys with water and black and winter. Some types of qigong balance all five phases while others focus on one phase and are practiced only in the season with which the phase is associated.

Historical Foundation of Ancient Chinese Wisdom

The need to respond to violence and political chaos that plagued many regions of the world triggered immense intellectual, philosophical, and religious change during a period known as the Axial Age (900-200 B.C.E.). The world's great wisdom traditions were born - Confucianism and Daoism in China, philosophical rationalism in Greece, Buddhism and Hinduism in India, and monotheism in the Middle East that is the foundation of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Nothing of comparable importance in the history of philosophical and religious thought occurred until the Great Western Transformation that fostered the scientific and technological advances of modern times. (Armstrong, 2006)

China's Axial Age, one of the most intellectually creative periods in Chinese history, began in response to hundreds of years of civil war and political chaos accompanying the crumbling of the Shang civilization and the rise of the Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 B.C.E.). During this period, the shamanic beliefs of the Xia (2070-1600 B.C.E.) and Shang (1600-1046 B.C.E.) civilizations blossomed into a philosophical system that explored the nature of reality and the cultivation of life dominated by two major schools of thought grounded

in *The Book of Changes* (*Yi Jing/I Ching*). The Daoist School developed a system to explain the relationship between *Yi Jing* hexagrams and natural phenomena and used *Yi Jing* as a guide for mental cultivation, inner alchemy, and spiritual development. The Confucian School emphasized the moral messages in *Yi Jing* and encouraged returning to abandoned rituals and traditions to restore harmony to society. (Huang, 2000)

Daoists and Confucians agreed that the golden age of humans was in the past and that referring to the wisdom of ancients was the most effective way to return to the helpful ways that had been lost. Daoists cited the Yellow Emperor and Fu Xi (*Fu Hsi*) who, according to legend, lived long before the Xia Dynasty (2070-1600 B.C.E.) while Confucians referred to the wisdom of King Wen and the Duke of Zhou who the founded the Zhou Dynasty, (1046-256 B.C.E.). Before introducing these giants of ancient Chinese wisdom I will summarize the modern version of ancient cosmology.

Ancient Cosmology

According to Chinese cosmology, the universe started with *wuji*, translated as "Ultimateless" or Boundless. *Wuji* is absolute stillness. Everything is there, but undifferentiated and disorganized. The first change occurred when movement was introduced into the stillness of *wuji* and "tai chi" (*taiji*) emerged. This too seems initially strange yet it is comparable to the unitary stillness that preceded the Big Bang and the universal activity that followed. The nothingness of *wuji* became "tai chi" (*taiji*) which is the one. Movement of

Leabharlanna Poiblí Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath
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"the one" of tai chi generates the two - the primary energies known as yin and yang.

"Tai chi" (*taiji*) is a metaphysical term that should not be confused with tai chi, the martial art, which is correctly called tai chi chuan in English (*taijiquan* in pin yin) although the martial art is often shortened to tai chi. Tai chi chuan means tai chi fist. The metaphysical term tai chi (*taiji)* is made of two words. Tai can mean big (*da*) if written 大 and small (*tai*) if written 太. Ji (*ji*) means "to the ultimate" or "to the extreme" whether the direction of movement is toward big or small. "Tai chi" (*taiji*) refers to "tai chi" moving toward its ultimate largeness or ultimate smallness. For example, when yin grows to its ultimate largeness, it begins to shrink until it reaches its ultimate smallness and begins a new cycle in a never-ending progression of expansion and contraction.



Most westerners are familiar with the tai chi symbol (*taijitu*), created during the Song Dynasty (960 - 1279 C.E.) to represent the interplay between yin and yang. (Fung, 1948) The dark areas are yin and the light areas are yang. The two, yin and yang, becoming four are also represented in the tai chi symbol. The large yin area is old yin. When it nears its fullest, young yang begins in the small light circle within the large dark yin area. This is called yang within yin. The growth of young yang is represented by the thinnest portion of the large light area which gradually widens. When old yang nears its fullest, young yin begins as the small, dark circle of young yin in the

widest part of the light, yang area. This is called yin within yang.

The tai chi symbol illustrates the inseparability of yin and yang. They are aspects of a whole that cannot exist without one another just as day and night or up and down cannot exist without the other. Yin alone or yang alone cannot generate life. They must work in complement. Yin and yang initiated life when they worked together to create movement and change. It is comparable to the inseparability of north and south on a magnet and how the spinning of a magnet within the correct sort of coil generates electricity. This example points to the interaction of yin and yang, but it is not complete or totally correct.

The tai chi symbol also represents the constant interaction of yin and yang in the universe and in the human body. Yin expands as yang contracts and yang expands as yin contracts. As yin approaches its end, yang starts. As yang approaches its end, yin starts. The absolute center of the yin-yang sphere of tai chi is balanced, but the balance is maintained only briefly before movement pushes it out of balance. One of the goals of doing qigong is to reach that point of balance both physically and psychologically.

THE TWO	
Yang	———
Yin	— —

Over time, the concept of the nothingness of *wuji* becoming the one of tai chi (*taiji*) which became the two of yin and yang which became the four possible interactions of yin and yang was expanded by scholars to four becoming the eight variations of natural energy

which became the sixty-four what that represent everything in the universe.

This conceptual evolution used lines as symbols for the two and the four rather than the tai chi symbol familiar to Westerners. Yang is represented by an unbroken line and yin by a broken line. The symbols for these two primary energies can be combined to generate four symbols that represent all possible interactions between yin and yang energies – yang over yang, yin over yin, yin over yang, and yang over yin.

THE FOUR	
----------	Old Yang

---- ----	Old Yin
---- ----	
---- ----	Young Yang

---- ----	Young Yin

If a third line is added is added to each of the four, the result is eight symbols that represent all possible interactions between yin and yang energies. This is accomplished by placing a yin or yang line above each of the four possible combinations of yin and yang to form eight trigrams (*bagua*). For example, placing a yang line over two yang lines yields ☰ while placing a yin line over two yang lines yields ☱. *Ba* means eight and *gua* is the word translated as trigram so *bagua* means eight trigrams.

Each of the eight trigrams (*bagua/pagua)* represents one of the eight natural variations of energy. Each has a metaphorical rather than a literal meaning. Heaven

☰ is the active energy that initiates the creation of all things. Earth ☷ is the responsive energy through which Heaven creates. Neither Heaven nor Earth can carry out its function without the other. Fire ☲ symbolizes heat and light as wisdom and knowledge. It is a natural energy expressed as a hollow center or an empty space. Water ☵ has a natural energy that flows or pushes forward. Thunder ☳ represents arousing energy that awakens, inspires, and triggers growth. Wind ☴, which is sometimes called wood, is a gentle yet penetrating energy that has a natural impetus toward action that moves from a solid base. Gentleness is accepted easily just as a gentle wind can go everywhere or growing wood penetrates the soil deeply. Mountain ☶ is a soothing energy that stops wind or wood from penetrating too deeply. Lake ☱ is an exhilarating energy associated with joy. (Huang, 2000)

The eight become the sixty-four by combining each of the eight trigrams (*bagua*) with each other. The sixty-four represents *wanwu* which means everything and is translated as ten thousand myriad things. No symbols have been created to represent *wanwu*. The sixty-four are the hexagrams that comprise the *Book of Changes* (*Yi Jingll Ching*) which provides guidance for maintaining balance by living in harmony with the cyclical changes in the rhythms of life.

Why is the above important? The stillness of *wuiji* becoming the one which generated the two which became the four, the eight, and finally the sixty-four that represent everything (*wanwu*) is the conceptual

foundation for maintaining internal balance through qigong and tai chi chuan.

Ancient Intellectual Giants and Wisdom Texts

The Yellow Emperor (*Huang Di*) and Fu Xi (*Fu Hsi*) are among the earliest legendary figures of Chinese history. The Yellow Emperor is said to have had conversations with his ministers about concepts that are the foundation of traditional Chinese medicine - qi, yin and yang, and the five elemental phases as well as *dao yin*, a practice that was eventually folded into qigong. These conversations were written thousands of years later during the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E.-220 C.E.) scholars in *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine/Huang Di Nei Jing* which is to Chinese medicine what Hippocrates' work is to western medicine. Fu Xi is credited with creating the broken and unbroken line symbols for yin and yang which evolved for more than two thousand years before becoming the trigrams and hexagram that are fundamental to *The Book of Changes/Yi Jing* (*I Ching*).

King Wen, the Duke of Zhou, and Confucius are historical figures who played a role in the evolution of *The Book of Changes* (*Yi Jing/I Ching*). King Wen became involved when he studied an earlier version during seven years of imprisonment by the Tyrant of Shang, the last emperor of the Shang civilization. King Wen combined each of the eight trigrams (*bagua*) described above with each other to create sixty-four hexagrams (also called *gua*). He organized the resulting sixty-four hexagrams into the Upper Canon, which emphasizes the yang aspect of natural phenomena in the Dao of Heaven, and the Lower

Canon, which emphasizes the yin aspect of natural phenomena in the Dao of Humanity. Hidden in this arrangement is his idea that constant interactions between yin and yang unite everything in heaven and earth in a never-ending process of attaining balance and harmony. King Wen added a brief summary of the symbolic meaning to each hexagram. His summaries are called "decisions" in modern translations of *The Book of Changes* (*Yi Jing*). Some scholars believe he also composed text for each of the six lines (*yao*) for each of the sixty-four hexagrams while others believe his son, the Duke of Zhou, composed the texts that analyze each line of a hexagram. These texts employ parables and metaphors to analyze the six stages of any situation and convey both moral and metaphysical interpretations. Their writings significantly deepened the meaning of earlier versions and became known as the *Zhou I,* but it was difficult to understand so Confucius wrote commentaries called the Ten Wings to explain the text. The incorporation of Confucius' commentaries marked the point of the book being called *The Book of Changes* (*Yi Jing/I Ching*).

Laozi (about 571 B.C.E.) is credited with writing the five thousand character book now known as *Dao De Jing*; however, whether he was a historical or legendary figure has been hotly debated. According to a biography woven from oral traditions by first century B.C.E. historian Sima Qian (*Ssu-ma Ch'ien*), Laozi Li, also known as Li Erh, decided to retire from his position as a keeper of the imperial archives for the state of Zhou and headed west on an ox. His journey was interrupted when Wenzi, a frontier gatekeeper, refused to allow him to pass unless he wrote down the wisdom

he had gained so he wrote the *Dao De Jing*. Multiple versions of this story exist. Although Sima Qian's work was taken as fact by his contemporaries, modern scholars believe it cannot be taken as historical evidence and most agree that Laozi, which means Old Man, was a legendary rather than historical figure credited with wisdom compiled from multiple writers.

The *Dao De Jing* may have been transmitted orally over many centuries before being written during the Zhou period. An important stage in the evolution of the *Dao De Jing* occurred in the third century C.E. when two versions of the standard text appeared with new commentaries that became famous - a philosophical, metaphysical rendering by Wang Bi (*Wang Pi*) and a more religious one that emphasized longevity by Ho Shang Kung (*Ho-shang Kung*).

Many modern English translations of *Dao De Jing* use the same text as Wang Bi and Ho Shang Kung. Others use the silk manuscripts discovered in a tomb in the village of Mawangdui in Hunan Province in 1973 or text written on slips of bamboo discovered in 1993 in Guodian, Hubei Province. Both the silk manuscripts and bamboo slips are much older than the text used by Wang Bi and Ho Shang Kung and provide new material for modern scholars to interpret.

Although neither the *Yi Jing* nor the *Dao De Jing* mention qigong, Master Cheng suggests that "they can be vital for qigong and tai chi chuan practitioners because information about both is hidden within these texts. The wisdom in each also provides guidance for cultivating virtue and becoming the best person one

can be." *Yi Jing* is a model for understanding and virtuously dealing with the relentless changes of life – the Upper Canon with the dynamics of the world, the Lower Canon with social and personal changes. The eighty-one poem-like chapters of *Dao De Jing* are divided into two sections: one about understanding the Way (*Dao*); the other about how to cultivate Virtue or Integrity (*De*). "*Dao*" is the power in each thing in the universe as well as that which energizes the universe. It drives each thing to develop in a way that is consistent with its own nature. It is not another word for God. "*De*" is about cultivating the proper disposition for getting the most out of life and for living in healthy ways that contribute to longevity. *Jing* means classic book.

