

## Medical *Qi Gong* and Posture

By David Twicken, DOM, LAc

*Qi gong* is a treasure of Chinese culture. This ancient health practice can be found in the earliest historical periods of China. In my previous article on medical *qi gong*, the three adjustments were introduced: posture, breath and intention. Now, I will explore the links between posture, acupuncture channels, anatomical structures and health.

Posture is a very important aspect of *qi gong* and martial arts; it is also called alignment or structure. The classic book of Chinese medicine: the *Nei Jing*, presents five major systems of acupuncture channels. The channels are sinew, luo, primary, divergent and eight extraordinary channels. These channels can be viewed in layers, from superficial to deep. Posture or structure influences all the channels, but it has a particularly strong influence on the sinew and divergent channels, and their corresponding anatomical structures.

Aligning the body, specifically the skeletal system and sinew channels, allows for the normal flow of *qi* and blood throughout the body. The sinew channels directly influence tendons, muscles, bones and joints, and indirectly influence the internal organs. Good posture aligns the anatomical structures, which allows the internal organs to retain their normal positions. Improper posture can create stress and pressure on the anatomical structures surrounding the internal organs, and over long periods of time it will influence the circulation of *qi* and blood in the channels. The stress created by misaligned anatomical structures and the diminished circulation of *qi* and blood can cause imbalances of the internal organs.

The divergent channels are one of the most interesting channel systems. The early classics do not provide a comprehensive theory and application of this channel system; the *Nan Ching* does not contain them. These channels originate in the big joints of the body, which are large anatomical structures, for example, the knees, hips, elbows and shoulders. The divergent channels divert pathogenic factors away from the organs to these anatomical locations, to hold them. In an ideal situation, self-healing methods are practiced to clear and resolve these holding areas. If the areas are not resolved, the pathogens can damage the local structures

and move towards the internal organs.

A unique aspect of the divergent channels is they connect the superficial and deep layers of the body. From an acupuncture channel perspective, it includes the sinew and eight extraordinary channels. The divergent channels integrate *Wei Qi*, tendons and muscles, as reflected by the sinew channels, bones and *Jing*, which are reflected by the eight extraordinary channels. Good posture aligns sinew, divergent and eight extraordinary channels and their corresponding anatomical structures, creating a structure for good circulation and health.

From an ancient time, *qi gong* and Chinese medical practitioners had a profound understanding of movement and posture, and their influence on the human body. One insight they had was how posture influences the skeletal system, and its corresponding vital substance: *Jing*, as well as the entire marrow matrix.

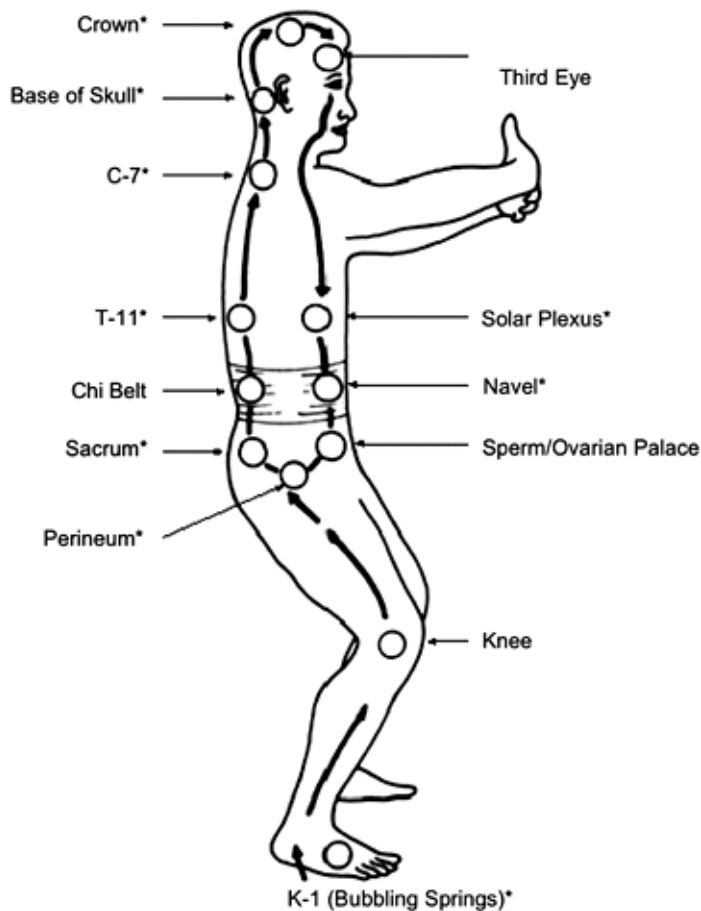


Figure 1 By aligning the body properly they could stimulate *Jing*; this understanding contributed to the development of the Bone Marrow Washing *Qi*

