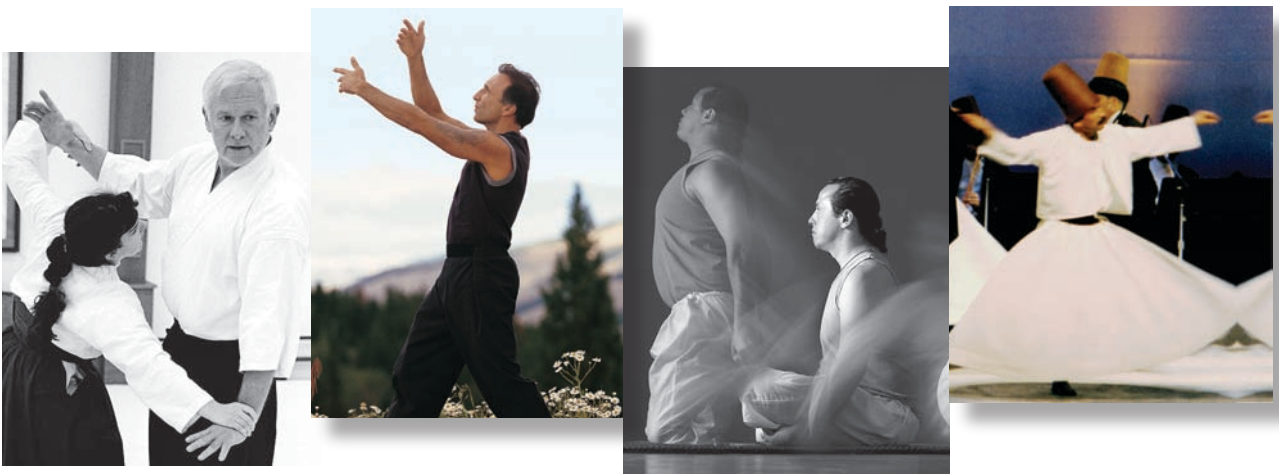


Postures & Movements

Yoga is not the only form of moving meditation.



Aikido: The Art of Peace

BY JOHN STEVENS

WHEN I FIRST SAW aikido being practiced, I was enticed by its graceful, elegant movements. There was none of the hard contact or the ungainly grappling associated with other martial arts. The movements seemed fluid and seamless, and it was difficult to discern who was the attacker and who was the defender as the two partners executed the techniques and their motions blended together. The techniques, I later learned, are based on three principles: circular movement to neutralize an attack, triangular entry to the side or behind an attack to avoid its force, and square control of an attack by using one's four limbs to pin a partner. In aikido, before an attacker lands a strike or gets a firm hold, his or her partner is already moving out of harm's way.

Aikido is the "way of harmony," founded by the great Japanese master Ueshiba Morihei (1883–1969). Morihei was a peerless martial artist, famed for his ability to down any number

A look at some other traditions that join body and mind in transcendent movement.

of attackers. But he was primarily known as a man of peace, a “spiritual warrior.”

In his youth, Morihei was obsessed with physical strength. While he was not a tall man, he was built like a tank, and with his prodigious stamina and energy he could overpower any opponent. One day, finally, he was completely stymied by a martial artist named Sokaku Takeda, a tiny gremlin of a man who relied on the power of *ki* (spiritual force) to subdue challengers. Sokaku’s martial art mastery awakened Morihei to the truth that real power transcends physical strength.

Morihei trained under Sokaku in Hokkaido for a number of years, but he remained troubled in spirit. “There must be more than technique involved in the martial arts,” he thought. Then, on a trip home to visit his dying father, Morihei had a fortuitous encounter with Deguchi Onisaburo, the grand shaman of the new Omoto-kyo religion.

Omoto-kyo is primarily Shinto in approach, but it also combines elements of Daoism, Buddhism, and Christianity. One of the fundamentals of its creed is that all human endeavors—including farming, martial arts, and fine arts—should be works of the spirit. Onisaburo himself was one of the greatest Japanese artists of modern times—a calligrapher, painter, potter, sculptor, poet, playwright, director, actor, and archer. Onisaburo’s Omoto-kyo teachings opened Morihei eyes to the spiritual dimension of life, particularly to the concept of *misogi*, “purification of body and mind.” *Misogi*, an ancient Shinto ritual often performed in waterfalls or the ocean, is used to cleanse the body and mind, returning one to an original state of purity. Morihei made the concept of *misogi* central to his martial arts practice.



John Stevens performing an aikido technique from a seated position.

