



QI GONG

Rediscovering Our Humanity

PAUL FRASER

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*For
Anisha,
A True Partner in Love, Life
and
This Path We Share*

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Preface

“[C]oincidence exists in necessity. Without necessity, no coincidence. How could necessity come into being if there were no coincidence? Many coincidences make a necessity.”

—*The Path of Life, Vol. III*, Translated English Edition 2003
Ou, Wen Wei, Qigong Master

I dismissed those words at first; I found them confusing. Later, I tried to make sense of them, eventually coming to the realization that every pivotal moment I could recall came about through coincidence. It seemed as if there had been some guiding force that appeared, random in the moment, but, in hindsight, fitting a discernible pattern.

As human beings I suppose most of us strive to make meaning from the events of our lives. It is understandable. Our lives are all we have. They are important to us. Why would we not seek to make what occurs within them matter? In the end it may make no difference if there is a guiding presence or not, as long as we value what we do and do what we value.

Looking back, I may have been one of the least likely candidates for exploring the art and science of qigong. Everything about my knowledge and experience was conventional and, at best, average. But then a

very unconventional illness presented itself and the average avenues of treatment were not enough. Through a series of coincidences, I found myself at first helped and then later transformed by qigong.

Adding to those coincidences, the place I lived at the time, Boston, Massachusetts, was home to tremendous talent when it came to qigong. There was Tom Tam, my first teacher and the man I credit with saving my life; Dr. Yang, Jwing-Ming of Yang's Martial Arts Association, scholar and author of numerous books on the subject; Master Vincent (Fong) Chu of the Gin Soon Tai Chi Federation; Lin, Soong of the Lin family (Wild Goose Qigong), famous for generations as qigong practitioners, who once, using only qi, repositioned a herniated disc in my lumbar; and Daoist Priest Zhou, Xuan-Yun, who grew up on Wudang Mountain mastering medicine, all of the Wudang martial systems, and Daoist ritual—just to name a few. I found myself in great need and encountered much greater talent and ability.

In another work, *Pangu Mystical Qigong*, Master Ou describes the purpose of human evolution as harmony of heaven, earth and humanity. We are part of a vast network of Life, bridged by qi and spirit. Tracking our evolution may be viewed through three key stages: “[material, circumstances and people are] coexisting relatively [antagonistic], tolerating each other then becoming stable, being harmonious then resonant.”

My study of qigong followed this pattern. I went from illness (coexisting antagonism), to learning, practice and health (tolerance and stability) and on to endless fascination (harmonious and resonant). In the process I found a way of living that continues to offer value and meaning, made the best friends anyone could hope for, experienced deep love in many forms, and have known the incomparable joy of helping others.

The debt I feel I owe to my teachers, to those who kept this priceless body of knowledge alive, is, I'm afraid, well beyond my capacity to repay, despite their insistence that there is no such debt. I have their examples of hard work, generosity and kindness. They make me want to try, despite myself, to offer just a fraction of what they give, hoping, in some way, to honor those gifts.

Paul Fraser
Asheville, North Carolina, USA

Introduction

Initiations

“It was involuntary. They sank my boat.”

— John F. Kennedy

Like many nineteen year-olds, I had a vision of how my life would unfold. At the time, mine had something to do with investment banking, homes throughout the world, and, in later years, a Pulitzer Prize.

That vision changed abruptly, coming from another vision in a hospital bed.

Six years earlier, at thirteen, I had a respiratory illness that developed into pneumonia. In the course of a chest x-ray a strange shadow was, quite by accident, seen by a passing orthopedic surgeon as anomalies in parts of my skeleton. He mentioned it to the radiologist, who reported it to my pediatrician, who then consulted with that same orthopedic surgeon.

It was an extremely rare bone disease. It was a type of growth that infiltrated the bones on either the right or left side of the body. Generally it was nothing to worry about, and would remain for one’s entire life undetected, but, in my case, it was strangely active. It had all but

destroyed a section of my right humerus (the upper arm). A fall, or even excessive pressure would most likely result in a break. Further scans noted similar growths of a more benign nature in my ribs, two fingers, and the right side of my pelvis. Surgery was scheduled within the next couple of months and my right humerus was reconstructed with bone taken from my left hip. After physical therapy I was cleared to resume my normal, awkward teenage years. I would, however, need to have the growths in the ribs, fingers, and pelvis checked every six months or so. Once I stopped growing there would no further need for concern.