A Brief History of Tai Chi Chuan

Master Cheng rarely speaks of the Yang style tai chi chuan lineage; however, she gave students the following account. "According to legend, tai chi chuan was originated by Daoist Zhang San Feng (*Chang San Feng*) who studied at Shaolin Temple for a few years then went to Wudan Mountain. Zhang San Feng's disciple, Wang Zongyue, renamed "long boxing" as tai chi chuan and taught it to Chen Wangting who founded Chen style tai chi chuan.

Yang style founder and first generation lineage holder Yang Luchan (1799-1872 C.E.) learned tai chi chuan by secretly watching the practice of Chen family members for whom he worked in Chen Village, Henan Province. He was caught watching and after demonstrating what he had learned, was formally taught by Chen Changxing (*Ch'en Chang-hsing*). Yang Luchan modified the Chen style by making it slower

and more graceful. Yang Luchan became the best martial artist in China and was invited to teach the emperor of the Qing Dynasty in Beijing. Yang Luchan taught his sons, but they were not good at tai chi chuan so he taught his grandson Yang Cheng Fu and appointed him as the third generation lineage holder. Yang Cheng Fu, appointed multiple fourth generation lineage holders including Cui Yishi who taught Liu Gao Ming who he named as one of the fifth generation lineage holders. Liu Gao Ming appointed me as a Sixth Generation Yang Style Lineage holder."

According to Liu Gao Ming's obituary in 2003, his contributions to Chinese martial arts were recognized throughout China. He won many national martial arts competitions, had over ten thousand students in multiple countries, and introduced a simplified version of Yang style tai chi within China in order to encourage more people to practice tai chi. In 1979, he was assigned as Head Coach at the Beijing Consulate, where he taught Barbara Bush the twenty-four form during her husband's tenure as United States Ambassador to China.

Liu Gao Ming told a story about Barbara Bush in an interview published in China's *Soul of Martial Arts Magazine* in February 2001. When he was teaching he "noticed a tall, middle-aged woman who was very eager to learn and who practiced very seriously. After one round of practice, she was in a sweat. She continued practicing even when class was over. If she was unsure about anything during practice, she asked questions through an interpreter – the wife of the Austrian ambassador to China. Through the interpreter,

I knew that the hard-working student was Barbara, wife of Ambassador George H. W. Bush. By the time of the class graduation she could practice the Twenty-Four Form very well. Generally speaking, the single whip form is a difficult move especially for middle-aged people with no experience, but Mrs. Bush could do this form very well with her lower body firm and leg fully stretched while keeping her upper body straight. For the performance at the class graduation ceremony, only two students were elected to represent each continent because the stage was small. Mrs. Bush was elected as one of the North American representatives. Mrs. Bush had not realized this event would include playing tai chi, so she did not bring her tai chi shoes: however, she was so excited to be selected that she took off her high-heeled shoes and got on the stage. That brought a great cheer from the audience and laughter from Mr. Bush."

One day at Master Cheng's home, we watched a YouTube video of Liu Gao Ming performing tai chi chuan and a video of photographs of third generation lineage holder Yang Cheng Fu. Master Cheng said, "Neither of these masters knew qigong so both were simply martial artists." I'd read Thomas Cleary's translation of an essay attributed to Zhang San Feng (*Chang San Feng*) about what is now called qigong and asked why qigong was not incorporated into tai chi. Master Cheng explained that "tai chi chuan grew out of qigong but two dynamics caused the connection to be severed. One is that Zhang San Feng lived at a time when religious Daoism was growing and the relationship between the tai chi and qigong became polluted by the trappings of religion. The other is that

knowledge of how to incorporate tai chi chuan and qigong was passed to a chosen few and the secrets were held so closely that they eventually were lost. Reconnecting qigong and tai chi chuan and emphasizing the turn of the waist to stimulate circulation in meridians are my unique contributions to Yang Style tai chi chuan."

In June 2013, Master Cheng initiated twenty-nine tai chi chuan disciples - Jean Chu (*Jing Qing*), Adrienne Wade, Kathleen Deviny, Cynthia Hartdegen, Valerie Marshall, William Martin, Jr., Yaping Sun, Hsiaoching Kao, Jerome Ray, Keith Lee, James Phu, Xia Tang, Thomas Matsuda, Ikuko Sano Matsuda, William Kirkpatrick, Shirley Van Kainen, Janice Doppler, Mayumi Kinuta, Claire Dacey, Thomas Lautzenheiser, Hidetoshi Kinuta, Eileen Kakley, Kathleen O'Connor, Yuan-Young Liu, Ryan McDonnell, Pamela Kamini Avril, Allen Murray, Hiroya Kinuta, and Catherine Rossi. She told these disciples that she would appoint seventh generation lineage holders at some point in the future.

Modern History of Qigong

The philosophy underlying qigong and tai chi chuan gradually gained complexity during the centuries in which the *Yi Jing* and *Dao De Jing* were evolving, but exploring that evolution is beyond the scope of this book. The most recent large-scale change in the history of qigong occurred in the second half of the twentieth century after the Communist Party won the Chinese Civil War (1927 - 1950). The word "qigong" had appeared in documents only a handful of times throughout the previous centuries; however, in 1949 it

was officially adopted as an umbrella term for a wide variety of "traditional body technologies" that were reformulated and institutionalized as part of the government's aspiration to improve the health of the masses. What was considered superstition was stripped away and scientific experimentation on the medical benefits of qigong were begun in qigong-oriented hospitals that sprung up in China. When the political winds changed during the Cultural Revolution (1966 - 1974), the government banned qigong and the old masters fled to the safety of the mountains. After the Cultural Revolution, political winds shifted and the masters came down from the mountains and resumed teaching. In the 1980s, a movement referred to as "qigong fever" swept China. Countless types of qigong were practiced by millions of people who sought health benefits. (Palmer, 2007) Qigong masters or their students moved to other countries where they taught qigong which is now practiced in many places throughout the world.

CHAPTER 4 – BECOMING MASTER CHENG

I grew up in a time of hardship caused by the Chinese Civil War and the Japanese occupation of China's Northeast during World War II. Getting enough food was nearly impossible even though my parents were affluent. Japanese planes frequently bombed Jilin, my home town, with the intent of destroying the dam on our city's Songhua River because it made electricity for several cities. Everyone was terrified since our homes would have been washed away if they succeeded.

My parents taught me traditional Chinese culture. They had a *Book of Changes* (*Yi Jing)* and I read it often. My father went upstairs every day into a tiny room that had a ceiling so low that an adult could not stand. He was very secretive about it and said it was not for children. Once, I sneaked upstairs and watched as he sat silently and calmly on a red pillow. I was curious to know more, but children were expected not to ask about anything done by adults so it remained a mystery. When I learned qigong years later, I realized it was what my father did when he sat in the small room; however, he had already died so we couldn't discuss it.

When I accompanied my father on visits to a Chinese medicine shop owned by his friend, I explored while they chatted. The shop had two rooms. In one, a doctor examined patients. In the other, my father's friend prepared and dispensed medicine. Watching him

formulate the medicines was fascinating. Each herb had its own drawer in a large wooden cabinet. Some were used with no preparation while others had to be pounded or ground with a wooden rolling pin so large that he moved it with his feet because thighs are stronger than arms. He used a tiny scale to measure the correct amount of each herb before wrapping a prescription in a paper packet.

My mother told me stories to teach me the Confucian values of kindness, compassion, loyalty, honesty, and justice for each person. My favorite was about a seriously ill woman who asked her son to bring her a peach. Even though it was winter, he diligently searched until he found a tree covered with ripe peaches atop a high mountain. He picked one and was immediately confronted by an angry tiger who growled, "This is my tree. Why did you steal one of my peaches?" The son explained and the tiger allowed him to take the peach on condition that he promise to return and be eaten. His mother began to recover from her illness as soon as she ate the peach. She sadly allowed him to return to be eaten by the tiger because he had given his word. The young man's wife secretly followed him to the tiger's mountain. When the man called the tiger to come eat him, his wife stepped out and begged the tiger to eat her instead. Then, the old woman stepped out from behind the wife and pleaded with the tiger to eat her and spare her son and his wife who deserved to have long lives. The tiger was touched by the love these people had for each other and allowed all of them to return home. Each time my mother finished this story I shouted "Mom, again! Tell

me again." I was three, maybe four years old. Now, I tell it to my granddaughters.

My parents arranged for me to attend a martial arts school to learn Shaolin Fist (*hongquan*) when I was seven years old. I had an aptitude for martial arts and quickly became one of the top students in spite of being the smallest. I combined my martial arts skills with what my mother taught me about ensuring justice and developed a reputation for protecting children who were being bullied. Any time bullying began, someone would run for me. I'd verbally challenge bullies to stop being hurtful and if they refused, I used martial arts to force them to stop. After a while, older boys ran away as soon as they saw me coming to assist a child being bullied.

When I was twelve, I became seriously ill and ran a fever for weeks. Chinese medicines were not effective at healing the ailment, so Father found a Japanese doctor trained in western medicine. He x-rayed my lungs, diagnosed tuberculosis, and prescribed penicillin. My father relentlessly combed the city until he found a pharmacy that stocked this scarce, expensive medicine. My fever dropped quickly when I began taking the penicillin, but complete healing required an injection each morning and evening for three years. This gave me an appreciation of western medicine as a complement to traditional Chinese medicine.

I left my home to study engineering at Beijing University when I was seventeen. I had access to the best library in China and went there often with a little

bread and salt to nibble while I studied. Through the writings of Laozi, Confucius, Mencius, and others I learned more of what my mother had taught about being a virtuous person who valued justice for all.

While I was in college, I married Xie Min Shu who I'd known since childhood. I did not tell my parents I was married and we lived on money they gave me while I was in college. My husband dropped out of his aviation science program at Tsinghua University to avoid being assigned to work far away from our home after he graduated. We were so poor that our tiny home in Beijing held nothing more than a rickety table, two very bad chairs, and an old bed.

Xie Min Shu had no money and no job, but he loved to spend money and when he saw something he wanted he bought it even though we could not afford it. He found a job, but lost it when he quarreled with his employers. After a long time he found a new job as a waiter at the Beijing Restaurant, but a neighbor who did not like my husband accused him of stealing his burning coal ball used for cooking and heating. We were too poor to own a glove to steal a burning coal ball, but the false accusation was enough to cause Xie Min Shu to be fired.

Our situation improved after I graduated and secured a job teaching the exercise routine the government decreed would be performed by every worker each morning while music blared over a loud speaker. I was expected to know as much about physical activity as possible so, in the early 1960s, I learned tai chi chuan and qigong at the Workers' Cultural Palace (*Wenhua*

Gong) near Tiananmen Square in what is now known as the Forbidden City. It was originally a temple where the emperor worshipped during the Ming and Qing dynasties and it is currently a tourist attraction. It was already open to the public when I arrived in Beijing and I felt no awe for its history; however, it was in a peaceful park with beautiful trees that were over a thousand years old. I was soon among those who practiced tai chi chuan there every morning. This is the place I miss most now that I live in the United States.

I attended class twice a week to learn the Standard Chinese National Tai Chi Chuan Twenty-four Form. It was developed in 1956 by four tai chi chuan masters commissioned by the government's National Physical Culture and Sports Commission to create a form that could be practiced by the general public. I learned quickly and after two or three years, co-workers asked me to teach them in the park outside our workplace. There were several teachers at the Cultural Palace. I longed to learn from Liu Gao Ming, a famous master who taught only a few groups. When our paths crossed occasionally we chatted informally and he said I was skilled at tai chi chuan.

I also attended qigong class I twice a week. My first teacher was Mister Li, a western doctor who understood Chinese medicine, tai chi chuan, and qigong. He taught sitting qigong that promoted overall health and a lying down qigong that healed the heart; however, it could raise blood pressure if done incorrectly. From other teachers I learned healing qigong, zhan zhuang and multiple types of qigong.