In the spring of 1925, Morihei had an enlightenment experience: “Suddenly the earth trembled. Golden vapor welled from the ground and engulfed me...I saw the entire Earth as my home, and the sun, moon, and stars as my intimate companions.”

Morihei went on to become the most famous martial artist of the twentieth century, revered in Japan and abroad as O’Sensei, the Great Master. In 1942, he formally established aikido, the name he selected for his art. He described it this way:

Aikido is a way to promote love and goodness among humankind. Aikido follows the dictates of heaven, is free of conflict, and continually manifests freshness and vitality. The world will



Above: Stevens executing the kaiten-nage technique with partner Peter Abrahamsen. In aikido, the aim is to perform techniques that are true (effective), good (no one gets hurt), and beautiful (lovely to behold).

Right: Stevens demonstrating a “breakfall.” His training partner here is Anna Schneider, whose blindness did not prevent her from earning a black belt in aikido.



continue to change dramatically, but fighting and war can destroy us. What we need are techniques of harmony, not contention. The Art of Peace is required, not the Art of War.

Morihei wisely prohibited any kind of competitive matches or juried contests in aikido. Each and every practitioner takes turns practicing the techniques—which stress *ki* blending, timing, breath power, and smooth, flowing movements over brute strength—to gain experience being the “winner” and “loser.” Since there are no organized competitions in aikido, men and women, young and old, train together. Training with all kinds of people—some very strong, some not; some flexible, some stiff; some tall, some short—and learning how to apply just the right amount of movement and control is an invaluable lesson in how to deal with different kinds of personalities.

The emphasis in aikido is on “crossing the goal line together, hand in hand.” We train not to learn how to win; we train to learn how to emerge victorious in any situation. And the enemy we need to defeat is not an opponent who faces us but the demons of hatred and contention within. Morihei stated that it was not necessary to perform *misogi* in a waterfall if you practiced aikido. The techniques themselves are vehicles of transformation, and sincere practice will bring out the best in you by uniting your spirit with that of the Divine.

JOHN STEVENS is a professor of Buddhist studies and an aikido instructor at Tohoku Fukushi University in Sendai, Japan. He has written more than thirty books on various aspects of Asian culture and is one of the world’s leading authorities on the practice and philosophy of aikido.

Trulkhor: The Magical Movement of Tibet

BY M. ALEJANDRO CHAOL

TRULKHOR, OR “MAGICAL WHEEL” or “magical movement,” is a distinctive Tibetan practice of physical yoga in which breath and mental concentration are integrated with particular body movements. In contrast to Indian styles of yoga, in which the practitioner aims to hold a pose with the body still and the breath flowing naturally, in trulkhor the practitioner holds the breath still while the body moves in such a way as to guide the breath, which in turn guides the mind.

Tibetan religious traditions have employed trulkhor as part of their spiritual training since at least the tenth century. Although trulkhor is found in all five Tibetan spiritual traditions, it is most prevalent in the Kagyu, Nyingma, and Bon schools. While trulkhor may have been practiced much earlier and preserved only as an oral tradition, written texts point to the practice of trulkhor by famed yogis of the eleventh through thirteenth centuries such as Marpa, Naropa, and Drugyalwa Yungdrung, among others.

Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, who teaches trulkhor at his Ligmincha Institute, says, “Trulkhor is a wonderful daily practice, especially to control and handle the stress of our modern life in society. It has the power to balance the energies of mind and body, and it also helps enormously to support one’s meditation practices.” Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche, who teaches trulkhor under the Sanskrit name of *yantra yoga* through his Dzogchen community, describes the practices as a tool to understand one’s own true nature more clearly.

Within trulkhor there are practices that work specifically with the energetic or subtle body. This is composed of channels (Sanskrit: *nadis*), vital breath currents (*prana*), and essential spheres (*bindus*), providing the landscape where the mind and the physical body connect with each other. The Bön *Mother Tantra*, among other tantric texts, explains that the mind rides on the vital breath (or energy) currents like a rider on a horse, and the two travel together through the pathways of the channels. As the breath

circulating in the channels becomes more balanced, the channels become increasingly pliable, allowing the vital breath currents to find their own comfortably smooth rhythm.

Put simply, our physical body, energy, and mind are said to be the three doors through which one can practice and eventually realize enlightenment. Therefore, trulkhor can be understood as movements that guide the energy linking the mind with the gross and subtle bodies. This brings internal or even mystical experiences and transformation to the practitioner. Also, with the help of movements that guide the mind and vital breath currents into different areas, the practice brings the possibility of healing the body-energy-mind system, which is the model of good health in Tibetan medicine.

