

After years of living with the debilitating autoimmune disorder lupus, Jana Eshaghian discovered qi and healing through Qigong.



Discovering My Qi

by Jana Eshaghian

On Monday, my first day of class in Inner Power Qigong: The 9 Phases of Qi Cultivation and Mastery* lead by Josie Weaver and Jessica Kolbe at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, CA, I couldn't walk up the long, steep hill to our classroom by myself. My daughter, Hannah, helped pull and push me up the hill, something she was used to doing. I stopped three times on the way up, finding a post to sit on for a while before ascending the stairs at the top. I didn't know how much I would be able to participate in class. After eleven years of living with Systemic Lupus Erythematosus, a chronic autoimmune disease called lupus for short, and all of its "companion diseases" like fibromyalgia, chronic migraine, osteoarthritis, plantar fasciitis and Raynaud's syndrome, many body parts and associated movements still remained painful to execute.

With an undergraduate degree and teaching certification in dance and graduate study in Laban Movement Analysis, I was no stranger to the study of body movement, but lupus had limited my capacity to move. For the first two years of living with lupus, I was basically in bed. I could only practice breathing and visualization, dancing and choreographing in my mind. Gradually, I went from bed to couch, to wheelchair, scooter mobility device, walker, cane until finally freestanding. As is common with lupus, there are periods of progress and regression. For every two or three steps forward there are usually one or two steps backward.

I'd heard over the years that the body has the ability to heal itself and I've seen astounding recoveries first hand with my brother, Charlie, coming back from the edge of certain death on more than one occasion. If disease is disharmony in the body, I've learned that it takes a harmonious symphony of healing modalities to counteract the effects. In concert with my Western Medicine treatments of medications and physical therapy, I've learned about anti-inflammatory diets, water exercise that takes the stress off the joints, the importance of rest, the benefits of juicing and I try to limit physical and emotional stress. I've tried acupuncture, herbal remedies, specific vitamins, minerals and supplements, I practice meditation and even though I occasionally have "stinking thinking" where I feel overwhelmed, negative and angry, most of the time I can come back to center with gratefulness for the things I can do, remembering how blessed I am in so many ways. Always, I acknowledge and respect the oneness of body, mind and spirit and I recognize my connection to all things.

Even with these healthy lifestyle choices, every day has its share of struggles, that's the meaning of "chronic." What I experienced in the five day workshop, learning about Qigong and The Promise of Healing Qi was nothing short of miraculous! It was like inviting the conductor to the stage to manage my symphony orchestra.

In the simplest of ways, I understand the principle of qigong to mean that if the body is relaxed, it can do the job of healing itself. If I picture the meridians of the body as rivers that bring healing, and pain or stress as the rocks in the rivers that block the flow, I can see that qigong is the method of discovering these blocks and helping me to move them along.

By Thursday, the fourth day of our workshop, I walked up the hill to class all by myself with only a brief pause. The last set of stairs was a challenge and I used the breath and rhythm of Walking Qigong to manage the final climb. I moved my body more in five days, pain free, than I had in many years, feeling old aches and pains leaving my body. I'm not sure what took me so long to discover qigong, I suppose my orchestra was still tuning up, waiting for the conductor to arrive. I'm grateful and thrilled to be at the beginning path of this life changing work.

As I said to Jessica on our last day of class, "I feel like every cell in my body has a happy face on it!"

*Developed by Dr. Roger Jahnke