Although my job made it possible to learn tai chi chuan and qigong and meant that Xie Min Shu and I had more money, it also created difficulty because my supervisor sought a romantic relationship with me. He often followed me home from work and encouraged me to leave my husband who he insisted was unworthy since he could not hold a job. I repeatedly told him I was a faithful wife and rebuffed his advances yet he persisted in pursuing me. I was powerless to stop him from placing his desk next to mine and frequently rubbing his leg against mine.

I soon became even more powerless. In 1966, a movement called the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution ripped through Chinese society. Students and workers recruited into the Red Guard created a state of anarchy. Wearing army clothes and waving Mao's *Little Red Book* Red Guard cancelled schools, stopped work at factories, and tormented individuals.

On the first day of the Cultural Revolution I was riding my bicycle to work and saw Red Guard randomly stopping and beating people. They stopped me and splashed red paint on the logo of my white bicycle then released me. At my workplace later that morning, members of the Red Guard dragged our director to an auditorium to be the victim of a struggle meeting in which they forced him to wear a board bearing words that slandered him and to kneel while they kicked and beat him with a belt. They screamed at him saying he was no good, anti-social, and counter revolutionary and they forced my co-workers and I to scream criticisms at him. They wanted him to admit to "crimes" against the revolution, but he would not admit to things he did not

do so they beat him harder. When I arrived home after work I wrote Mao's words on the walls of my apartment and began burning the books I loved.

The supervisor who had been sexually harassing me retaliated for my rebuffs by making false accusations against me which resulted in the Red Guard raiding my home on the second day of the Cultural Revolution. They ripped family pictures off the walls and confiscated books that I had been unable to burn the night before. They searched for evidence of my "crimes" in my study journal containing notes on the writings of Marx, Lenin, and Mao. They weren't educated enough to understand that I was learning the philosophy that supported the Cultural Revolution and they took my notes out of context as proof that I was against Mao. I was labeled bourgeoisie, anti-revolutionary, and a class enemy. As such, I was targeted in a struggle meeting and my six-year old son was forced to watch while I was beaten and humiliated. After this first of many struggle meetings, I was confined in a small room at my workplace for six months. During this time I knew nothing about my husband and my two small children. My captors beat me and said they'd stop if I admitted my crimes. I had committed no crimes and refused to admit something I had not done. The incarceration and beatings continued. I kept my spirit up by singing.

Throughout the Cultural Revolution there were many ebbs and flows in the political situation and the fate of individuals depended on who was in power. One day my captors lost power and my incarceration abruptly ended; however, I remained vulnerable to being

captured by lawless groups of Red Guard since I continued to carry the label of class enemy. Once, I was caught by a mob that put me underneath a car with my eyes blindfolded. An old man overheard their plan to bury me alive so he and a young man risked their lives to rescue me. Another time, a mob knocked me against a wall and two men pulled me down a flight of stairs with my head hitting each step. They kicked me, bound my arms around my back, blindfolded me, and threw me into a truck. When they removed the blindfold after three days all I could see were blurs. Another mob whipped me with leather belts and slapped my face with their hands until my face was swollen like a ball and blood came from my mouth. I was close to death. I was never permitted hospital treatment for the injuries I sustained during these beatings because I was labeled a class enemy.

One day, Red Guard came to my workplace and announced that I was sentenced to go to the countryside for "re-education" and was given twenty-four hours to report. The next morning my husband and I went to the government offices to obtain a reprieve. While we were in line waiting for the office to open I was assaulted by seven male Red Guard. I used my martial arts skills to throw off the first three attackers. When the other four attacked, I threw them off too! My husband and I escaped with our two children on our bicycles. We lived on the streets of Beijing for a month. We had little money with us because we had expected to be sent home after gaining a reprieve from a government official. We dared not go to friends because my presence could bring them trouble. When the weather became too cold to live on the streets we

risked going home. A day later, I was arrested and sent to a farm village where I was a prisoner for three years.

Many city-dwellers were sent to rural areas for "re-education." Eighty to ninety percent worked side by side with farmers during the week to learn about the life of farmers and returned to their homes on Sundays and holidays. The rest were "class enemies" sent for punishment. As a member of the latter group, I was required to perform heavy labor in the fields for more than twelve hours daily. I was watched constantly by two or three people even when I needed to use the bathroom. At night there was a light on all night long in the place where I slept so I could be monitored.

My external environment was horrific so I had to control my internal environment. They could beat me, restrict me, but they could not control my mind. I was not free, but qigong let me be calm in my internal world. Sometimes I was too tired or upset to do qigong, but I added controlling my emotions and calming myself to the technique for lying down qigong that I learned from Mister Li and did qigong when my captors thought I was asleep. Qigong saved my life because it enabled me to bear the endless pain and stress both physically and emotionally.

My captors attempted to make me admit I committed crimes I had not committed. That I would not lie was interpreted as having a bad attitude and *that* was a crime. When I became angry and yelled, "What is my crime?" they smashed my head against a pipe and knocked me down. When they realized that treating me roughly was not going to work they shifted to treating

me softly and offered to let me see my children if I admitted what they said were my crimes. I knew more political theory than my captors and when they insisted I was not following Mao's words I answered using the words of Marx and Lenin. This angered them and they threatened to cut out my tongue if I persisted. There was no evidence that I did anything wrong so they demanded that I write what my crimes were. Regardless of what they did to me I refused to admit crimes I had not committed. Instead, I wrote poems. I also wrote the truth of what was happening in tiny characters between the lines of government-approved books and magazines. I brought those books and magazines to America. I still have them!

During my captivity on the farm, I made friends with two others who were treated as cruelly as I was. We attempted to make life bearable for each other. One was an artist who was required to do the same hard work I did even though she was pregnant. Her fetus died. She and I developed a simple way to communicate using hand signals – pulling on an ear meant one thing, touching a cheek meant another. The other was a sixty-year old, professor who had earned a Ph.D. in the United States. He could not differentiate weeds from wheat and when he accidentally pulled up wheat he was forced to sleep in an active pigsty. He knew I wanted to learn English, and he put himself at risk by writing English letters in the dirt so I could begin learning.

Eventually, the re-education initiative ended. I returned home and was assigned to a job cleaning bathrooms. Four years later, I was appointed as librarian in a small,

community library. This low status job was intended to humiliate and isolate me. Few people came to the library because people did not trust that the government truly wanted to make books available given the earlier burning of all books except Mao Zedong's *Little Red Book*. I still carried the label of anti-revolutionary so the only people who talked to me were those who had enough power that speaking with me did not endanger them. The intent of isolating me was accomplished, but I had plenty of time to read books I selected for the library. At home, I was usually under government surveillance so I dared not approach friends or family because my situation would put them in jeopardy. At night, I often laid awake with my heart pounding every time I heard a truck roll down the street because it might be carrying a mob coming to beat me. The long-term isolation coupled with the ever-present threat of brutality was more painful than the physical brutality I had endured. Particularly painful was the betrayal by my husband who corroborated false charges made against me to save himself from punishment. His betrayal resulted in our divorce.

Life became even more challenging when I was diagnosed with mediastinal cancer, a tumor between my lung and heart, with a prognosis of death within six months. I refused to accept the prognosis and undertook an intense daily regime that I believed could heal me. Each morning started with an hour of a standing qigong called *zhan zhuang* to which I added a healing breathing technique normally used during sitting qigong followed by an hour of tai chi chuan. I created a simple tai chi chuan twelve form because I did not have the strength to do the kicks in the

traditional long form. When I played tai chi chuan the pressure from the tumor felt like a knife in my back with each inhalation. Each day ended with an hour of sitting qigong. During this qigong it often felt like ice melting inside me. When I returned to the physician six months later the tumor was half its previous size. Now, more than thirty years later, there is no sign of the tumor.

Before I became ill I attended classes because I enjoyed qigong and tai chi chuan, but I did not practice at home because I thought I was too busy. When I became ill, both became part of my daily routine because my life was at stake. Without the hope and healing qigong and tai chi chuan yielded I would have died. After I knew I wasn't going to die I continued doing qigong daily and it changed me. I became calmer, less prone to worry, and angered less easily. The quality of my life improved as I realized I could relax into the natural unfolding of life rather than trying to control things and doing everything hurriedly.

My librarian job qualified me to return to the Worker's Cultural Palace (*Wenhua Gong*). I resumed tai chi chuan classes and sometimes substituted for teachers who had to miss a class. Liu Gao Ming was impressed that I continued attending classes in spite of having cancer and my long-time wish of being accepted as his student came true. He was powerful enough to risk coming to my home so he taught me individually on Sundays in addition to the usual twice weekly classes. He eventually initiated me as his disciple.

After the Cultural Revolution ended, the government actually began encouraging qigong so I also resumed

attending qigong classes. Masters returned from the mountains to cities and were hired to teach anyone who was interested in learning at places such as Wenhua Gong. The political environment was volatile so most masters taught only for a short time in any one place. I learned from many highly accomplished qigong masters. One was Master Hong Yi, from Wudang Mountain, who taught basic fundamentals of healing qigong to all students and a secret Five Elements qigong (*wu xing zhong* 五行) to me and a handful of other carefully selected students. Another was Shao Bo Li who taught the basics of Small Circuit of Heaven Qigong (*xiao zhou tian*) in which qi is circulated in the body. I had practiced in secret for years so attending publicly encouraged classes was joyful for me even though few others attended.

My anti-revolutionary and class enemy labels were finally lifted in 1984 after a government-appointed committee conducted a month-long investigation of why my freedom had been taken away. The month long investigation resulted in a document over fifty pages long that made it clear that the treatment I received was undeserved. When the report was read aloud the people who heard what I experienced cried. The result of the investigation was that the government admitted that the way I was treated was a miscarriage of justice. My good name was formally restored in a public ceremony and I was issued an official apology for the wrongs against me. Acknowledgement of the injustice was published in the newspaper and broadcast in Beijing in every major newspaper and announced on every radio station. Once the dangerous

"class enemy" label was lifted, friends and neighbors poured into my home. My years of isolation were over!

After my reputation was rehabilitated I was assigned to jobs that carried respect – writing a history of an area in Beijing, preparing displays for a large economic exhibition in Beijing, and developing factories and research centers to improve the economy for farmers. In addition, I was invited to teach qigong. It was during this period of my life that I met and married Wei Wen Tao who was also a student of Liu Gao Ming.

One day, Wen Tao heard a qigong master singing on the radio and called me to listen. As I listened I could feel qi at the crown of my head in my *bai hui*, an acupuncture point where several yang meridians converge, so I knew he had special energy. I immediately phoned the radio station and asked to talk with Master Kong Tai. He rarely accepted requests to converse yet he took my call. I described the qi I felt when I heard him sing on the radio. After quizzing me about my qigong he accepted an invitation to come to my home.

When he arrived at my home for the first time we talked about each other's qigong. After that he came to my home often. He told me that when we first spoke on the phone at the radio station he decided to come to my home because he felt there might be a soul connection between us. For the first few years of our relationship he was just my teacher or *laoshi* and I was simply his student. Over time, we developed a close relationship and one day he arrived at my home with incense and other things necessary for a formal disciple initiation

ceremony. I knelt and he performed a ritual. It is customary that a disciple receives a new name from the master as part of a disciple ceremony. I received the name Le Xin which means Happy Heart.

There is a deeper heart connection between a disciple and master (*shifu*) than between student and teacher. He taught me exceptionally deep information about qigong. Master Kong told me that during the disciple initiation ritual he'd seen many students in front of me and predicted I would become a teacher with the ability to transfer qigong energy to my students. This was surprising since when I started studying with him all I wanted was to do qigong well and I had never considered teaching. I believe our meeting was destiny.

Master Kong was only in his thirties when I met him yet he was an extremely powerful qigong master and his wisdom was beyond that of most people. I do not know how he became powerful at such a young age. What I do know is that Kong Tai had a Buddhist master who told him to go to a certain cemetery at a specific time to do qigong and promised to meet Kong Tai afterward. The appointed night was windy. He heard music in his mind as he did qigong. When he opened his eyes at the end of qigong there was a Daoist master with him. He studied Daoist philosophy with the new master and never saw his Buddhist master again. That night marked the beginning of Master Kong being able to transmit healing energy through his singing voice. He had other extraordinary powers. Once when I was ill, he materialized small black pills in his hand and he stirred tea into medicine. As he stirred, the smell

changed from tea to a medicinal smell and the consistency gradually changed to oily and sticky. He could use his mind to twist the handle of a metal spoon. Local officials wanted to determine whether this was trickery so he was stripped naked in an empty room and challenged to materialize medicine and bend spoons with his mind. He did both.