I began university studies at eighteen. All seemed well as I took on the full course load of a Finance major, made new friends, took up intramural martial arts, and explored the many diversions Boston had to offer. In the middle of my sophomore year it was time for another bone scan, most likely to be my last since I had stopped growing, this time using what was then the relatively new technology of Magnetic Resonance Imaging. The results had always shown no change in activity of the growths; there was no reason to suspect anything else.

The results of what was to be my last scan were very different and very unusual. The growth in the pelvis had become so active that much of my iliac crest was affected. The change had been so dramatic over the past six months it was very possible the growth had become malignant. Immediate surgery was scheduled to remove the growth, have it biopsied, and repair the pelvis with another bone graft.

That surgery was much longer and more involved than the previous one. When I awoke from the anesthesia there was a great deal more pain. I was grateful for the morphine and became acutely aware of its absence every four hours. When the surgeon told me that the biopsy showed cancer activity, the fear, pain, and opiate effects of the morphine mixed together, producing a kind of vague, disbelieving disassociation. We would talk about it later, he said, perhaps after my family arrived and I was feeling a little stronger.

There wasn't much more to say, it turned out. The tumor, about the size of a softball, had been removed. It was such a rare disease that no blood tests had yet been developed to track its activity. All we could do was continue to watch and wait. And hope.

I lay there with my right leg attached to a traction device, a drain inserted into the incision to remove debris from the surgery, with uneaten green jello on a nearby tray, staring at the ceiling, trying not

to worry, counting the minutes to the next morphine injection, as the pain ebbed its way back. There was a crash of metal on floor as something was dropped outside my hospital room. The vibration from the crash sent new waves of pain through my pelvis. I closed my eyes and exhaled. My heart was beating fast, from pain, being startled, and worry that my life could end much sooner than I expected. I glanced at the clock. Twenty minutes to go until morphine.

It wasn't sleep but I felt strangely relaxed and heavy. My heart slowed, my breathing evened out as the pain seemed to lessen with each exhalation. Behind my eyelids images of tiny squares covered my field of vision. Gradually the squares formed an intricate pattern of what appeared to be colorful tiles—a mosaic. I could no longer feel any specific part of my body, only a sense of one part of me sinking heavily and another floating lightly, gazing down at the mosaic.

The field of vision closed in to a small grouping of colorful tiles, different shades of sky blue and cloud white. My attention went to one blue tile in particular. It seemed to become brighter, outlined with a light shimmer of gold light. A hand appeared and pointed to the tile. There were no audible words, just a strong sense of "this tile is you."

The visual field broadened, showing several hundred surrounding tiles. Two fingers of the hand plucked the tile that was me from the mosaic. As the tile was plucked, about two thirds of the surrounding tiles fell away. The tile was placed back. All the tiles that had fallen away repositioned themselves in their original places, with the entire section of the mosaic outlined in that same golden shimmer of light. "This is why you won't die," I felt. With that, a strong wave-like feeling passed through my body and I was abruptly awake.

But different.

The first noticeable sensation was actually the absence of one: I felt no pain. I was calm, happy, with a sense of eagerly anticipating some stroke of good fortune. The hospital room was the same, yet I sensed a vibrancy to my surroundings I'd never experienced before.

A nurse walked in and smiled, asking if I was ready for a dose of morphine. "No, thank you," I said, "I feel fine. I'll wait for a while until I really need it." Was I sure? I was. Did I know it was always a good idea to be medicated ahead of the pain, that it was the best way to keep it managed? I did. I remembered us talking about that. "Thank you for caring so much." I felt tears come to my eyes. I could feel something

about her. She had genuine compassion. It made her happy to take care of people. She had always been like that since she could remember. How did I know that? *Did* I know that? Was I just creating a story?

Hours passed. I didn't surf through television channels, try to read anything or have any desire to direct my attention to anything other than my own sense of being. It was comfortable and interesting just *being*. I was pleasantly surprised. I had never felt like that before. I had always needed some way of occupying myself, even when I ate: I wanted something to read, to watch, someone to talk with.

