

## AN INTRODUCTION TO QIGONG (Sept. 2019)

*Gerald Seminatore*  
*Savannah Qigong Collaborative*

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**WHAT IS QIGONG?** The ancient philosophies and practices of Qigong have their historical roots in China. The Mandarin Chinese characters for **Qigong** are pronounced “Chee” as in “cheese” and “gong” like a metal disc struck to make a sound. (Alternate spellings include “Qi gong” and “Chi Kung.”) Possible English translations include “Life Energy cultivation” or “working with Life Energy.”

In group settings, Qigong practice will emphasize breathing, body alignment, coordinated and “mindful” movements, and self-massage. Qigong philosophy and practices are foundational aspects of both martial arts training and traditional Chinese medicine. (Tai Chi, another tradition of mind/body practice, is closely related to Qigong.) As there are many different styles of Qigong, exercises can be selected for different situations and contexts, according to the needs of practitioners.

**BENEFITS.** Qigong and Tai Chi have been practiced in China for centuries. In recent decades, both have become more popular worldwide. These practices offer many opportunities for recreation, gentle and mindful exercise, and the promotion of wellness. Within a larger framework of Integrative Medicine and wellness care, current research on Qigong and Tai Chi points to a range of benefits for both physical and mental health. Peer-reviewed studies (e.g., National Institutes of Health, the New England Journal of Medicine, and the UCLA Medical Center) suggest that regular practice of Qigong and/or Tai Chi can offer life-changing improvements in one or more of these areas: joint and bone health, muscular strength and balance, reduction of blood pressure, strengthening of the immune system, and relief from symptoms of stress and chronic pain. While this research is ongoing, a clearer picture of the efficacy of Qigong and Tai Chi in supporting wellness and quality of life is coming into focus.

**ACTIVITIES.** In Qigong circles, we “practice.” This means that we are doing, repeating, and deepening our experience each time we engage in Qigong exercises. Different teachers bring different perspectives to Qigong and its presentation to students. Generally speaking, a Qigong session includes some dynamic or energetic exercises to enhance breathing, circulation, and ease of movement in the joints and spine. Self-massage targets acupuncture points and easing of muscular tensions. Flowing movements promote enhancements in concentration and coordination, stress reduction, and gentle exercise of various muscle groups from the “inside out.” For many practitioners, the meditative and centering quality of some Qigong exercises can be especially appealing.

**IS QIGONG FOR ME?** No expertise or extensive training is required to practice Qigong, either on your own or in a group setting. And no special equipment or clothing is needed. Whether you are 19 or 90, Qigong has something to offer you! Qigong exercises engage both the body and the mind, and are easy to learn. If you are challenged by physical or mobility issues, don't let that stop you! Rather, you are encouraged to ask a teacher how Qigong exercises might be adapted for your particular situation. (*Before embarking on any type of exercise, consult with your doctor or health care provider.*)

**HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?** While a number of online Qigong resources are now available, their quality varies. They are certainly to be recommended as an introduction. However, most offer only a glimpse of the potential benefits that Qigong practice may hold for your life and health. Of course, published books can also be helpful guides, but they cannot substitute for direct experience. The best way to learn about Qigong is with a qualified instructor, in the company of others who can support you in your exploration and practice.

**IS QIGONG A RELIGION?** This question occasionally comes up, and its short answer is NO. Qigong masters, teachers, students, and practitioners around the globe are believers in many of the world's religious traditions—or people who do not identify with any faith tradition.

**WHAT DOES IT COST?** The Savannah Qigong Collaborative (SQC) is a group of five certified Qigong teachers, representing three different Qigong schools. We lead Qigong practice sessions in several community venues and at the Veteran's Administration, every day of the week. These sessions are offered on a volunteer or donation basis, and no one is turned away for lack of funds. This means that regular Qigong practice is within everyone's financial reach. *Beginners are welcome at any community practice session.*

Outside of regularly scheduled community practice times, SQC teachers may request personal payments for individual or group lessons. Workshops require a registration fee, though a teacher may reduce that fee on a case by case basis. Fees for classes taught in a commercial fitness center, gym, or yoga studio will be set by the venue.

**PRACTICE LOCATIONS.** Visit [www.savannahqigong.net](http://www.savannahqigong.net) for class schedules and information about regular community practice sessions and special workshops in the Savannah area. For private sessions (one-on-one or small groups), a teacher can come to you. Again, the best way to explore Qigong practice is with the help of a teacher. The social aspect of group practice can also be very encouraging.

Questions? Send a note to [savannahqigong@gmail.com](mailto:savannahqigong@gmail.com)

*(Gerald coordinates the activities of the Savannah Qigong Collaborative. He is a certified Level 2 instructor of Long White Cloud Qigong.)*