Master Kong freely admitted that the ability to twist spoons was unimportant in itself, but he used it to attract thousands of people to qigong events. Sometimes, he'd twist an entire box of spoons before beginning to talk about qigong. Then, he'd sing songs that communicated the ancient wisdom of Laozi, Confucius, and *Yi Jing* in music that integrated ancient melodies with music that appealed to modern people. Many people who arrived with physical problems were healed by the end of the event via the energy transmitted through his singing.

My tai chi chuan master did not understand qigong and my qigong master did not know tai chi chuan, but they both knew me. On the day I was to fly to the United States for medical treatment on my eyes and to live with my son, Master Liu Gao Ming drove me to the airport. He told me that I should teach in America and he gave me ten plastic collapsible swords that I currently use when I teach sword. Master Kong Tai wrote and recorded music for me to use when I teach qigong in America. I had not yet realized that teaching tai chi chuan and qigong would be the pillars of a career about which I am passionate; each of my cherished masters gave me a tool to guide me in that direction.

CHAPTER 5 – OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE NEW

As soon as I was old enough to read, my parents gave me a thick book of Bible stories. My favorite was about Samuel who was sent as a boy to live at the temple so that he could devote his life to God. When Samuel responded to a voice calling his name, God began coming regularly at night to talk with him. I hoped that someday God would talk to me as intimately as he did with Samuel.

In my senior year in college I began to doubt much of the Christian fundamentalist faith instilled by my family. The year after I graduated, I realized I am a lesbian and entered a committed relationship with a woman who was the choir director of a Presbyterian church. I joined the choir and attended church weekly in spite of my unresolved doubts. When our lesbian relationship was discovered she was fired and I was expelled from the choir. I renounced my connection to Christianity; however, a deep longing for connection with "the Transcendent" remained so I explored various options – New Age, Hinduism, earth-based spirituality, and others. Through a source I no longer remember, I learned that "when the student is ready a teacher will appear." As mentioned in Chapter One, I sensed that someday a Special Teacher would cross my path and each time a new teacher entered my life I wondered whether this was the person I had been awaiting. Each

time, the answer was no. I learned what I could and kept searching.

During those years of spiritual exploration and searching for my Teacher, I earned my living as a high school health and biology teacher. To be discovered as lesbian would probably have resulted in being fired so I was deeply closeted. An assignment as a chaperone at the prom emerged as a golden opportunity to deepen the illusion of heterosexuality that I endeavored to project. I asked my gay friend Joe to be my date. He wore a tuxedo with a cumberbund that matched the mauve gown I'd worn as Maid of Honor in my sister's wedding. The local fire department brought a truck with a spot light that was shown on the entryway to the prom so parents and students not attending the event could get a good look each couple. Kim, a tenth grade

girl whom I suspected was a lesbian, was in the crowd. I think she suspected me too. I have never forgotten the shock and betrayal on her face when she spotted me on Joe's arm or the shame of lying to protect myself.

A new area of spiritual exploration opened when friends invited me to attend the annual Quaker Lesbian Conference where I heard discussions about how "the personal is political" and met women for whom acting politically to promote social justice was an important part of their spiritual lives. It was my first awareness that spirituality is incomplete if it lacks an impetus for action. A few years later I moved from New Jersey to western Massachusetts where I joined the local Quaker meeting and married Peg many years before it was legally recognized by the government. I obtained an

administrative job as Health Education Coordinator for a local school district. Five weeks into my new job, a request from the Massachusetts Department of Education asking the school district to form a "Safe Schools Task Force" with the goal of making schools safer for gay and lesbian students. I flashed back to Kim's look of betrayal and knew that I had to act on this request. Serendipitously, this provided an opportunity to combine my spiritual life with action for social justice.

I recruited school staff, parents, and students to form the Safe Schools Task Force. The first step was to survey parents of high school students about how to best meet the needs of gay and lesbian students. A half dozen extremely conservative people, none of whom were parents of current students, reacted with outrage. A nationally recognized anti-gay lawyer opened an office nearby and provided counsel for those who protested even the smallest effort of the task force. Our small, rural school district became the focal point for the reaction of the religious right against the Safe Schools Program in Massachusetts. After six years of intense struggle, the protestors realized they could not stop this initiative in our district and their attacks became less frequent and less virulent. The lawyer closed his office. Gay-Straight Alliances, the cornerstone of the Safe Schools Program, became commonplace in high schools in our state and in many regions of the country.

Early in the Safe Schools struggle, I was appointed to the state's Health Curriculum Framework Committee that was part of Massachusetts' education reform initiative in 1993. A Department of Education staff

member privately told me I'd been selected to be a voice for ensuring that issues related to safety for gay and lesbian students were addressed in the framework. I was encouraged to come out publicly as lesbian, but I was afraid to let go of the illusion of safety I felt when hiding in the closet. I remained silent when straight colleagues on the committee discussed the importance of addressing homophobia in the Health Curriculum Framework.

A day of reckoning came when Daniel French, the leader of the initiative to develop curriculum frameworks in seven subjects, told our committee that all references to homophobia were being removed from the Health Framework. With sweaty palms, a pounding heart, and rubbery legs I stood and came out as lesbian. I spoke of how I had been nearly fired for simply mentioning homosexuality when teaching a health class in New Jersey and that including the concept of homophobia in the framework would make it safer for teachers to address issues related to the Massachusetts Safe Schools Program. Afterward, Daniel told Commissioner of Education Robert Antonuci what I'd said and how passionate the Health Framework Committee was about preserving our work. The commissioner agreed that all references to homophobia would remain in the health framework.

I had been hiding in the closet for more than twenty years so working for the protection of gay and lesbian students and the teachers who supported them was quite frightening. I gathered courage from stories told by youth who were benefitting from the Safe Schools Program and accounts of early Quakers who sacrificed

to protect others. I am grateful to have played a part in this important work, but I was relieved when my job responsibilities changed and I was able to put down the mantle of responsibility. I was left questioning how to integrate mystical spirituality with the political activism valued by many Quakers when activism doesn't fit with my personality.

For reasons that are not relevant here, I eventually left Quaker meeting; however, I retained the imperative to mesh my personal spirituality with action. Eventually, I found my way to Center for Harmony where a way to integrate spirituality and action slowly evolved. For the first three years, I happily practiced qigong, played tai chi chuan, and listened to Master Cheng's teaching about how balancing yin and yang, and the five elemental phases contributed to improving one's health. She rarely mentioned a spiritual connection which confused me since it was core to my practice of qigong and tai chi chuan. She often said "qigong improves your virtue and cultivating virtue improves your qigong," but did not explain further. I was learning so much that I was content to let my confusion drift within me.

Early in my fourth year at Center for Harmony something happened that significantly changed my qigong and my relationship with Master Cheng. It started when Master Cheng asked Jing Qing and me to assist her with writing a chapter for *The Power of Grieving – A Stronger You* by Maryjane Boggins-Atkins, a former student. It was a laborious process with Master Cheng speaking in Chinese, Jing Qing translating, and me writing. As we were preparing to

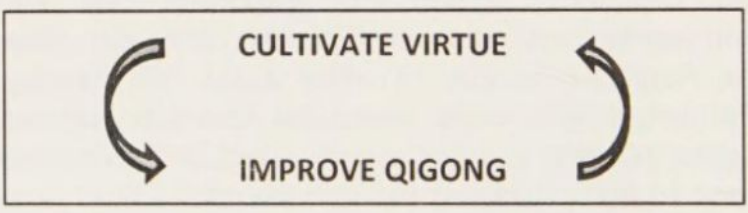
leave at the end of a work session, I asked Master Cheng how to deal with a problem I was having with my qigong. She was astonished by what I described and disclosed that what I was experiencing was well-beyond what most people would ever achieve. She helped me on with my coat then quickly swiped her hand down my back. Neither of us acknowledged her action and I felt nothing. The next day during qigong in class I experienced so much qi that I could barely contain it and my qigong changed dramatically and permanently.

We began meeting at Master Cheng's home every four or six weeks and talked for hours about questions I had about qigong and she instructed me about dealing with the intense experiences I was having during qigong. I always wrote down as much as of her teaching I could remember when I got home no matter how late it was or how tired I was. Eventually, our meetings expanded to include doing qigong together and sometimes she taught me energetically. Master Cheng told me it is important to "preserve the Mystery" of one's qigong experience and cautioned me about putting mystical experiences into words since it can drain their power. Although it would be unwise to speak of the energetic instruction, I can describe an interaction that was amazing, though not mystical. One day as we sat about four feet apart doing qigong, I suddenly felt a significant decrease of qi within me. I was perplexed about what I did to lose the sensation of qi. Master Cheng began to snore about thirty seconds later. A couple weeks later I felt a similar drop in qi as we did qigong and I thought "Master Cheng is falling asleep" seconds before she began snoring.

These times for private instruction were idyllic times that fulfilled my imaginings of learning deeply about mystical experience when I finally found my Special Teacher. Sometimes qigong is mystical, sometimes not. The mystical times satisfy my longing for connection to the Transcendent that I felt when I read of God talking with Samuel.

Over time, the content of the private tutoring sessions expanded to include theoretical discussions that frequently centered on the relationship between qigong and cultivating virtue. For example, one summer morning we mulled over Chapter Nineteen, *Grasping the Purpose of Life*, in *The Book of Chuang Tzu* (Palmer, 1996) while munching cherries and nuts on Master Cheng's back porch. I listed principles I'd gleaned from studying the chapter and asked how they applied to qigong – remember everything and everyone is equal because we all come from the same source and return to the same place, find activities to harmonize your internal self (mind and spirit) with your external self (body and emotion), accept what comes in life, and do not worry because if you are following these principles your internal self cannot be harmed even if difficulties affect your external self. Master Cheng responded, "Qigong is improved by cultivating these principles. Unselfishly caring about other people instead of just caring about yourself is an aspect of cultivating virtue. The peacefulness that comes with aiding others improves qigong." I asked, "Does the calmness that comes with focusing less on oneself support relaxing during qigong so that more qi can be received which improves qigong? And, does improved qigong help a person worry less about self and focus

more on others?" Master Cheng replied, "Separating what happens during qigong and daily life is a western way of thinking. The Chinese way of thinking is that everything is together." I drew a diagram of cultivating virtue and improving qigong with arrows going to each from each to show her I understood that improving qigong and cultivating virtue form a positive reinforcement loop. She said, "You understand, but you persist in the western type thinking of pulling the loop apart in an attempt to understand what happens during qigong and what happens during life."



I learned much about cultivating virtue through interacting with Master Cheng. She has a way of making each person feel valued, special, and perhaps even cherished. I am challenged to rise to her example when she is at her best as illustrated via an interaction during a tai chi push hands class. Typically, she pushes with as many students as time allows. When students make mistakes she laughs in the way adults laugh at the cuteness of toddlers then gently corrects. One evening after class she said to me, "Your rollback (*liu)* is poor. You must improve it." It must have been quite poor because she rarely tells students they are bad at anything. The next day, she fell on a slippery new wooden floor in her home and could barely walk for several days. Before class on the night she returned after two weeks of healing she told me that she was

still in pain, especially her hip. When it was time for push hands she announced that we'd work on rollback and began to push with me to demonstrate what she wanted students to practice. I tried hard to follow her, but knowing how much pain she was in and noticing her hand on the painful spot on her hip made it impossible to concentrate. I finally said, "Shifu, I am afraid I will hurt you." Without a word, she moved to the student next to me and pointedly demonstrated what she wanted me to correct in my rollback. There was only gentleness in her instruction. After Master Cheng left our group a senior classmate admonished me first for thinking I could possibly harm a tai chi chuan grandmaster and second for having the hubris to voice it. After class I apologized to Master Cheng who simply patted me on the shoulder and smiled as she said, "It is okay. You have a good heart. I appreciate your concern for me." Her actions modeled putting others before herself and challenged me to treat each person with gentleness and acceptance.