I was offered more pain medication. I would need it, she said. Later in the day she would try to stand me up, perhaps take a few steps or even try some crutches. These actions were often painful, at first, right after surgery. That sounded great. I was ready. I wouldn't need the medication. I was doing well without it. Was I being honest with her and, more importantly, with myself? I was. She sighed. "All right," she said dubiously, "we'll try."

Standing and walking with crutches wasn't nearly as problematic as the group of one doctor, a physical therapist, and two nurses, all waiting to catch me, seemed to suggest. I moved down the hallway. "Practicing," I said, to kind admonishment. I ought not to rush things, they told me, and I certainly should not fall.

After two days I was left to my own devices. I could get up and roam the halls on crutches whenever I liked. I passed one of the other hospital rooms. It was filled with people, family for a woman who had been severely injured somehow. She was in a large traction device that held most of her body in place and rotated, automatically, on an even larger wheel, periodically. There was a small girl in the room, perhaps five or six years old. Her daughter. No one seemed to be paying attention to her. She was very frightened. She stepped out of the room and sat down on the floor in the hallway with silent tears streaming down her face. We looked at each other. I could feel her being afraid, sad, her love for her mother, her confusion, her desire to be both close to her mother and far, very far, from this place. It rushed through me and, for a split second, I was sure I would break the rule of not falling. I offered what I am sure was a weak smile. She smiled back, then was led back into the room by someone who had realized she wasn't there.

I returned to my room and cried.

Two more days passed and the feeling of being deeply connected with people, places, circumstances and with myself was gradually

slipping away. I felt panic. I tried to hold onto the connected feeling, but the more I tried the more quickly it would dissipate. In its place I could feel worry, uncertainty, and more anxiety than before. The pain returned and, once again, I happily accepted medication.

I was sent home with detailed instructions for my own rehabilitation. I was young and this wouldn't be a problem. I would regain my strength in no time. After all, look how well I had been doing.

Except that I wasn't doing well. My blood pressure shot up to a level that was considered just below dangerous. Whenever I ate I had difficulty keeping the food down. I wasn't sleeping, was anxious almost constantly. With post-operative check-ups it was determined that the bone was not filling in the pelvis. I wasn't healing. The physicians, my family, and a few friends were sure this was some kind of post-traumatic stress. I should talk with someone; a therapist or perhaps a priest.

I was sure that talking wouldn't help. The sensations, even the anxiety, felt more in my body than my mind. Besides, I thought, how could I explain my experiences in the hospital? Would anyone believe or understand? For all the good people I had in my life, the mystical wasn't something they were likely to embrace. It wasn't how we lived.

I went to a library and searched for books related to mystical experiences. All I could find (this was 1987, after all) were books that described visions and occurrences that were far more elaborate and long-lasting than mine.

My physical condition was going from bad to worse. I was rapidly losing weight, signs of sleep deprivation were clearly apparent, my blood pressure stayed high enough that there was talk of medication, and the condition of the pelvis was unchanged. I felt very weak and was sure I was dying. I began avoiding family and friends, unable to meet worried looks and offers of advice I could not take.

On my way to yet another library, I stood, supported by crutches, on the subway platform at Wollaston station. Idly I glanced up, and saw a sign that was written half in English and half in Chinese characters: *Lea Tam Acupuncture Center*. After the words passed through my mind I felt the same wave-like sensation that brought me out of my reverie in the hospital. Suddenly, I felt infused with a sense of calm and confidence. The train came and went as I stood there staring at the sign, afraid to move, thinking that, if I did, this blissful feeling would be gone.

Twenty minutes passed as I stood, unmoving.

To hell with it. I'm going over there.

Tom Tam sat behind a desk in the waiting room. He greeted me and asked why I was there. I unloaded, not even thinking that English wasn't his original language, that I ought to slow down, and that he may only have been getting about every third word. I barely paused to breathe as I recounted the details of the strange illness, the more unusual occurrence of it becoming malignant, the downward spiral I was experiencing post-surgery, culminating with one question: Can you help me?

He smiled and answered, "Yes". How could he be so sure? I blurted. "It's my job to know," he explained, "and anyway, I can treat you and, if you don't feel better, don't pay me."

Well, there's confidence, for you, I thought, then explained that, even if I felt better, I couldn't pay him since I hadn't planned on coming in and all I was carrying were two subway tokens and a library card.

He held eye contact for a few seconds and smiled. "It's OK. You'll come back. You keep your word. Now, would you like to try acupuncture?"

