

Managing Stress with Qigong

Gordon Faulkner

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For centuries, Chinese emperors, scholars, martial artists, and everyday citizens have perfected the use of *qigong*, a system that combines movement and breath with the aim of manipulating the body's energy. Although every form of exercise brings these two major elements into alignment, qigong is unique, notes first-time author Gordon Faulkner, who serves as principal instructor at the Chanquanshu School of Daoist Arts.

In qigong, the focus isn't on the Western idea of fitness, but rather on the Asian concept of health. The difference is important, Faulkner notes, since the latter incorporates physical, mental, and social components for an overall sense of well-being. Stress, a problem that permeates every culture but is particularly acute in the Western world, sabotages an individual's well-being and health in every aspect, and Faulkner believes that qigong can facilitate stress reduction and cause positive changes, like better immune system response, as a result.

In this exceedingly straightforward, clear guidebook to qigong, Faulkner first examines the general nature of stress from both Western and Eastern viewpoints. He notes that certain exercises are ideal for stress relief, while others can be helpful for stress prevention, and both sets of exercises take only about ten minutes. Since the exercises are so gentle in terms of movement, they can be done by nearly anyone, and don't increase a body's stress response the way traditional Western exercise might.

From there, Faulkner provides extensive practice material that's well articulated and easy to follow. Numerous photographs also prove useful, and with the combination of the step-by-step descriptions and photos, it takes only a short time to become comfortable with the motions.

So that qigong students can get a fuller sense of why they're doing these specific movements, the author goes into detail about the "qigong principles of action," a simple description of why the practice affects the body in such a specific way. He describes how mental focus, controlled breath, and physical actions help to regulate the body and mind, and create greater mental "stillness." Quieting the mind, he notes, is particularly important, since stress can increase frantic thoughts, and have an adverse affect on the body as a result.

Faulkner's great strength lies in simplifying a complicated discipline. His book allows readers to try several easy, brief exercises that can reduce stress and boost a sense of well-being. For anyone feeling harried in today's world—and basically, that seems to be nearly everyone—this detailed guidebook will be a secret weapon for fighting stress.

ELIZABETH MILLARD (November 18, 2010)

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