It is one thing to talk theoretically about cultivating virtue and quite another to act with virtue. Master Cheng gave me practice by allowing me close enough to brush against her flaws such as her inconsistent follow through on commitments. There have been many disappointments over the years and I have found it challenging to be flexible and avoid reacting from my own flawed places when commitments were ignored or promises broken. I did my best to accept each one from a place of benevolence, the first Confucian virtue, rather than with anger or sadness. The gift in these challenges is that I have become more flexible through

the process of trying to act with benevolence in spite of small or big disappointments.

The broken promise that was most difficult for me centered on a decision Master Cheng made about appointing qigong disciples. It started one day after particularly intense energetic instruction during qigong at her home when I said, "I am lucky to have you as my teacher." She replied, "I am lucky to have you as my qigong disciple and I am going to formally initiate you and possibly one or two others at the anniversary celebration next month." I was ecstatic because this meant the time for even deeper instruction was approaching, but just a week later Master Cheng told me she decided not to appoint disciples. Her change of heart occurred after she mentioned the upcoming ceremony to a student she did not intend to initiate and the student excitedly assumed she would be one of the initiates. Master Cheng did not want to disappoint her or anyone else who mistakenly expected to be a disciple so she decided to appoint none. She did not appear to realize that this news devastated me. All I could do was accept her decision and attempt to let go of the stunning disappointment.

I had hoped that when I met my Special Teacher we would explore the mystical realms of the transcendent. Master Cheng and I do that, mostly during qigong. I did not expect to learn that real transcendence is transcending myself by cultivating virtue, which I think of as a code phrase for living life meaningfully: putting others rather than myself at the center of daily life, treating others with gentleness and benevolence, and handling disappointments with flexibility rather than

anger or frustration. I did not expect to learn that these actions can be a part of a spiritual life that fulfills the call to act from within my spirituality that I experienced with Quakers.

Master Cheng let me close enough to see how she tried to cultivate virtue and be her best self as well as times when she missed the mark. Her ways of being served as a measure against which I could judge what worked for me and what didn't as I figured out who the self was that I wanted to grow into.

Some situations in which I observed Master Cheng as she applied ancient wisdom to her life are described in the following chapters. The chapter titled *Jeffrey* brings our differences into focus by recounting the serious illness and eventual death of a beloved student. The chapter titled *Health Crisis* presents the challenge of accepting decisions with which I strongly disagreed as Master Cheng dealt with her own serious health problems. The chapter titled *Master Kong* explores how an unexpected meeting with Master Cheng's qigong master provided a new lens for viewing qigong and cultivating virtue and suggested that each person must live according to her or his own talents and temperament. The final chapter, *A New Story*, reveals the guiding story I'd constructed for my life and the need to create a new one.

SECTION III

JOURNEYING TOGETHER

The courage to face trials and to bring a whole new body of possibilities into the field of interpreted experience for other people to experience – that is the hero's deed.

Joseph Campbell, American Mythologist

The snow goose need not bathe to make itself white. Neither need you do anything but be yourself.

Laozi, Chinese Philosopher

CHAPTER 6 - JEFFREY

While teaching a class at a local university, Jeffrey suddenly experienced inability to speak and paralysis in his hands. He was rushed to the hospital where doctors diagnosed kidney failure. He eventually had a kidney transplant. Along with a prognosis that he would live no longer than ten years, he was told to expect to lose at least one leg to complications from wounds that were quite likely to develop. He was only sixty years old. Looking for solace, he attended a healing service at a Catholic church where he sat in a sea of five thousand people. For no obvious reason, the priest walked down the aisle and placed his hand on Jeffrey's heart and murmured "Doctors cannot take hope away from you. It is something you have. Hang onto it." Jeffrey burst into tears.

Continuing to attend qigong and tai chi chuan classes twice a week helped him keep hope alive. Eventually, one leg developed two wounds, yet Jeffrey regularly hobbled into class, propped his cane in a corner, and joined in all activities including the difficult tai chi chuan long form that took more than a half hour to perform. He knew this would promote circulation in the leg that he was determined not to lose. When the wounds refused to heal after months of treatment, physicians declared it was time to amputate. An alternative to amputation was surgery to graft healthy skin from his body over the wounds to encourage healing; however, the chance of success was so low that most surgeons

refused to attempt the procedure. Jeffrey searched until he found a surgeon who reluctantly agreed to perform the graft. The procedure succeeded with only one of the wounds. He never talked about the ramifications of the failed procedure after he was released from the hospital. He just kept doing tai chi chuan and qigong and teaching at the university.

When Jeffrey was seventy-two, a stroke paralyzed his left side. Master Cheng asked me to accompany her to visit him at a short-term rehabilitation center. Jeffrey was so weak he was barely able to speak. His mouth drooped to the left. His left foot was sticking out from under the covers with skin so shiny it looked waxed and so swollen that the normal creases and lines were absent. Three plants wilting on the window-sill and two unopened sketch books on the bedside table deepened the sense of hopelessness. Death appeared to be closing in.

I placed a chair next to the bed for Master Cheng and stood behind her. Jeffrey peered blankly at her as she asked how he was feeling. A spark of awareness ignited as she taught him a special qigong used to heal strokes. The contrasts between the white bed sheets with his extremely dark skin and the white surrounding his dark irises kept me focused on his eyes and they were riveted on her. Attentiveness gradually replaced the dazed confusion in his eyes as she repeatedly insisted, "You have a strong spirit. I believe you can heal yourself. Move your body and heal yourself. If you cannot move, imagine moving."

On one hand, filtered through my American socialization about how to act at the bedside of an extremely ill person, her insistence that this apparently dying man move his paralyzed body seemed insensitive, maybe even cruel. I was upset. On the other hand, witnessing this was like watching someone gently receiving water after days spent lost in a desert. At the same time that she insisted Jeffrey move, I could feel qi filling my body and knew she was radiating healing qi to him. She was the sun radiating energy to two planets orbiting around her. When she stopped, his left leg and arm were shaking. Being filled with qi can do that.

Shortly after our visit, Jeffrey overheard a conversation between two rehab center staffers discussing over-medicating patients to keep them quiet during the weekend. He alerted his physician who insisted that Jeffrey be given medications at the level he prescribed. Would Jeffrey have had the awareness to listen to and report the conversation without the healing energy and encouragement he received from Master Cheng? What would have happened if he didn't?

Jeffrey regained strength and was transferred to a long-term care facility. He experienced ups and downs for several months until physicians finally believed Jeffrey was a few hours from death. Master Cheng again asked me to accompany her during a visit along with her husband Wen Tao and Jing Qing. Although I was curious about how Master Cheng would handle a final goodbye to a beloved student, I didn't want to intrude in this intimate moment and intended to wait outside Jeffrey's room. But, the room was large with

space near the foot of his bed so I slipped in and tried to remain unobtrusive. Jeffrey lay in a twisted position that would have been uncomfortable had he not been nearly unconscious. A gauze bandage covered the wound that had been expected to cause the removal of his leg over a year ago. A white badge of courage. The room was quite hot, but Master Cheng did not remove her wine-colored ski cap or the mauve, padded silk Chinese-style coat that topped multiple layers of clothes. Was it because the numbness developing in her hands from her own serious illness made it too difficult?

Master Cheng spoke first. She said her name and Jeffrey's several times then told him he was strong and insisted he cling to life. She said she would love him forever and implored him to believe in his capacity to heal himself. There was a wailing tone to her voice and she wiped tears from her eyes several times. Her hands were clasped in the position used for greeting at tai chi chuan class, but at her chest similar to the attitude of Christian prayer. Wen Tao, Jing Qing, and Master Cheng frequently traded spots so that each could quietly speak to Jeffrey. His breathing became deeper and his chest heaved each time Master Cheng was the speaker. Was this dying man upset by being begged to retreat from the edge of death or was he struggling to connect with Master Cheng as he did at the short-term care facility?

After leaving the hospital, we sat down for a late dinner at Mosaic Cafe. I still felt upset by Master Cheng's insistence that Jeffrey reach for life at this time of approaching death. Hoping to open a conversation, I

wondered aloud whether a dying person is aware of being given permission to let go or begged not to die. Wen Tao explained the Chinese norm that when the flame of life has reduced to embers loved ones "put wood on the fire" via their words. The wood will rekindle the embers into fire if the person is not ready for death and the wood will have no effect if the person is ready to cross the threshold into death. Master Cheng shook her head in a way that conveyed both confusion and sadness as she confessed "I don't understand Americans. When a loved one is dying Chinese people gather around the bed and call out encouragement for staying alive, but Americans sit in a darkened room where people passively wait for death." I asked Master Cheng if she sent Jeffrey qi while we were at the hospital. She smiled and said, "I've been sending Jeffrey energy all day and telling him I was coming and to wait for me. I am very tired now." Then, she silently ate her meal.

That night I lay in bed unable to sleep and pondered the events of the evening. My mind drifted to when I spent every possible moment in the hospital with my grandmother after a heart attack that I sensed would result in her death – silently sitting next to her while she slept, holding her hand when she was conscious. At one point I moved away from her bedside to find something to wipe away the ring from a coffee spill on her bedside table. From her mostly unconscious state she called out, "Where's Janice?" They were the last words I heard her say. Although those days are among the saddest of my life, I cherish the memories of the final moments in the life of the grandmother with whom I shared a deep love.

Comprehending that Master Cheng may have been interpreted my quiet way of connecting with my grandmother as passively waiting for death challenged me to reconsider my perspective on her insistent calling Jeffrey from the edge of death. She was quite ill herself at the time and sending Jeffrey qi was at great expense to her own health. I realized that what appeared insensitive through my American normative filter was actually filled with love from within Master Cheng's world view.

Jeffrey died four days later. In qigong class Master Cheng spoke of the strengths of how he had applied the principles of qigong, tai chi chuan, and Chinese health practices she taught. She also confessed her belief that she had failed because she couldn't persuade him to eat less of the too-salty food served in American restaurants and to curtail trips which she believed depleted his *jing qi* and led to a too-early death.

I was saddened by Master Cheng's sense of failure because she ignored the reality that qigong and tai chi chuan helped him to live longer than physicians expected and to keep both of his legs. In addition, his quality of life was greatly enhanced by what he learned from her.

Jeffrey was known for the vibrant colors in his paintings. His watercolors hang in New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art, Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, The National Museum of American Art in the Smithsonian Institution, and many others. Jeffrey stopped painting for a year after his kidney failure.

When he resumed painting as a vehicle for healing emotionally, his work was dominated by images inspired by Chinese acupuncture points, *Yi Jing*, and what he learned from Master Cheng. It was filled with patterns of "energy dots" that represented qi. The vibrant colors of the paintings that gained him fame were replaced by works in shades of blue and white. Over time, as Jeffrey healed, color returned to his work, but the energy dots remained in his watercolors for the rest of his life.

Chinese and western physicians approach medicine from wildly different views. Leon Hammer, a western psychiatrist trained in Chinese medicine, posits in *dragon rises, red bird flies* (Hammer, 1990) that the former seeks to promote health while the later seeks to prevent death. Jeffrey took advantage of the best of both views. A western kidney transplant kept him alive for twelve years and surgery carried a possibility of healing his leg. Qigong and tai chi chuan kept hope alive throughout an enormously difficult time and brought healing benefits via improved qi circulation that supplemented western strategies. Jeffrey beat the odds by living longer than expected and keeping his leg in spite of the wounds that developed. What seems more important to me is that his quality of life was better not just because he kept his leg but because he kept his hope. His positive emotional state changed his painting and the Chinese philosophy that crept into his painting kept his emotions positive.

Master Cheng once told me it was important for us to spend time together so that we could understand each other better so that she could teach me based on my

individual learning needs and so that I could understand the personal context of her teaching. Experiencing the visits to Jeffrey with Master Cheng was important because I learned that our cultural differences could carry wildly different interpretations of appropriate and loving behaviors and that we could have opposite interpretations of the meaning of a life event. It added complexity to discerning which of Master Cheng's teachings I would be wise to integrate into my life and which were a good fit for her, but not for me.