I would. And did. He helped me onto a treatment table and inserted the needles in my back, legs, and arms. After asking if I was OK so far, he made circular motions with his hands over the needles. The wave-like sensations began again. I drifted into a state that was neither asleep nor awake. I could feel tension, pain, stomach discomfort, pressure in my head I hadn't noticed before: all seemed to lift to the surface and be carried away down my back, through my legs, and out of my body. I fell asleep.

I awoke to Tom removing the needles and asking me how I was doing. I looked at the clock. It had been thirty-five minutes since I got onto the table. He helped me up and I stood, unaided, feeling as if I were standing straight for the first time in about six weeks. The inside of my body felt substantial in way I had almost forgotten. After about a minute I felt my physical structure pull me down into a familiar slouch.

Tom had been watching and explained that it was a good sign. The qi—did I know what qi was? Not really? Well, the qi, or energy in my body had begun to enter the injured and imbalanced places. As it did so, I would heal much more quickly. My body couldn't yet sustain a fully upright position because my structure would need time to repair itself. The qi was already in place, which was why I felt normal for a few seconds.

May I come back tomorrow? "Best to wait a couple of days to let the qi do its work," he explained. We made another appointment and I

continued on to the library and took out the only book on acupuncture I could find, reading it twice before I saw him again.

At our next meeting I showed him the book and, with a nineteen year-old's lack of humility, proceeded to explain to him what he did for a living. He smiled. Much of what was in the book was accurate, but there was a great deal that wasn't. Take, for example, causes of disease. It is much more complicated than what was explained in only a few sentences.

Tom's explanation went something like this.

Since energetic factors are key elements in our healing processes, it stands to reason that, when these factors become imbalanced, they become the causes for disease and disharmony.

Many diseases and disorders have obvious causes. Someone sneezes on you in line at the grocery store and, hours later, you have a scratchy throat. Maybe the food you had at your favorite take-out place wasn't cooked as well as it should have been and now you're experiencing gastric distress. Or perhaps you have been exposed to a harmful or toxic substance and are now experiencing signs of being poisoned. These are obvious.

But many illness are not so obvious. No one is really sure why a person's immune system doesn't identify mutated cells in his body that later become malignant and multiply into cancerous tumors, especially when this person has lived a fairly healthy and responsible lifestyle. The causes for diseases of the nervous system such as Multiple Sclerosis and Lou Gherig's Disease have baffled researchers since their discovery. Genetic research shows the presence of inherited genes that may "activate" in some people and create disease, but no one really knows why these genes activate in some people and remain dormant in others. Just as baffling is why some people never seem to get sick and others seem to contract everything.

From an energetic point of view, disease can be viewed as energy that is disharmonious to the overall health and well-being of a person. This energy can be introduced through obvious means, such as a sneeze or contaminated food. Or through more subtle ways.

Suppose you're driving to work during rush hour and it's a particularly bad day for traffic. Other motorists are just as eager, and, therefore, anxious, to get to their destinations. No one has time to spare. People are being cut off, honking, yelling, and generally behaving in ways that

create distress. Once you get to work, you're already in a heightened state of anxiety, only to find out that something has gone wrong, your full workload is about to get even heavier, and everyone seems angry. You have too much to do, and so are unable to take a break. Lunch must be delivered to your desk. You eat and work. As you are eating, your stress and that of those around you becomes part of your lunch.

When your work day ends (later than usual) you go home to find that your significant other has had an equally bad day. Of course, you may not be your most balanced and understanding self; there was the horrible traffic, the greasy, undigested lunch, and long working day. Either you or your significant other says something that gets misinterpreted and perhaps an argument begins. The tension continues through dinner. Both of you may have the good sense not to argue and eat, but intuitively you know you are also absorbing the energetic circumstances of the meal.

Still, the meal isn't pleasant or relaxing, and you're thinking that you'd like to have at least one pleasant sensation today, so you have bowl of ice-cream to fill the void.

You end the day by watching television. A comedy to cheer you up. But the comedy keeps being interrupted by commercial messages that give you the unconscious impression that you won't be happy unless you spend more than you can afford on things you do not need, which may have been part of the reasoning you picked that high-stress job in the first place.

Tom paused.