Until recently, Westerners were focused on receiving Tibetan teachings that develop the mind, but in the last five years there has been a growing interest in Tibetan physical yogas. While traditionally these practices were taught and practiced only after the student had undergone many years of meditation training, some Tibetan masters now teach it more openly, like many other meditative practices, yet with the appropriate supervision. Other teachers maintain the secrecy of the higher trulkhor practices.

Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche has based much of the trulkhor practice he teaches on the ancient *Mother Tantra*. You can find a very good explanation of these teachings in his book *Healing with Form, Energy and Light*. Ligmincha Institute offers training

specifically on trulkhor that consists of four five-day retreats over a two-year period. Over the last five years, Ligmincha Institute has been collaborating with the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston to design and implement a Tibetan Yoga program for cancer patients, utilizing the *tsa lung trulkhor* from the Bön tradition. Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche follows the trulkhor of Vairochana's *Union of Sun and Moon*, on which he has written a commentary that will soon be published in English. Other

teachers of Tibetan physical practices in the West include Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso, who teaches both public and advanced practices, and Lama Norlha of Kagyu Thubten Choling monastery, where trulkhor is taught only as part of the three-year retreat.

These physical yogas from Tibet have come to the West, as most Buddhist teachings have, through the needs of students. Feeling that mind practices lacked the "embodiment" aspect, many felt the need of physical movement with a spiritual component. Unaware of the existence of Tibetan yoga, or unable to meet the strict requirements

for receiving the practices, they turned to hatha or other Indian yogas. Now that many trulkhor practices are available to Western students, it seems that the magical wheel is turning.

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Alejandro Chaoul demonstrating trulkhor exercises

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL SEXTON



Francesco Garripoli and his wife, Daisy, practicing qigong together.

Qigong: The Way of Healing

BY FRANCESCO GARRI GARRIPOLI

THE WORD *QIGONG* is made up of two Chinese characters. The first, *qi*, has a similar meaning to *prana* in Sanskrit and can be roughly translated as “life force energy.” The second character, *gong*, means “practice,” “work,” or “discipline.” So qigong describes the various ancient Chinese practices that work with qi. Qigong offers a powerful pathway to self-healing, because to truly heal we must honor body, mind, and spirit.

There are many forms of qigong. Some require you to sit quietly in a cross-legged position, some require you to lie on your back, and still others require you to stand motionless with your legs slightly bent. Typically, all qigong forms involve gentle movement and stretching that complement focused breathing and visualization.

The Swimming Dragon is a favorite qigong form of mine, one I learned from an old master in China. To practice it, stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, your knees slightly bent, and your shoulders relaxed. Reach out with your right hand, first to the right side, slightly behind you at hip level, then in front of you. Next, as if you were scooping something in, draw your hand toward the area just below your navel. Do the same with your left hand, and then alternate right and left. Breathe out as your right hand moves away from

your torso, and inhale as it moves in toward your belly. As the movement continues, one hand will move toward you as the other is moving away; this honors the balance of yin and yang. As you get comfortable with this movement, turn your torso to the side that your hand is reaching toward in order to enhance the stretch and the qi flow.

Do the Swimming Dragon for at least five minutes. Throughout, visualize your connection to the qi energy all around you, infinitely present. With each breath, see in your mind’s eye how you move through energy, how you *are* energy, and how you can enhance your physical connection with this life force by the way you shift your thinking.

The Swimming Dragon reflects the Daoist view of nature as the supreme teacher. Many Daoist qigong movements mimic the movements of animals, both real and imaginary. The ultimate spiritual goal in Daoism is immortality; thus, Daoist-influenced qigong emphasizes strengthening the body toward that end.

Buddhism has given birth to various qigong styles. Because Buddhists regard the body as secondary to the mind, the focus here is on meditation and entering into a compassionate connection with oneself and all things.

Various forms of Buddhist qigong also involve movement, recognizing that in order to have the strength to reach enlightenment, individuals must be physically healthy.

In China, Buddhism and Daoism are not competing philosophies but two complementary pillars. Many knowledgeable qigong masters have embraced both Buddhist and Taoist qigong, incorporating what they consider to be the best aspects of both.

Da Mo, or Bodhidharma, the Indian monk who is credited as being the spiritual father of Zen, was the best-known Buddhist to teach movement-based qigong. During the Liang dynasty (502–557 CE), Da Mo went to the Shaolin Temple in Honan province, where he found the monks to be weak and sickly. It is said that after pondering their illness for nine years, he wrote two qigong classics, *Yi Jin Jing* and *Xi Sui Jing*.