In the next chapter, differences of interpretation are an important theme in the story of Master Cheng's own health crisis. What I learned from visiting Jeffrey with her helped me negotiate the challenges that emerged.

CHAPTER 7 – HEALTH CRISIS

Master Cheng immigrated to the United States in 1994 to obtain laser treatment for eye damage caused during the Cultural Revolution. Her right eye was restored to health, but the only option for her left eye was drops to control traumatic glaucoma. Master Cheng refused the drops in favor of depending on qigong to maintain normal pressure in her eye and for nearly twenty years she experienced no eye problems until a glaucoma crisis flared when Master Cheng's three-year old granddaughter accidentally hit her left eye. Did qigong actually control the glaucoma? Did the typically symptomless "silent thief of sight" progression of glaucoma permit the erroneous perception that all was well? A bit of both?

Intense pain in Master Cheng's head and face forced a visit to her ophthalmologist who measured an ocular pressure of forty-nine when twenty-two is the high end of the normal range. Laser treatment intended to relieve pain was itself extremely painful and was aborted when Master Cheng insisted she couldn't handle more. She promised to return in a week to complete the procedure, but she changed her mind in favor of healing by doubling her daily qigong and taking Chinese herbs. She declared that patience was necessary because qigong and traditional Chinese medicine work slowly.

Over the following months there were days she felt no pain and her eye looked normal and others when her eye was red and painful. One day she arrived for class with her eye nearly closed. During a qigong session at home the previous day cold fluid was released from her eye - so much that she used an entire box of tissues. According to Western medical knowledge, aqueous humor normally exits the pupil and recirculates back into the eye, but her eye was no longer normal. Could the fluid have been aqueous humor that poured from her eye due to ocular pressure so high that it was like a weakened dam bursting after prolonged rain? Master Cheng interpreted the fluid as healing via a release of bad qi. Amazingly, her eye was pain free and normal in appearance two days later. The apparent breakthrough didn't last and she began experiencing pain so intense it made her vomit; despite this, she remained steadfast in the belief that her pain was caused by qi breaking through blockages and healing her eye. When intense pain began to awaken her almost every night she admitted she needed help.

Jing Qing, my wife Peg, and I had planned a trip to Chinatown in New York City so Master Cheng joined us and we added a visit to a Chinese physician with a reputation for healing glaucoma to our itinerary. The trip felt like we stepped into China. Upon our arrival we went to a restaurant for traditional dim sum – cubes of daikon radish in rice powder, tendon in a tasty sauce, shrimp dumplings, sesame and rice soup with thousand year duck egg, and many more dishes. Whole roasted pigs hung in a corner adjacent to an aquarium-filled room from which patrons selected fish that would be cooked and served a few minutes later.

After lunch we headed for a tiny pharmacy on a small side street. One wall of the pharmacy was covered with shelves containing Chinese over-the-counter medicines and foods that function as medicinal herbs when properly prepared. A long glass counter that ran the length of the store topped shelves stocked with myriad types of dried herbs. My eye fell on a medicine preparation area that held a wooden mortar and pestle, a cleaver, and an abacus. All were worn from use. The cleaver resembled paper cutters used in American offices except the blade was about eight inches high and a foot long. The back wall was crammed with plastic bags of herbs. Next to a bank of drawers bearing varied medicines hung a large pair of deer antlers harvested in their furry stage. Was it for show or were pieces of it ground in the mortar and pestle for some prescriptions?

The physician looked to be in his fifties. He wore a white shirt and black trousers and was devoid of anything that indicated he was a physician. He invited Master Cheng into an examination room in the back of the store. After several minutes she emerged smiling. The physician had diagnosed pain from an infection that resulted from being hit in the eye by her granddaughter. Master Cheng believed his unlikely assertion that western drops used to dilate her eyes on the day of the aborted laser procedure caused the increase in ocular pressure.

The physician prescribed a combination of herbs that, if made into tea and drunk on six consecutive days, would heal the pain and stop the infection. He placed six large sheets of white paper on the counter and

gathered plastic bags of herbs from the bank of drawers, under the counter, and other places. He piled each herb on the papers in approximate doses, based on his experience rather than an exact measure. All the ingredients were dried – chrysanthemum flowers, gogi berries, varied plant leaves and stems, tree bark, and slivers of roots. The most exotic ingredient was exoskeleton of cicada. Each of the six completed piles could have filled a gallon jug. Each dose was wrapped individually and placed in a red bag. Master Cheng resisted only briefly when I picked up the heavy bag to carry for her.

After completing the course of treatment the pain was worse and her eye redder than it had been for months. More herbs were prescribed. Two months after beginning the herb regime, Master Cheng began experiencing numbness in the fingertips of her right hand and pain in her right foot. The Chinese physician insisted she need not worry. When she began to experience pain in her supposedly healthy right eye she admitted to me that she was "a bit scared." Her body language shouted that it was more than a bit.

Master Cheng's son found the ophthalmologist who'd saved the vision in her right eye when she immigrated to the United States. This ophthalmologist indicated there was no further danger to the now totally blind left eye and her previously healed right eye was healthy. He suggested a couple of avenues that could relieve the pain in her left eye. She chose to do nothing except more qigong and she did not mention her eye again.

As we were leaving the ophthalmologist's office, Master Cheng asked me to zip her jacket and quietly admitted that the numbness in her hand had intensified to the point where she was unable to button a button or zip a zipper. A couple weeks later she began experiencing pins and needles up her right arm to her elbow and at night her arms were so weak they were like noodles if she attempted to reach for something. A month later, her legs were becoming numb.

She no longer trusted the Chinese physician because his herbs had not resulted in improvement so she turned to her western primary care physician. When preliminary blood tests ruled out some illnesses, but didn't diagnose a problem Master Cheng concluded western medicine was also ineffective. She confided that she was so tired that all she wanted to do was sit. As she spoke she leaned into the couch letting it hold her up the way a baby leans back against its mother for support. I had never seen her so weak.

Hope dawned a week or so later when Master Cheng arrived for class very excited. She had done a powerful tiger and dragon qigong accompanied by special music that her qigong master, Kong Tai, recorded for her personal use and as she did it she could feel energy pouring through her elbows, knees, hands and tiny spots at the tips of her fingers. She animatedly showed me red, bruise-like areas topped with white, scaly patches on the spots where she'd felt energy exiting. She hadn't been this relaxed and energetic for months. It was amazing to see the power of qigong manifesting in such an overt manner.

Master Cheng told me that centuries ago, in an era when Daoist qigong masters were trusted advisors to emperors, some masters were assassinated by people who were jealous of their political power. There are stories of masters who foiled poisonings by using qigong to expel toxins from their bodies and she believed she was using qigong to overcome accidental poisoning through the Chinese herbs prescribed for her eye. A week after her experience during tiger and dragon qigong the reddish areas were duller, but the white peeling skin on her hands and crusty white patches on her elbows were unchanged. She admitted to still experiencing pain and numbness in her hands although it had diminished in intensity.

In the meantime, Master Cheng's primary care physician received the results of a specialized round of blood tests and recommended consulting a rheumatologist. Master Cheng asked me to accompany her and her son to help them understand what the rheumatologist said. He started with x-rays to check for skeletal issues and blood tests to rule out problems such as Lyme disease, hepatitis, and lupus. After a few visits and nearly three dozen increasingly specialized blood tests he diagnosed dermatomyositis – a rare autoimmune disease that causes muscle weakness that can lead to serious complications and death. Red areas topped with white, scaly patches were consistent with this disease. Master Cheng refused the muscle biopsy that would definitively confirm the diagnosis. She said there was no point in continuing with the rheumatologist because she would not take the corticosteroids he said would be prescribed for the rest of her life to control the disease.

Later, she insisted the rheumatologist hadn't been able to prove she had dermatomyositis and did not acknowledge the inconsistency of refusing the confirmatory test then blaming the rheumatologist for not giving an absolute diagnosis. She seemed to give no weight to the western treatments that saved her life when she had tuberculosis as a girl and her vision when she initially arrived in this country. She ignored her own teaching that Chinese and western medicine strongly complement each other. Her reasoning upset me since I had learned that dermatomyositis could be seriously disabling and that one in five people are dead within five years of diagnosis. She was extremely weak and had so many symptoms of dermatomyositis that every time my phone rang I feared she'd been hospitalized or worse.

Her reticence to embrace western medicine was understandable since it conflicted with the norms of Chinese medicine with which she grew up. She insisted that qigong had healed her cancer so it could heal this. I was torn. Should I accept Master Cheng's decision to reject western medicine and depend solely on doubling her daily qigong to restore her health or follow my heart which wanted to ignore her decision and encourage her to utilize both options?

Remembering the layers of cultural difference within which Master Cheng and I related, I considered the writings of two ancient Chinese sages. Confucius asserted, "What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others." If I were seriously ill and had decided on a treatment, I would not want someone to try to convince me to do something she thought more efficacious.

Zhuangzi told a story of an enormous bird brought to the emperor after it was discovered far from its normal habitat. He ordered a feast for the bird and musicians to serenade it. The bird died within a few days even though it was treated the way the king would want to be treated if he were lost in a strange land. To some degree, Master Cheng was like a bird out of her element in western culture. From Zhuangzi's viewpoint, pushing for my preferred approach of combining qigong with western treatment seemed comparable to giving a bird a feast of human food.

While I pondered the light these stories shed, Master Cheng told me that she understood that the western treatment of corticosteroids could make her more physically more comfortable, but was unwilling to risk possible interference with qi circulation in the extensive network of meridians that are a core component of Chinese medicine that is ignored by western medicine because meridians are invisible.

Soon after, she told a group of students that blood tests and x-rays showed no problems yet the rheumatologist wanted her to take corticosteroids. The details she gave suggested she misunderstood what he actually said. I have often seen Master Cheng find life in America difficult because her English is very basic and I was concerned that she didn't understand the consequences and was not making an informed decision. So, with Jing Qing translating, I talked with Master Cheng one more time to ensure she understood her medical situation. Master Cheng confirmed that she understood the severity of dermatomyositis. She ran down the list of symptoms

she was experiencing and asked if each was a symptom of dermatomyositis. Numbness in her hands? I nodded yes. Muscle weakness? I nodded yes. Trouble swallowing? I nodded yes. Heart palpitations. Yes again. I could see in her face that she truly understood the western view of her problem. There was one point that I needed to be sure she understood so I swallowed hard and asked, "Do you understand that this disease can cause you to die?" She nodded yes.

I wanted to convince her to take western medicine in addition to doing qigong and to shout "cling to life" the way Master Cheng encouraged Jeffrey. But, I had been asked only to be sure she understood her situation and attempting to convince her to accept my preference was well beyond the boundary of what I had been asked to do. Clearly, Master Cheng was firm in her decision to use only qigong to heal herself so I stepped back and did my best to support her decision in spite of my strong disagreement with it.

As I write it has been more than a year and a half since that conversation and Master Cheng rarely speaks of her health. It has been a time of confusion because there are both encouraging and discouraging signs. Master Cheng has regained much of her strength and she claims to have less numbness in her hands so it appears the healing power of qigong is working. On the discouraging side, increasing weakness in her hips make it more and more difficult for her to perform kicks in tai chi chuan and nodules that formed in her knuckles fit the description for a complication of dermatomyositis called calcinosis.

Master Cheng interprets the nodules as the poisons from the Chinese medicine for her eye being gathered as a preliminary step to qi gradually eliminating them from her body.

Dermatomyositis can go into spontaneous remission, sometimes permanently. Was the return of some her strength due to remission of the illness? If so, did qigong and tai chi chuan contribute to remission or did it happen spontaneously in spite of not taking the usual medication? If not, why did much of her strength return? Were the nodules symptoms of the progression of dermatomyositis? The answers may never be known. What is known is that Master Cheng believes without a shadow of doubt in the effectiveness of qigong and she is staking her life on it. She believes that her body is healing and she lives each day with contentment and hope.