When you think about disease and an unusually stressful day, how does your body feel? Pleasant or uncomfortable? The tightening in your chest and stomach are reactions to disharmonious energy. You're closing down to the flow of energy because, at the moment, the energy you're taking in isn't good for you. Now, if you replayed your stressful days, giving them focus, attention and energy, you'd be amplifying their effects. You'd be interrupting the qi-flow through your body, since you've closed down, as a defense, to what feels negative. You've absorbed harmful energy from stressful circumstances and your reactions to them. Then you've cut yourself off from the healthy flow of universal energy while trying to defend against them. Then you've amplified the disharmony within your body by giving it attention, focus, and energy.

Many people live this way for a long time and manage to stay reasonably healthy. Until they don't.

These stresses have frequencies. They can create illness in the body if amplified or left stagnant in your energetic structure. Then they accumulate.

Energy attracts similar energy. It's all magnetic. This will serve to create a disease or to activate a disease that is lying dormant. If grief sits for a long time in a body it can weaken the lungs. If similar weakening frequencies are added to that grief it can create an illness. These frequencies can be induced from substances, day-to-day stress, traumatic experiences, or they may even be passed on from parents to children, since they share an energetic structure as well as DNA. If that energy becomes so strong that it becomes a dominating force within the lungs, the cells may mutate so that they can survive in that energy. This is often the case with cancer, he explained.

Solving the problem means breaking the cycle. Strengthening qi will give you the energy to deal with stress better and will add power to immunity. It acts as insulation as it clears out disharmonies already moving through your energetic structure.

Becoming calmer, you react less. This new focus turns to that which is healthy and life-promoting. Since similar energy attracts a similar energy, you will gradually build up a strong reserve of healthy qi. Over time you'll be vital, balanced, happy, and peaceful.

It made sense. I thought for a moment, and then continued my interrogation.

What about him waving his hands over me and the sensations I felt and how quickly I felt better once he started to do that?

That was Fa Gong, emitting qi to help someone heal.

How had he done it? Can anyone learn it? Do you have to be special?

You don't have to be special, he explained, just alive. First, I would have to learn to exercise the qi to make it strong, to heal myself, to make sure that the cancer would not return. Then it would be easy enough to learn to emit qi to help other people.

So, where do I sign up? How do we do this?

He wrote down an address. He'd see me Sunday morning at 8am. I should be on time.

I was early.

He began by teaching the Tai Qi Dao Yin qigong form without any preliminary explanation. It was best to feel first and know later, he said. I didn't feel anything. I was disappointed and thought I just didn't have whatever the knack was. That wasn't it, he said. I'd likely not feel much in the beginning because my body was weak. Most beginners feel qi

along the surface of their skin before sensing it more deeply in their organs and structures. My qi wasn't rising to the surface of my body; it was needed in my organs, my blood, and especially my bone marrow, places deeper than most of my sensory nerves. Keep doing the movements. You will feel something. You're alive.

It took five and a half weeks of daily, sometimes twice daily, practice, before I started to feel the tingling and warm sensations that many people report when first feeling qi. It happened to coincide with a check-up at the hospital.

My blood pressure was normal, the bone was filling in nicely. I had regained a little weight and, while we were on the subject, I reported I had been sleeping better too. The scans showed no advancing activity of any of the growths anywhere in my body. All good signs.

I went straight to see Tom and told him. He was happy but not at all surprised. Keep practicing, he said.

I did, and became something of a pest. Whenever I had free time I asked lots of questions. Most he answered, some he ignored, and for some he directed me to ways of finding the answers myself.

I went back to finish a university degree, seeing Tom on the occasional weekend and break. He taught, advised, and subtly influenced. Slowly I came to the conclusion that there was nothing as interesting to me than qi and how it worked.

After graduation I got a job at a financial institution but otherwise threw myself into qigong training, Chinese medical theory, and as much of the philosophy connected with it that I could find in English.

Eventually, we went to China (1992), so that I could be introduced to and learn from one of Tom's teachers. We learned what we could from people Tom was connected with, went on to Hong Kong, and, a year later, were off to Taiwan on a similar expedition.

Boston, as it turned out, offered a great deal in the way of qigong training. It had a vibrant Chinatown and many generous people willing to teach (unlike the rivalries I would hear of and, later, experience). It was like a 1920s Paris of qigong.