In the past, many qigong forms were considered too difficult for ordinary people to practice, and training methods were kept secret from all but a few disciples in each generation. Today qigong has become a common practice for the general population, and millions of people in China and around the world practice countless qigong styles.

FRANCESCO GARRI GARRIPOLI is the author of *Qigong: Essence of the Healing Dance* and the director/producer of the PBS TV documentary “*Qigong: Ancient Chinese Healing for the 21st Century*.” www.kahunavalley.org



Wherever You Turn: The Mevlevi Whirling Ceremony

BY KABIR HELMINSKI

Wherever you turn, there is the Face of God.

—QUR'AN SURAH BAQARA 2:115

ALTHOUGH PRACTICES of whirling, especially among the peoples of Central Asia, have existed from time immemorial, it was the thirteenth-century Sufi saint and poet Jalaluddin Rumi and his lineage, the Mevlevi Order, who developed whirling into a form of spiritual training and a high art.

Whirling, which requires an inner emptiness and a heightened awareness, is not a trance but an exercise of mindful presence and an act of service. While whirling, the student, or dervish, is conscious of several things at once: pure awareness uncluttered by thought, harmony with the other participating dervishes, an inner connection with the sheikh who is leading the ceremony, and a conscious opening of the heart to the Divine.

The basic form of whirling is this: the right foot is lifted up to the knee and returned to the same place from which it was first lifted, while the left foot and leg become the axis on which the whole body revolves. The body revolves 360 degrees in a counterclockwise direction, and with each revolution the name *Allah* is pronounced inwardly. The

arms are extended with the right palm turned upwards, receiving Divine grace, and the left palm facing downwards, bestowing on the earth the Divine energy, which passes through the heart. Beginning dervishes must dedicate themselves to practicing this basic form before they can partake in a ceremony.

The ceremony begins when the sheikh and dervishes walk majestically around the ceremonial space three times in a procession. Then, at a specific point on the circle they bow to each other, face-to-face, essence-to-essence. They are reenacting the journey of life, the progression from mineral, to vegetable, to animal, to human, and, finally, to a state beyond ego in which they are “resurrected” by Love.

The bulk of the ceremony is divided into four sessions of whirling, approximately ten minute long, called *selams*. The first selam ends when the music stops. The dervishes halt, facing the sheikh. The movement is so quick that their billowing skirts wrap around their legs as they bow. The dervishes do a second selam, similar to the first but accompanied by different music. Then they do a third and most ecstatic selam, which represents union with the Divine. The third selam begins when the sheikh steps forward and silently recites a prayer:

*May Allah grant you total soundness, O travelers on the Way of Love.
May the Beloved remove the veils from your eyes and
reveal to you the secrets of your time and of the true center.*

In the fourth and final selam the dervishes cluster around the sheikh, who is now for the first time revolving slowly in the center. This selam represents receiving one's selfhood back, but now with a whole new state of being. It ends when a recitation of the Qur'an begins.

The whirling ceremony is one important facet of a way of life designed to maximize Divine remembrance, which in Islam is considered the highest of all human activities. The ceremony is typically offered once a week in a Mevlevi *tekke*, or center. It is preceded by spiritual conversation and discussion (*sohbet*), similar to what Hindus call *satsang*. This is followed by *salaat*, the ritual prayer of



Islam, performed at five specified times during the day. Then there is *Zikr* (chanting the name of God) and the whirling ceremony itself. Immediately after the ceremony, the dervishes meditate for as long as their other obligations permit, sometimes late into the night.

The whirling ceremony of the Mevlevi serves two main functions. First, it strengthens the bonds of affection and respect within the community of seekers. More importantly, it serves as a means for communion with the Divine, developing in individuals the capacity to be in touch with spiritual reality in the midst of the most demanding activities of everyday life.

The goal of Mevlevi training, including whirling, is to beautify and spiritualize the self through cultivating various artistic and intellectual skills and practicing service and contemplation. For more than seven hundred years the Mevlevi Order has been a crucible of transformation, giving birth to a highly refined aesthetic culture and providing a spiritual discipline that has brought many souls to human maturity. ♦

KABIR HELMINSKI is a sheikh of the Mevlevi Order, the translator of several volumes of Rumi, and the author of two books on Sufi spirituality. He has led the whirling in ceremonies around the world.