I have learned from my own qigong that there is a place of safety for the core spirit of each person that cannot be damaged by external situations including physical health problems. When I told Master Cheng of my discovery, she smiled, but did not comment. No words were necessary because we both understood. Perhaps her daily contentment is because she is able to live within that place of safety and her twice daily qigong is more about accessing that place than physical healing. Perhaps refusing western treatment with the "fight this thing" mentality that often accompanies serious illness was a good decision even if she eventually suffers disability and even death from dermatomyositis.

Master Cheng has been my teacher for a long time and I consider everything she teaches whether by word or deed, but not everything she teaches makes sense for my life. This chapter and the one about Jeffrey illustrate some differences in our perceptions, but Master Cheng was the only role model I had until I met her qigong master and witnessed a different way of incorporating qigong and Chinese philosophy into one's life. The story of meeting Master Kong is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 8 – MASTER KONG TAI

Master Cheng's stories of her qigong master, Kong Tai, knowledge passed from him through her to me, and qigong music he composed and performed as the background for my daily qigong all merged into a sense of connection with him and he has long been the person I would most like to meet. It seemed like an impossible dream since they lost touch more than a decade ago and there was little chance they would ever be reunited. But in November 2013, Qing Jing traveled from her home in Connecticut to Chinatown in the Flushing area of New York City and, acting on a whim, purchased a Chinese-language newspaper where she discovered an announcement of a series of lectures to be given by Master Kong the following week! Master Cheng, Wen Tao, and her son Qun traveled to Flushing accompanied by Jing Qing, me, and three other tai chi chuan disciples to surprise Master Kong.

Master Cheng had aged so much since their last meeting that he did not recognize her until she whispered "I'm Le Xin" which is the disciple name he gave her. Joy radiated from his face as he embraced her and pride from hers when she introduced her students to her beloved teacher. Master Kong had changed so little physically that I instantly recognized him from old pictures, but how and what he taught had changed greatly. Master Kong explained that in 2002 he decided to take a break from everything he was

doing. After a couple years of pondering his future he realized that he wanted to devote himself to restoring the Confucian values of ritual (*li* 禮) and music (*yue* 樂) to Chinese society and spread them across the world.

Master Kong communicates a different message; however, he uses the twisting of spoons to generate receptivity to his message just as he did when Master Cheng first met him. He spoke about the power of positive thoughts and the importance of promoting harmony through ritual and music (*li* and *yue*). He told us, "Lost harmony (lost *yue*) means lost happiness. Use the metaphor of keeping bees in your heart and throwing out the flies to maintain happiness to gradually shift yourself toward having only positive thoughts. Bees are the most positive animal in the world. In the hive, each bee willingly carries out its role in harmony with the other bees. Out of the hive, the fruit of their labor carrying pollen from flower to flower ripples through life in many positive ways. Expel the flies from your heart. They live in garbage. Complaining is an example of flies in your heart. It is like carrying a bucket of feces so nobody wants to be near you since it smells. Treating yourself and all others simply, wishing well to all, respecting others, and having harmony in relationships with others are ways to have bees in your heart. Bringing happiness to others and raising bees in your heart and the hearts of others is the way to live a high quality of life."

After this brief introduction, Master Kong asked us to imagine bees in our hearts while he sang and twisted the handle of the spoon. He held the spoon in one hand which he gently waved back and forth above his

head as he sang a familiar qigong song. The qi projected in his voice filled me. It felt as if an area between my shoulder blades opened and qi flowed into my middle dantian. At the end of the song he held the spoon sporting a twist in the handle just below the bowl of the spoon and said, "this spoon handle twisted ninety degrees with the handle still intact for eating represents a human standing erectly both externally and internally. The ability to twist a spoon is an example of the great energy that can be released when you reach a point of harmony within yourself. The inner strength required for spoon twisting is the same inner strength used for promoting internal harmony by cultivating bees in your heart." He did not say it, but I understood that it is the same inner strength that can be developed through qigong.

Master Kong and Master Cheng both teach about the qualities captured within the multiple meanings of the Chinese character 樂 – harmony, joy, peacefulness, and music. Both masters urge people to focus our awareness, thought, and strength on positive choices that support harmony and joy; move in our chosen direction toward being the best people we can be; use love properly by giving people what they need rather than what we want to give them; help people feel their value; see possibility instead of difficulty when facing problems; set our minds and act without interpreting a situation as difficult or problematic. Nothing in life is impossible so do not doubt yourself.

The two masters teach essentially the same message, but they frame it differently. Master Cheng moves a few people in a large way because many of her students

stay with her for years. Half of her current students attend class three times a week and several do qigong and/or tai chi chuan daily. She frequently says "qigong improves your virtue and cultivating your virtue improves your qigong," yet she rarely explains how to cultivate virtue. Instead, she models it in the way she treats students and in how she reacts to the world. Over time, it seeps into her students.

Master Kong encounters most people in his audiences only once so he uses his exceptional ability to inspire large groups of people to move thousands of people a little bit. He uses spoon twisting to inspire then encourages people to reach for a better life through the metaphor of living with a bee's spirit supported by the external scaffold of Confucian ritual (*li)* and music (*yue)*. He energizes invisibly by sprinkling songs into his lectures at appropriate moments and uses the gift of transmitting healing qi through his singing he received long ago when he did qigong in the cemetery as instructed by his Buddhist master. It does not matter that people do not realize they are receiving qi because they receive it and it adds energy to the changes they want to make in their lives.

Master Cheng teaches that qi is both matter and energy and that qi can be condensed into matter and matter can expand into qi. I have long understood the words, yet I did not truly understand the concept. Master Cheng speaks of qi as something to be accumulated while Master Kong tells his audiences his job is to energize people so their lives can bloom; he does so without mentioning qi. As I pondered the similarities and differences between two gifted masters

I realized that qi that can be accumulated is a noun while qi that energizes is a verb. That dawning triggered the emergence of a model for understanding qi. No model can totally illuminate any concept and this model is no exception; however, it helps me understand a concept that has eluded me for longer than I wish to admit.

Qi as a noun can be represented by water that could be a block of ice, a bowl of ice cubes, ice cubes floating in water, water, steam, or invisible humidity. Qi as a verb can be represented by sound waves. Beginning qigong is comparable to a block of ice since qigong beginners usually struggle with mental activity and emotions that hinder the flow of qi. Music played during qigong sends sound waves into the ice and begins to break it apart as if an ice pick were chipping away at it. Mental activity and emotions gradually diminish and qi flow increases as calmness increases. Increased flow of qi makes it easier for qi to accumulate in one's body. This is comparable to the block of ice gradually falling into chunks that are more like ice cubes which change into cubes floating in water then simply water which sound waves can penetrate with ease.

Meeting both masters has had a profound effect on me. Learning qigong and cultivating virtue from Master Cheng has broadened my outlook by providing a way a) to satisfy my life-long craving for connection with the mystical realms through qigong and b) to transcend myself by cultivating virtue in ways such as putting others rather than myself in the center in daily life, treating others with gentleness and benevolence, and

handling challenges with flexibility. Paradoxically, at the same time Master Cheng offers a broader view, she offers a narrower view through her interpretation that Jeffrey's death was a failure to apply her teachings and her rejection of both western and Chinese medicine in favor of qigong in her own medical crisis. Master Kong's shift away from teaching qigong to teaching about cultivating virtue by keeping bees in one's heart opened the door to the possibility that there are ways other than teaching qigong to apply what I am learning from Master Cheng.

Events in the ten months before I first met Master Kong had me pondering whether I could use my qigong in ways or places I had not explored with Master Cheng so the possibility he unknowingly opened felt quite important to me. I did not know that I would soon be compelled to take a direction not yet explored with Master Cheng.

SECTION IV

RETURN

There is not one big cosmic meaning for all, there is only the meaning we each give to our life, an individual meaning, an individual plot, like an individual novel, a book for each person.

Anais Nin, American Author

The expectations of life depend upon diligence; the mechanic that would perfect his work must first sharpen his tools.

Confucius, Chinese Philosopher

CHAPTER 9 – A NEW STORY

There is a saying "Be careful what you wish for because it might come true." I say, "Be careful of the stories you tell yourself because you might spend your life making them come true." I made up a story that strong qi during qigong was a gift I received and I was responsible for passing it on. I set about fulfilling that story grounded in what Master Cheng's modeled - a person with strong qi teaches qigong and builds her life around it. My story was buttressed by a gift from Master Cheng's friend Ma Dao Ren, a ninety-three year old Daoist master and famous painter. She told him I was her disciple and asked him to paint something for me when I met him in Xian during my travel in China as part of a school administrator exchange program in 2008. The painting he gave me, *Passing Treasure from One Generation to the Next*, hangs in my living room and is a daily reminder of the Daoist tradition of teachers passing knowledge to their students who pass it on to their students.

The guiding story I created was immensely beneficial in some ways. I did qigong every day and worked to "cultivate virtue" within myself so I could grow toward being the best person possible. I gradually became calmer, more patient, and became more accepting of myself and others when situations unfolded in ways that were other than my wishes. My wife, Peg, appreciated that I became better at listening to her feelings about difficulties she faced rather than offering

suggestions for how to fix them. During a conversation with Master Cheng about something that upset me, she laughed and said, "You are so much more flexible than you used to be!"

The story has been detrimental in that it contributed to my being unable to totally let go of the sadness I feel over Master Cheng's decision to not formally appoint a trio of qigong disciples as was described in Chapter Five. In traditional Chinese culture, a master teaches her disciples much more deeply than non-disciple students and I longed for deeper learning. Also, disciple status confers credibility when passing on the teachings of one's master. My perception was that not being appointed weakened my ability to fulfill the teaching responsibilities embedded in my story.

Nearly three years after the aborted qigong disciple initiation ceremony was to have taken place, Master Cheng invited all current and a few former students to become her qigong and tai chi chuan disciples. Anyone who completed an application with only one question – "Why do you want to become a disciple of Master Cheng?" would be initiated.

I was among a handful of students who were dismayed at the abandonment of the ancient tradition of carefully selecting a few disciples. I did not mention tai chi chuan in my application because I do not believe I am worthy of being a tai chi chuan disciple, but I poured my heart into explaining why I wanted to be a qigong disciple and recruited a classmate to translate it into Chinese so Master Cheng could read my answer in her native language. Although I recognize that Master

chi chuan and qigong disciples at the same time was "too confusing" and again aborted her intent to appoint qigong disciples until an unspecified time in the future.

One week before the tai chi disciple initiation, I discovered that other than awarding certificates there was no plan for the ceremony or luncheon to follow even though about a hundred people were expected. Master Cheng reluctantly agreed to discuss a plan for the event for which I suddenly became responsible with insufficient time to delegate more than a small portion of the enormous amount of work. Master Cheng scolded me for not staying calm and rolling easily with the major changes she made throughout the week even when significant changes were made as late as thirty minutes before the event!

Master Cheng asked me to be the first speaker in the part of the initiation ceremony where initiates described why they wanted to be disciples. Given the events of the week, I had seriously considered withdrawing my disciple application and my preference was not to speak at all, but I honored her request. I acknowledged the difficulties of the week and indicated that, like Heaven and Earth – the core hexagrams of *Yi Jing* - Master Cheng and I were necessary for each other. Her creative Heaven energy lit something within me that enabled me to discover parts of me that I did not

know existed. My responsive Earth energy contributed to her dream of creating a school where people learned how to create balance and harmony in their own lives and would pass it to others.

A few months later, Master Cheng said it was time for me to take my next step toward teaching qigong - leading Happy Heart Qigong (*le xin gong)*, the forty-five minute long sitting qigong that is the cornerstone of qigong instruction at Center for Harmony. She had been teaching me qigong privately for almost five years during which I learned techniques for accumulating, moving, and projecting qi. Leading was a big step that included creating an energy field around and among students and transferring qi heart-to-heart to each of my classmates. It carried the risk of depleting my personal qi.

We agreed that she would introduce my initial attempt. I thought she was going to say I had been working for years to get to this point and that she would reassure my classmates that she would take over immediately if anything undesirable happened to the energy field in the room. Instead, she said only that I was going to lead the beginning and if anyone else wanted to try they could! Where was the worry about the risk of depleting their personal qi? Why had I worked for years and anyone else could just do it?