Training consisted of long periods of repetition punctuated by moments of breakthrough. For me, the challenge was holding focus and intent while things seemed to be staying status quo. I would repeatedly discover that, even though it seemed as though nothing significant was happening, my sensations told me qi was flowing and condensing and

my experience told me that once the flow and volume reached critical mass another threshold would be crossed.

I would make this my life. I enrolled in acupuncture school.

I would discover that Tom Tam was unlike most qigong masters. He did not cling to traditions. He insisted on having reasons for all he did and did not do. His way was to question and test everything. He was open to learning what he could from whomever was willing to teach, and encouraged his students to do the same. Rather than being possessive of his knowledge and students, he encouraged all of us to share what we had learned, to question it, refine it, and seek knowledge from many sources.

It was most likely his example that engendered a sense of restlessness regarding my own knowledge and ability. There was always a vague sense that there was something more, greater, with a larger scope than what I knew. We continued to search and research. Tom continued to innovate. I was still dissatisfied.

One morning I pulled my copy of the *I Ching* from the top shelf. My training and knowledge with the *I Ching* were, at best, elementary. Still, why not try? I calmed myself and allowed the qi to flow as I held my question of how to advance to a better level of training, then threw the coins that would determine the hexagram. Opening to the appropriate page, the answer was something along the lines of “What is yours will come to you. What is not yours will never come to you. So, there’s no point in worrying about it.”

That was annoying.

I felt the qi increase as I read “the judgement,” but it gave me no other course of action than patience—never my strong suit. I put the book back on the shelf thinking, “Five thousand years of culture and this is the best I can get...”

Three days later, my sister Cheryl (my first qigong training partner and, at the time, one of my partners in a clinic we’d opened), told me a friend of ours, Sandy Ryan, had received teacher training in a style of qigong called Pangu Shengong. Strangely, as Cheryl related the story, I felt the same wave of qi pass through my body as I had experienced in the hospital, and again when I saw the sign for Tom’s office.

Sandy had taught Cheryl the day before, and Cheryl said it had been powerful. I’d heard such stories many times from people, but never from my sister, and never with the qi sensation I’d just had. Sandy was

due to stop by (we all often traded acupuncture treatments) and maybe I could ask her about it.

Sandy came in and I all but pounced. What could she tell me about it? What was her experience so far? Had she taken teacher training? Would she teach me? When? How about right now?

Sandy was gracious and my sister's assessment had been right. I wanted more and Sandy invited me to a group practice run by Gary Woolf, who would later become a good friend. Gary related the story of Master Ou, the creator of the Pangu Shengong style, and informed me that Master Ou would be returning to Boston to teach in a few months if I'd like to meet him.

I practiced diligently for those few months and Master Ou certainly did not disappoint. To my surprise, as I shook hands with many of his students who had been practicing for only two years, they had more qi strength than I had, then in my twelfth year of training. Part of me wanted to sneak out the back and pretend that none of this had ever happened, but the rest of me was ready to start again.

That day he taught the foundational form, which I had learned from Sandy, called the moving form, followed by the next level of Pangu Shengong, called the Non-Moving Form, and then gave a class in healing skills: how to emit qi to help others, which remains the most efficient and effective means I know of helping people.

He came back every couple of months, offering the same classes, and I retook them each time. I noticed the strength of qi-flow increased each time I took the class. Master Ou explained that there was a transmission with each class and that to retake a class with him was one way to increase ability when combined with one's own diligent practice. Still, I had no personal connection with him.

One Sunday morning I was retaking the classes for the sixth or seventh time thinking, "I'll bet he couldn't pick me out of a police lineup. First break that we have, I'll head out."

It had been a long week leading up to the class. I was tired, discouraged, and pessimistic: three attributes that don't exactly encourage a healthy flow of qi. On the break, Vincent Chu, a local legend for his Tai Qi skills and also the acting interpreter for Master Ou when he came to Boston said, "Hey, Paul." (Vincent and I had known each other for years.) "Master Ou said he remembers you."

I was surprised and looked up to see a friendly smile on Master Ou's face. Not unusual, but once directed toward me it had the effect of clearing out my fatigue, discouragement, and pessimism all at once.

“Please tell Master Ou I apologize for the other things I was thinking.” Vincent didn’t pass it on. He probably didn’t have to.

