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Preface

How we classify the various things and events we encounter depends on the model or paradigm of reality, to which we subscribe. The more complex our experiences, the more likely we are to have open paradigms. In the process of digesting our experiences and relating them to each other, we often discover unexpected connections. This is what this book is about: the underlying principle that unites qigong, quantum physics, and mysticism—and quite possibly, other aspects of reality.

About twenty years ago, I spent six months in Beijing, just after completing my Ph.D. in physics. A budding young scientist, I wanted to get to know the world and share the results of my research. So I went to Beijing, sponsored by a cooperative venture between the German Max-Planck-Gesellschaft and the Chinese Academia Sinica.

As soon as I got there, however, I found that my Chinese colleagues worked with the same kind of equipment we used and that one of them had just spent eight months in Switzerland, working with one of the leading scientists in the field. The transfer of know-how, then, came about in a rather unexpected way. . .

Every spring Beijing is subject to massive sand storms that bring clouds of dust from the Gobi Desert. Smart people either stay indoors or, if they cannot avoid going out, wear face masks to protect their nasal and respiratory passages. Not so smart, I duly got sick, suffering from laryngitis and a sinus infection, with high fever and a great deal of misery. I underwent one ambulatory treatment with *qi* and was completely cured. That was quite a surprise! How was that possible? How had it happened?

Even before coming to China I had practiced taijiquan for a while, but I had no clear concept of how qigong and Chinese medicine worked. Inspired by my experience, I decided to extend my stay and learn acupuncture to get a better grip of these subjects. After my return to Germany, I followed this up with an intermediate academic exam in Chinese language

and culture, as well as in philosophy, and then decided to pursue training in qigong through the Medical Society for Qigong Yangsheng.

Having undergone extensive qigong study and training, I eventually returned to my original fascination with physics, remembering the original impetus that had led me into science before my interest shifted into qigong. This shift, however, happened almost by itself. The connections between the two have intuitively always been clear to me, but writing them down in the form of a complete, integrated theory is something else again. This integration is the subject of this work. Please leave your preferred concepts of the world behind and follow me now.

1. Introduction

Human beings ask all sorts of different questions both of themselves and of life. The answers they find serve to provide their fundamental worldview. My own questions had to do with what operates behind visible reality: How is the universe built? Why am I here? What structure underlies that which we think of as our reality? Is there a universal principle that appears everywhere? How can I not only know but personally experience this?

These are hard questions. Since I first learned of qigong in a kind of spontaneous remission, I have been particularly interested in the answers it has to offer. At the same time, my perspective also goes beyond qigong into mysticism and quantum physics, thereby allowing an answer that is as encompassing and enlightening—and also as unprejudiced—as possible.

My basic position is that, if there is a fundamental principle in the universe, it must work behind and/or within *all* things. This matches the traditional Chinese vision as expressed, for example, in a prose poem by Su Zhe 蘇轍, the brother of the famous poet Su Dongpo 蘇東坡 (1037-1101). He says, “There is only one cosmic principle (*li* 理) among the myriad things. Their only difference is where they start.” A bamboo painting by Wu Zhen 吳鎮 (ca. 1300) similarly contains the inscription, “Having fully realized the cosmic principle that rests in emptiness—what sorrows could still fill the heart?”

Beginning from this position, my reasoning is that, if this is the case, I can take various things at random and study them in more detail to discover the underlying pattern. Should I then find a commonality in all these things, I can come to certain conclusions that I can analyze further with

regard to their wider applicability, expanding from the specific to the general following the principle of induction. The assumed ubiquitous principle, I suspect, has a lot to do with the concept and apperception of oneness inherent in the multiplicity of forms, respectively with the loss of oneness. This loss has initiated our persisting quest.

In qigong, oneness appears in various ways: it is in the roundness and completeness of each exercise; it is also present in the concept of Dao which I focus on in the first part of this work. Next I turn to mysticism, where oneness is experienced as union with the highest, the superior, the divine. From here I explore the natural sciences. They, too, know of oneness: with nature as, for example, in the manifestation of nonlocal phenomena, which are already being used in modern technology. My concluding synthesis, then, combines these various experiences of the underlying principle of cosmic oneness. To help the reader activate this understanding, I complete the presentation with a series of qigong exercises geared particularly to the topic.

