

# The Connection Between *Qi Gong* and Massage

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The *Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon (Neijing)* was compiled in 200 BC and is still considered the bible of Chinese medicine today. *The Neijing* discusses four major healing modalities: acupuncture, pharmacology (herbs), massage and *qi gong*. *Qi gong* was then called *dao yin*, which translates as "guiding and pulling" but is sometimes called "gymnastics" in translated texts. Early Chinese medicine and Daoist texts frequently grouped massage and *qi gong* together as the two most powerful methods of self-healing. *Qi gong* became an official part of Chinese court medicine by the Tang dynasty, and it is likely that massage therapists were already part of court medicine before that time.

Massage and *qi gong* are two complementary approaches to bodywork. It is said that *qi gong* balances the energy, blood and body fluid flow from the inside, and massage strengthens the flow from the outside. *Qi gong* uses intention and particular body movements to guide the *qi* in healthy directions, while the physical pressure and body manipulation of massage helps to do so from the outside.

Self-massage warms the body, which stimulates the flow of blood and body fluids. Any *qi gong* practice that follows is said to be more powerful after circulation has been stimulated in this manner. The physical stimulation of massage will also help the practitioner to feel, and ultimately guide, the *qi* flow in the body. When you begin a *qi gong* practice, you start by visualizing the movement of *qi* until you can feel its flow in your body. Once you can feel the flow of *qi*, you can then guide it. Thus, massage is a key technique to enhance and accelerate your ability to cultivate and circulate your energy. Likewise, self-massage techniques can loosen tight or stiff muscles that arise from our mostly sedentary lifestyle. If you do not rub or stretch these areas before *qi gong* exercises, you run the risk of injuring yourself.

Self-massage is also one of the best "quick pick me up" techniques out there. An exercise I like to do when I am feeling worn out or tired is called "Washing the Face." It obviously stimulates the flow of energy in the face, but it is important to remember that many of the *yang* acupuncture channels that ultimately connect to the brain are also stimulated when you rub your face. When you stimulate these channels, you are also stimulating the energy flow along these channels, which run from the arms to the head, down to the feet, or up to the crown of the head. Thus, your whole body will feel the increase in energy flow.

To practice Washing the Face, begin by placing the pads of your middle fingers on either side of the nostrils. Inhale, and push all the pads of your fingers in and up as you push your hands up towards your scalp, putting pressure on your face wherever your fingers pass. When you exhale, rub your hands down your face to the starting position. I like to take a slow, deep inhale as I rub my hands up, and then do a quick forceful exhale as I bring my hands back down; almost like sneezing. If you repeat this exercise at least nine times, you will definitely feel more invigorated and energized.

The beauty of massage and *qi gong* is that you can either go to a professional for a treatment or you

can give yourself one. You don't need any special equipment or tools, and you can practice anywhere or anytime you wish. As in the saying "healer, heal thyself," self-massage and *qi gong* are two ways to keep us strong, healthy and present for our clients.

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