*Gong*. According to Chinese legend, during the Southern Liang Dynasty at the Shao Lin temple, Da Mo created the Tendon Changing and the Marrow Washing *Qi Gong* Classics. There are many variations of these practices. One variation emphasizes body alignment and rooting to the ground. Rooting or being grounded to the earth, floor or ground, requires sinking the body downward and grasping or twisting the feet, legs, hips and shoulders downward. This rooting creates a natural weight bearing and resistance exercise. These weight-bearing exercises especially stimulate the divergent and eight extraordinary channels, and their associated anatomical structures and vital substances: *Jing* and *Yuan qi*.

Chapter 25 of the *Nei Jing* presents the following guidance: "Man corresponds with nature: In heaven, there are Yin and Yang; in man there are 12 large joints of the limbs," and "When one understands the principles of the 12 joints, a sage will never surpass him." These *Nei Jing* references highlight the importance of the 12 joints: ankles, knees, hips, wrists, elbow and shoulders. *I Ching* acupuncture applies this theory in the practice of acupuncture. *Qi gong* that emphasizes posture and body structure applies the 12-joint theory to a health practice.

The Embrace the Tree *Qi Gong* posture is one of the classic postures in *qi gong*. There are numerous variations of this posture but the basic principles are common in all variations. This foundation stance includes the following principles:



1.

Figure 2 The feet should be about shoulder width apart.

2. The knees should be bent, but no lower than your ability to see your toes over your knees. If you cannot see your toes you are bending too low.
3. The feet should be pointed straight ahead or slightly inward.
4. The wrists are at the level of the shoulders.
5. The elbows can be lower than the wrists and shoulders.
6. The shoulders must be relaxed.
7. The fingers should be pointing towards each other, allowing the flow of *qi* from one hand to the other.
8. The pubic bone should be slightly forward, allowing the coccyx and sacrum to align. This alignment allows the smooth flow of *qi* into the Du channel, and up to the brain and down the Ren channel. This circuit is the microcosmic orbit, the inseparable connection of the Ren and Du channels.
9. The chest is relaxed and slightly curved in a concave shape, this causes a naturally outward curve of the spine. When the arms and pubic bone are in proper alignment, the spine will naturally move into position, with the upper vertebrae slightly curving outward.
10. The chin is tucked gently inward, with the crown lifting backward and slightly upward. This aligns the cervical vertebrae and enhances the natural flow of *qi* up the Du channel and into the brain.

When these foundation principles are applied, your body weight sinks down through this aligned structure: the head, shoulders, hips, knees, ankles and toes. This posture unifies the 12-joints. Sinking into this posture connects and roots the entire skeletal system and body into the ground, transferring all your weight through your bones, stimulating them in a natural way. This is a natural weight bearing and weight resistance practice. It stimulates bones, marrow, *Jing* and the kidneys, promoting health and vitality; and is one of the foundation and most important *Zhan Zhuang* standing postures.

*Qi gong* postures can become a profound medical *qi gong* when the three adjustments are included in the practice. The Embrace the Tree posture, as a form for the Bone Marrow Washing practice, can have a profound influence on health and vitality. Chinese medical theory clearly presents the importance of the kidneys, *Jing*, marrow and bones. Medical *qi gong* postures offer a natural, simple practice for daily cultivation of the *Jing* matrix. This type of medical *qi gong* can be used alone or in conjunction with herbs, Acupuncture and other healing practices as a comprehensive healing system. It is my experience when medical *qi gong* is practiced with other healing methods there is a synergetic effect in the healing process.

These *qi gong* practices are for presentation purposes only. Please consult your licensed healthcare provider before practicing any *qi gong*.

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