The purpose of this book, then, goes beyond theoretical exploration and understanding. I hope to help alleviate and possibly even eliminate the sorrows that fill the heart through insights in and the experience of cosmic oneness.¹

¹ Regarding Wu Zhen, see Pohl (2007, 41). On induction, see Schäfer (2004, 26). An introduction to the reconciliation of Daoism and modern physics can be found in Bock-Möbius (2009; 2011).

2. What Is Qigong?

Qigong as a technical term was coined in 1947. The key protagonist was the Communist Party cadre Liu Guizhen 劉貴珍 who, suffering from various serious ailments, searched for and found efficacious exercises among Daoist practitioners and completely cured himself. In the process, he discovered that there were multiple practices, often with widely divergent names, that had the same goal: to cultivate perfect *qi* through body and mind, breath and spirit. In 1956, he became the director of the qigong clinic in Beidaihe 北戴河 near Beijing. Since its treatments, especially for chronic diseases, were quite successful, qigong came to spread more widely.

Over the years, it has undergone various stages of popularity and repression, and today is one branch of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) after acupuncture and herbal pharmacology. It combines physical, breathing, and meditation exercises into one integrated system, encouraging both still and moving practices. The practice of qigong is good for almost anything: to cultivate *qi*, to prevent ailments, to stimulate self-regulatory processes, to supplement other therapies, and to enhance rehabilitation. The Beijing physician Jiao Guorui 焦国瑞 (1923-1997), whose system of “nourishing life with Qigong” (*qigong yangsheng* 气功养生) I predominantly use, has formulated his key concepts in teaching poems. For example, “It is easy to practice *qi* but hard to regulate it.” It is also not all that easy to tame, nourish, stabilize, and control *qi*.

The Chinese characters for “qigong” help to better understand the meaning of the term. This book uses the abbreviated form of Chinese writing, as common in mainland China, usually after presenting the name or term in transliteration (*pinyin* 拼音). However, here I would like to take recourse to the traditional form of the character for *qi* 氣: it also contains

the word for “rice” (*mi* 米) underneath the abbreviated character 气, which is described as showing a sail blowing. The word as a whole thus indicates not only air, steam, gas, breath, and atmosphere but also “steam from cooking rice” and thus, by extension, creative pneuma and life energy. This is obvious in a way, since rice is the foundation of all Chinese nutrition.

The second word in the compound is *gong* 功, which consists of the two characters for “work” (*gong* 工) and “strength” (*li* 力). It means accordingly work, effort, merit, skill, success—all part of the fundamental tenet of “continuous practice.” The term *qigong* could therefore be rendered “working with *qi*,” which sounds a bit pushy. Thus, some people prefer “working on *qi*.”

Chinese medicine operates from a different understanding of sickness and health than Western bio-medicine. Its exponents have less interest in bacteria and viruses and instead presuppose that the individual will be healthy as long as *qi* is sufficient and flows smoothly through the meridians, the polarities of yin 阴 and yang 阳 are in balance, and the five energetic phases (*wuxing* 五行) are in harmony. This state of health should be recovered and, once achieved, maintained and enhanced.

Jiao Guorui has provided six key points for successful practice. They include naturalness, the principle of “light above, firm below,” and the close interconnectedness of stillness and movement. In addition, the point that “imagination and *qi* follow one another” is essential.¹ To stimulate *qi*-flow through the meridians and into each cell of the body, practitioners combine their movements with suitable visions and images.

For example, to perform the exercise “Push the Mountain,” stand with firm roots, i.e., focus your mental images on your feet and allow your lower back to relax. Let the thumb and index fingers form an open triangle, thus exerting a light pressure on the “Mountain” as you push forward from the center of the body. Use your imagination and begin to open (push) from the center, thus letting the *qi* flow from the body’s core to its

¹ An excellent outline of the development and social dimensions of qigong is found in Palmer (2007). For Jiao’s poems, see Jiao (1993a, #37-42). A scholar-practitioner who prefers the translation “working on *qi*” is Ute Engelhardt (1987, 16). Jiao’s six points of practice are outlined in Jiao (1988b, 60-69).

periphery, i.e., into your hands and feet. Then pull the arms back in again and conclude the motion, allowing the *qi* to come back and collect in your core. This single exercise accordingly activates the entire meridian system, notably the yin channels in the arms and the Bladder Meridian that runs across the head and along the entire back of the body.