When she took over after I led my segment, Master Cheng moved her head and arms a great deal to make major adjustments to the energy field in the room. Afterward, I asked her if I'd done something wrong. She said I'd done fine and the energy field was simply

"different" then added that she worried that leading again too soon would deplete my qi so she wanted me to wait for a few weeks until my qi was back to normal. It was back to normal when doing qigong at home the next day, but she has not invited me to lead again. She did not explain why the plan that I'd lead longer segments each week was suddenly too dangerous to my qi after years of preparation and in spite of her previously indicating it was not dangerous with her there to help me learn. Instead of the joy of accomplishing something I'd worked at for years, I was left feeling angry, confused, and abandoned.

Making up a story and believing it does not make the story true. The disciple situation and the unexpected stoppage of progress toward teaching qigong shook my confidence and had me questioning whether any parts of the story I'd been telling myself were true. If Master Cheng could shift from the traditional master-disciple relationship that she clearly valued greatly to an untraditional one that was quite diluted, how much of the rest of what I learned from her was equally fluid? Was I assigning more value to her teachings than actually existed? Why did she adjust the energy field so vigorously after I led a bit of *le xin gong*? Had I inadvertently done something bad for my classmates or myself and she didn't want to tell me? While I struggled with these questions the unthinkable happened.

Master Cheng died.

A snow storm forced cancellation of qigong and tai chi class on January 2, 2014. Master Cheng began feeling poorly at about the time class would have been ending.

She phoned her son in New Jersey then sat at her dining room table and sang Buddhist chants. A half hour later, her husband heard a loud noise and ran downstairs where he found Master Cheng lying unconscious on the floor. By the time medical help arrived she was already turning blue.

Her family had often warned her of the possibility of a fall if she maintained her habit of sitting on the edge of her chair or her refusal to move slowly in spite of being somewhat unstable from leg and hip weakness. Did one of these possibilities cause a fall that resulted in death from hitting her head on the table or chair next to her? Did she have a heart attack or stroke? She had regained most of her energy in the year and a half since the health crisis described in Chapter Seven and appeared to be healthy. In spite of the improved outward appearance, numbness in her hands and weakness in her hips and legs persisted. The nodules that may have been calcinosis remained in her hands. A cardiovascular event can be the final complication of dermatomyositis. Did qigong cause a total remission of dermatomyositis and her death was unrelated to that illness? Did qigong cause enough of a remission to allow a high quality of life and the appearance of good health in spite of a gradually weakening body? Did qigong have any effect at all?

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I was lost. The time I thought I had to work out the questions about the validity of the story I'd devised as a guiding light had evaporated. I was left with huge questions, damaged confidence, and no mentor to

guide me. The story I'd created for myself was a narrow one that fit what I learned from Master Cheng – accumulate qi and when you're strong enough, teach qigong and use qi to help others. Meeting Master Kong opened a different possibility – accumulate qi and use it to stay strong as you live a life aimed on the fulfilling your highest potential, but not centered around qigong.

A few years before her death, I told Master Cheng believed I was climbing a metaphorical "qigong mountain" and if I progressed far enough on the path I would be able to share whatever treasure I found along the way. She said, "That's a nice story, but it is only a story. Qigong is not a path. Qigong is something you do to open to the energy of the universe. You sit down every day then see what happens." Another time, she said, "You don't have to try so hard. Qigong helps you be calm enough, still enough to sense what your heart knows. Just trust your heart to know what to do in each moment and follow it."

A long time ago, I made up a story that Master Cheng was helping me discover treasure within myself and that I must pass on what I learned about how to discover the treasure buried in oneself. The first part of the story is true. Master Cheng strived to help me, and each of my classmates, discover the treasure within ourselves. There is a better second part of my story - if I can be still enough to sense what my heart knows then trust and follow it, I will know what to do.

I understand now that the Bible story of Samuel that I loved as a child was actually about being still enough to listen then trusting and following what was heard.

Have I understood how to make the journey to home since I was a child, but didn't realize I understood it until sixty years later? Can it really be so simple?

EPILOGUE

A few days after Master Cheng's death, I decided to read the stories about Professor Dumbledore mentoring Harry Potter through a string of dangerous, increasingly difficult confrontations with wizard-gone-bad Voldemort. I headed to the local library to borrow the first two books in the series of seven. The bushy, black beard and plaid flannel shirt worn by the young man who processed my books projected the look of a lumberjack rather than a librarian. I mentioned that I was grieving the death of my teacher, who had been like a mentor, mother, friend, and sister rolled into one person and thought reading the series might be comforting. He paused in his work, silently smiled at me, and kept smiling until I smiled back. A bit of grief lifted in that moment of compassion.

The relationship between Dumbledore and Harry revealed principles that are typical in any mentor-mentee relationship: 1) Mentors see potential that mentees do not see in themselves and inspire reaching for it. 2) Mentors know something mentees want to learn, but may not teach what or how mentees want to be taught. 3) Mentors are as imperfect as everyone else therefore mentees do not have to be perfect. 4) For the mentee, discovering and developing new potential can be exhilarating while not being taught what you want or how you want to be taught and dealing with the imperfections of one's mentor can generate frustration and anger.

All of these principles were part of my relationship with Master Cheng. She saw that I had unique qigong potential and she tutored me privately. I found it exhilarating when lessons happened unexpectedly such as an afternoon when we were walking down the street in New York City talking about qigong. Something struck her as particularly important and she stopped walking and carefully explained a qigong nuance while we stood in the middle of the crowded sidewalk. Other times, I was sad and frustrated when Master Cheng was too busy or too tired to pass on ancient secrets, philosophy, and techniques she had promised to teach as part of her tutoring. When Master Cheng's imperfections crept into her behavior I was challenged to cultivate patience and flexibility rather than becoming angry. I did not always succeed; however, watching Harry handle his difficult feelings and realizing they are part of any mentor-mentee relationship normalized my feelings and defused the power of my emotions which enabled me to let go of them more easily. Seeing Dumbledore make mistakes in spite of good intentions activated compassion for him and made it easier to acknowledge Master Cheng's imperfections without allowing them to tarnish the wisdom she passed to my classmates and me.

The Harry Potter books also revealed principles applicable to when the mentor and mentee separate: 1) Having a mentor is only a stage in a mentee's life journey and the most important growth occurs after the stage ends. 2) A mentee must continue with whatever has been learned even if it does not seem like enough. 3) It is not necessary to know what to do when a

mentor leaves. Trusting oneself and being patient are the only requirements.

In the years preceding Master Cheng's death, we talked a lot about how to proceed toward our shared mission that included writing this book, planning for the long-term stability of Center for Harmony, and preparing me to teach *le xin gong* (Happy Heart Qigong). As described in the previous chapter, I had created a guiding story for working toward our mission and I was already questioning the validity of that story at the time of Master Cheng's death. I was already pondering whether the narrow path with qigong that she modeled or the wider path modeled by Master Kong was more appropriate for me.

That I would complete this book was never in question; however, it quickly became clear that it was not feasible for me to remain involved with Center for Harmony. A few years before her death, Master Cheng elicited a promise from me to keep Center for Harmony running after she retired or died. She elicited the same promise from a classmate, but didn't inform us about our dual promises and left us with wildly different understandings of her wishes. The result was that we pulled in different directions as we endeavored to honor our promises. We met at a local restaurant to figure out how to pull together, but our conversation suddenly terminated when strange sensations in my friend's head necessitated a trip to the Emergency Room at the nearest hospital. In addition, disagreement within Master Cheng's family about what roles family members should play in Center for Harmony spilled into an already distressing situation.

Although everyone was trying to honor their perception of Master Cheng's wishes, the collision of grief and conflict generated intense turmoil. For me, the pain of staying was worse than the pain of leaving so I walked away from the community that had been like a second family.

Master Cheng's death marked the beginning of an adventure that will allow me to practice what I have learned and allow it to transform me. How am I going to do that? At first, all I had was loss and confusion. I had no teacher, no community, and no answer to the question of what to do about the expectation that I teach *le xin gong* (Happy Heart Qigong). I was trapped in conflicting advice about teaching. How could teaching be fine if I followed my heart and simultaneously too dangerous since the high energetic requirements could easily totally deplete the qi it had taken years of daily qigong to accumulate? Am I wise enough to follow my heart? How can my heart to figure out how to do techniques left untaught by Master Cheng? Is trusting my heart to figure out how avoid the danger worth the risk?

The first glimmer of an answer dawned when my wife and I went camping at Assateague Island in Maryland where I observed a killdeer tending a nest thirty feet from our tent. The nest was merely a depression in the ground in which clumps of dried, wild pony dung surrounded four pale green eggs with black speckles. The bird remained on her nest through a two-day storm so intense that Peg and I often stayed in our tent just to be sure it didn't blow away. The killdeer didn't know the storm was coming and couldn't prepare. She just

accepted what came and remained faithful to her task. I cried with relief when I saw the bird on her nest after the storm cleared. If she and her eggs could survive the storm, I could handle the emotional storm howling within me.

For months after Master Cheng's death my daily qigong felt weak and I worried that I was strong only when supported by Master Cheng. Worry and grief block the flow of qi so of course my qigong experience would be weak. Of course my qigong experience would be different without multiple weekly boosts from doing qigong with my mentor. I was too exhausted internally to sustain my tai chi practice. Like the killdeer, I simply needed to be faithful to my task – continue sitting for qigong every day until I hatched a way to relax into my own qigong energy and built enough energy to rekindle my tai chi chuan practice.

Hope bubbled within me when I studied hexagram number twenty-three in the *Yi Jing*. Thomas Cleary translates the name of it as "Return" in *Taoist I Ching*. In this hexagram, the "old yang" line at the top is trying to keep from being pushed out by five yin lines rising from below. The text explains that it is natural to want to hold on, but "young yang" will return at the bottom of a new hexagram as soon as the "old yang" is pushed out. This dynamic is depicted in the tai chi symbol where the white yang side thins to nothing then returns in the white dot of young yang within the thick black area of old yin. Old yang symbolizes anything in life that is coming to completion and moving away. Young yang symbolizes anything that is beginning. The real-life lesson in this ancient Chinese wisdom is that it is

natural to hang on to what we love and to be sad when it is lost, but it is important to remember that after any loss something will begin. It doesn't matter what the loss is – a beloved person, a job, a child leaving the nest to go off to college, the pleasures of summertime when September arrives . . . anything.

At the moment of Master Cheng's death, the old yang that she and I had been holding onto slipped out of our hands. She returned to the realm of spirit and I returned to life without her bearing a new lens on life that she helped me discover - a lens that will help me live differently, more wisely. Having Master Cheng as my Special Teacher for eight years was a joy and a privilege, but it came at a price because having such a teacher dims one's view of oneself because the view can be obscured by the shadow of the teacher. To truly know oneself, it is necessary to stand alone. Now that Master Cheng is gone, it is time to return to being my own Janice. Qigong and tai chi chuan will continue to be vehicles for discovering new answers to important questions. Who am I in my deepest being? Who is the best person I can be? How can I move toward becoming that person?

It is time to begin a new cycle of growth. The night I met Master Cheng, I was resistant to the possibility that our meeting would initiate change. Today, I find myself welcoming the potential for change. Apparently, new growth has already sprouted.

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Healing Bodies, Healing Hearts with Qigong and Tai Chi Chuan examines the life experience of Master Lijun Cheng and her students to reveal how qigong and tai chi promotes the health of body, mind, and spirit. Master Cheng credits qigong and tai chi chuan with healing serious illnesses and saving her life during the Cultural Revolution. Student stories reveal physical and emotional healing ranging from the dramatic to the simple – from healing after a serious automobile accident to maintaining health while aging, from healing the trauma of sexual abuse to not being angered by inconsiderate drivers or jars that refuse to open. *Healing Bodies, Healing Hearts* explores how Master Cheng mentored the author on a profound spiritual journey. All accounts illustrate how qigong and tai chi chuan can be vehicles for making life more meaningful for all regardless of the ups and downs of life.

Janice Doppler has been practicing qigong and tai chi chuan for seventeen years. She retired from a career in public education which opened time to write and carve birds. She earned a doctorate in Social Justice Education from University of Massachusetts. *Healing Bodies, Healing Hearts with Qigong and Tai Chi Chuan* is her first book.

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