We began a short conversation and, in the course of it, I asked if Master Ou would consider coming to our clinic to issue qi to some seriously ill people we had been treating. To my further surprise, he agreed.

After that, each time he came to Boston he made a stop at our clinic to help people who needed him. During subsequent classes, in breaks, and in the generous way he made himself available to his students by inviting them to his home (he had recently relocated to California from China), he taught more than a method of qi cultivation. He taught a way of living that offered health, vitality, peace, and a unique way of understanding the universe and its history. My relationship with him has been invaluable in every aspect of my life.

Over time, I learned that he is a true Master of Five Disciplines. To explain what this means could be an entire book by itself. Put simply, the Five Disciplines tradition means to dedicate one’s self to the mastery of five (or more, in his case) art forms. Achieving more than just technical skill, a true devotee will practice these arts with full presence and attention. Out of these gongs (deeply devoted practices cultivated over long periods of time) the practitioner discovers and develops his or her true nature, spirit, and learns to have that presence in every moment.

Master Ou’s art forms include cooking, calligraphy, poetry, philosophy, and he is unrivaled in emitting qi to help people heal. One of my greatest pleasures and privileges has been to sit down to a meal he’s prepared. To stand in front of one of his calligraphies can be a surreal experience. He infuses his work with qi that can be felt in one’s body. His poetry conveys deep sentiments, transporting the reader through a transcendent experience. There are volumes of published testimonials from people he has enabled to recover from life-threatening illnesses. He demonstrates each of his art forms with easeful grace. To an observer, it seems effortless.

I asked what made his qigong so powerful. He said that the real power of the qigong could be found in the opening lines traditionally stated before beginning the movements. “Take kindness and benevolence as basis. Take frankness and friendliness to heart” (translated) represents a crystallization of a deeply meaningful, profound philosophy. Put simply, universal, unconditional love is the primary power the creator used to create existence. There is no greater power than this love. The more we align ourselves with this principle, both in actions (how we treat each other) and in thoughts and feelings (striving for

inner calm, peace, and maintaining a tolerant, gentle, and openminded attitude towards other people and in our encounters with all circumstances) the healthier we become; our ability to help others grows, and our connection to the divine deepens, leading to a more profound sense of peace, happiness and well-being.

The qigong cultivates the energy of the experience of Love, infuses it in one's body, allowing it to permeate the heart and soul. To foster this Love, Master Ou offers a closing statement at the end of the qigong: "Speak with reason, —trying not to bring harm through our speech by harsh words, gossip, and off-handed remarks. Treat with courtesy, —greeting everyone we encounter with respect and kindness, regardless of how they treat us. Act with emotion—feeling this deep love and sincerity, and acting from that place. Accomplish results—performing kind actions and striving for that which benefits one's self and all with whom one interacts."

This is how Pangu Shengong grows in power and effectiveness over time. While the philosophy is easy to understand, it is difficult to put into practice.

I said as much to Master Ou, and he elucidated: "This is a very difficult and sometimes painful undertaking. One must restrain evil inclinations, attempting to emphasize what is benevolent. Over time, the parts of us that do not align with Love will be transformed. It represents the most fundamental struggle of good and evil, with the ultimate goal being not only the transformation of the individual but of our world."

I asked if there were one best way to transform the world; would he say it was to practice this qigong? To my surprise, he answered: "The best way to be healthy, happy, and to transform the world is to try one's very best to be kinder and more loving each day. Doing this sincerely, whether one practices Pangu Shengong or not, will improve, dramatically, one's physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Over time, one's life will improve as well, moving towards a deeper happiness and sense of peace. Pangu Shengong can make it easier. However, even if a person practiced the qigong and still refused to grow in love, it would bring much less benefit."

He said striving for harmony, within one's self, with the people encountered, and with our planet is an excellent goal of any serious qi cultivation. Harmony is a natural occurrence of Love. If one wants harmony, one must contribute Love, not with ulterior motives, nor as any means to an end, but sincerely and without defined expectation.

For him, qi cultivation is not simply something one does, it is what one becomes.

In the coming years as more ancient writings on qi cultivation became available in English, and with Master Ou offering discussions on ancient culture, it became apparent that he was teaching an essential component that had been largely ignored or given superficial treatment in the works available. He sought to resurrect those teachings and make them relevant to contemporary students.

This was a new stage in the journey.

Entering it would bring profound gifts.