The core or center from which all movements come and to which they return is known as the cinnabar or elixir field (*dantian* 丹田). The term goes back to operational alchemy, which was extensively practiced in the early centuries of the Common Era, and signifies the potential of the human body as *qi* to be refined and enhanced like metal in the alchemist's crucible.

The elixir field is an area below the navel where the *qi* collects and regenerates to once again flow into the organism. This process can be enhanced by using imagination to guide and direct the *qi* with the help of visual images. These images, too, arise in the elixir field and are projected from there into the body as if onto a three-dimensional screen.

All processes and events within the human organism in qigong are described in terms of Chinese medicine. The basic assumption is that bodily actions are managed through centers at the core of a network of energetic channels running through the body. Although they are often named after inner organs that are also familiar to Western bio-medicine, they are in fact energetic orbs in charge of extensive functions and qualities. Thus, for example, the *qi* contained in the Spleen orb and flowing through its related meridian is also responsible for keeping the blood in its veins and arteries.

By the same token, metabolism in Chinese medicine is always the transformation of *qi* in the orbs. Since qigong stabilizes internal balance and harmonizes the metabolic processes of the body, it has a positive effect on health. In accordance with this way of thinking, it is the task of the Spleen and Lung orbs—assisted by that of the Heart—to distribute the essential nourishment acquired from food, water, and air throughout the body. The Kidney and Small Intestine orbs, moreover, serve to filter the clear parts toward further usage while guiding the turbid parts toward elimination via the Bladder and Large Intestine.

All twelve orbs in the human organism are supplied with *qi* through the meridians and regulated with the help of acupuncture points. Qigong exercises activate the meridians and acupuncture points, not only to strengthen the individual's basic metabolic function, but also to enhance the person's inherent perfect *qi*: the combination of postnatal and primordial *qi* that keeps people alive. Postnatal *qi* is distilled from food, water, and air, as well as social and emotional contacts: it is stored in the Spleen orb. Primordial or prenatal *qi* is the *qi* supply received from Heaven and Earth through one's parents: it resides in the Kidney orb.

Qi provides all the basic energy needed for the various bodily processes of production and decomposition. In addition, it manifests in two further aspects: vital essence (*jing* 精), which is more concentrated and tangible and gives shape to external processes in the organism; and spirit (*shen* 神), which is subtler and provides the more psychological and spiritual dimensions. Together they are known as the Three Treasures: their presence is essential to maintain the life of the body and the person.

When speaking of qigong exercises for nourishing life, we generally refer to practices whose effect is directed inward and contributes to an overall strengthening of health. It is, of course, also possible to direct the fruits of one's *qi*-work outward: this happens, for example, in the martial arts and during presentations of apparently magical powers. However, even then, the foundation is the internal cultivation of *qi* and mastery of the body's energetic processes. In other words, whether one uses *qi* to split a brick or to stabilize health, is just a matter of how one directs it: in or out.

A long period of regular practice will lead to various positive developments: the meridians become more permeable, *qi*-flow is subtle, the metabolism functions smoothly, the joints are stronger and more flexible, the central and vegetative nervous systems are balanced, and the immune system is strong. People often note that they feel better and more vibrant overall, while noting a clear reduction in stress, both internal and external. That is to say, if you undertake qigong practice with perseverance and a bit of good fortune, you have embarked on a path toward an overall harmonization of health and life. It is a fascinating and engaging journey toward an increasingly clearer contact with *qi*.

It is important to avoid practicing immediately after a meal, under the hot sun, in strong wind, or under drafty conditions. Similarly, you

should not activate *qi* when emotionally agitated. Never strive for fast results. In all aspects of the practice, moderation is essential: doing everything in the right measure.²

² A brief summary of meridians and orbs in Chinese medicine appears in Bock-Möbius (1993, 25-33). For a good general survey, see Kaptchuk (2000). For details on the workings of the body in Chinese medicine in relation to Western science and Daoism, see Kohn (2005).

