

Walking Qigong

*The journey of a thousand miles
begins with the first step.*



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Introduction

The soles of our feet touch the ground, bridging the connection between body and earth. When we connect our feet with the earth more mindfully, we change regular walking to a qigong practice that becomes a source of inner transformation. The secret of qigong is to use our posture, breath, and creative imagination to commune with the natural energies around us and focus them internally. This in turn nourishes our own life force, calms the mind and creates an internal alchemy that enhances our ability to heal and strengthens balance in our bodies, brains and our lives.



Walking qigong methods keep our physical foundation strong and flexible and improve coordination. In addition, each walk benefits an internal organ system and can help heal disease. It takes a balance and coordination between the ground, soles, feet, legs and pelvis to move in an efficient way. Just as a strong house is built on a firm foundation, a strong and energetic body has its foundation in the way it connects to the ground.

When practiced regularly, walking qigong can create an inner resilience and creativity in mind and body that we can tap into in times of stress or illness. Emotional well-being is generated as awareness is centered on the body and in the moment. When our minds and bodies feel stronger, our actions can become more purposeful, and our satisfaction with life increases.

Most of the walks described here, unless noted, come from the Jin Jing Gong tradition of qigong. The lineage holder of Jin Jing Gong is Master Wang Qingyu who lives in Sichuan China. I had the opportunity and honor of learning these walks from Master Wang both in China in 1994 and in the US. I continued my study with Heiner Fruehauf, Ph.D., LAc who is the founder of the Classical Chinese Medicine program at the National University of Natural Medicine in Portland Oregon where I got my acupuncture and qigong training.

Jin Jing Gong Qigong

Jin Jing Gong Qigong is translated as Channels and Sinews Qigong. The numerous forms in this school open the meridian (channels) and stimulate healing energy in the body by stretching the tendons and fascia (sinews) and making them strong and flexible. When you focus on stretching, the muscles and joints also benefit. The movements are structured and there is a specific breathing pattern with each one.

Jin Jing Gong forms blend active and strong movements with resting and soft ones to balance the yang and yin of the body. In addition to its healing benefits, Jin Jing Gong forms have martial qualities like intensely drawing in, or harvesting qi, and storing it below the navel center in the lower dantian. These practices are designed to “nourish life,” which means increase and harmonize energy, endurance and function in body, mind and spirit.

For more about Daoist Medicine and Jin Jin Gong go to:

<http://www.classicalchinesemedicine.org>

What is Qi?

This little word communicates a big concept that is fundamental to life and to the practices in this book. The word qigong is made of qi and gong. Gong means practice, training or discipline. Qi is the very movement, vitality and infinite potentiality of life. We call it energy, but that translation does not do it justice or bring it to life, which is what we need to do in our practice.

The qi of a rose is not only the texture of its petals and stem. It is its color and the way we can see it with our eyes. Qi is its scent and the way that aroma travels to our noses. It's the intelligent movement that allows the petals to blossom and absorb the sunlight. Qi is the attraction we feel for the beauty of that rose and the movement we use to approach it, touch it, smell it. It's the cascade of inner change that happens in our bodies when that scent enters, and we relax and smile. It's the appearance of thoughts and memories we associate with roses.

In the words of Elizabeth Rochat De La Vallee, scholar of classical Chinese philosophy, “Therefore heaven and earth and all that is between them, everything that may envelope them and all beings and phenomenon existing between them, are just specific manifestations of qi which exist for a while. If it is an emotion it is for today. If it is a mountain it is for longer. Eventually we have the vision that everything is qi...” *A Study of Qi in Classical Texts*, Monkey Press 2013

So, when you commune with and “harvest qi” in your walking practice, feel it come to life in your body, breath, movements and thoughts. Enjoy being a part of this wild, mysterious and precious life.

Spectrum of Practice

The scope of your practice depends on the focus of your attention. It can be a strengthening physical exercise, a personal therapy, and a prayer. It can be an opening to feel a peaceful oneness with life and the subtle yet profound way that the presence of life is always with us operating in the background of our experience. The practice itself expands your senses and your awareness and so it can be all of these.

Often, I like to do qigong forms in a vigorous way and feel my body respond. At other times what nourishes me is to practice in a soft way with meaningful images that open my heart and speak to my inner longings. Then my practice becomes a form of personal therapy and a symbolic, intuitive dance that helps me transform situations in a positive way. I relate some of the imagery I use in the section that describes each walk. I invite you to practice and see what it becomes for you.

Ocean Walk and Mantra Walk are examples of forms that are not directly from Jin Jing Gong and came out of other experiences. Mantra Walk uses sacred sound for physical healing. The last section called Walk Your Path, is an integration of the walks and Five Element wisdom. This is an example of qigong as personal therapy that can bring resourceful creativity to situations and relationships that need transformation. It is not part of Jin Jing Gong but demonstrates a way to make your practice your own and let it grow you.

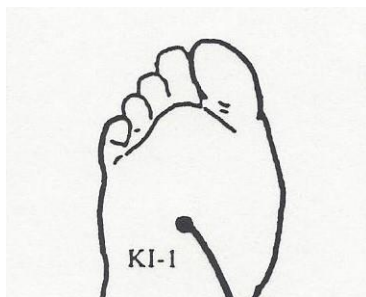
Walking Methods

Foot Pattern for All Walking Methods

The walking movements are simple, and your focused awareness makes them powerful. Find a comfortable pace that helps you stay balanced on each leg in its turn. Let each step establish an intentional relationship with the earth.

All the walks have the same foot pattern. The differences come with how we move our arms and torso, and the internal imagery associated with each walk. As with all exercise methods, warm up movements like shaking, joint rotation and stretches are recommended to do before you start walking.

As you lift one foot, do it deliberately. Grasp crisply with your toes and dorsiflex your foot. Imagine you are sharply pulling up a weed between your big and second toes. This opens an important acupuncture point on the sole of the foot called Kidney 1 and “Bubbling Spring.” It is in the center and just under of the pad. Bubbling Spring is a portal for drawing energy into your body.



The visualization is that we are pulling up and harvesting earth qi and storing it in the energy center below the navel, called the lower dantian. The intentional pulling up movement also stimulates the meridians and blood circulation in the foot and lower leg and gets the body moving and flowing.

Glide your foot forward and slightly to the side. Place it on the earth putting weight first on heel and then toes.

Here's how Heiner Fruehauf describes it:

The standard way of all the walks is to not only go down with the knees a bit, but arc outwards a bit for better balance and mingmen activation. This stepping to the side procedure shouldn't be exaggerated, however, just a little bit will do.



The wider step helps you maintain balance and move from the mingmen which is described below. Bend the knee and keep it over your foot. Avoid collapsing the knees inward as you step. Spread your toes out to further stimulate your feet and create more support for balance. Shift your weight onto that foot and then move the arms as described for each walk. Pull up with the other foot in the same way.



In the Storing, Cat and Eagle Walks, if your balance is unsteady, the leg can be raised just a little, so the tips of the toes touch the ground. Otherwise raise your knee in front of you until its parallel to the ground. You can gradually increase the time that your foot is in the air to practice balancing on one leg.

Relax your abdomen and pelvis and lengthen your low back when you lift your leg. With practice you can bend the knee of the standing leg slightly and drop down a little like you are going to sit in a chair. Keep the low back long and tailbone towards the ground. This creates a vacuum like effect in the pelvis and allows a deeper breath and a place to fill with fresh qi.

Move from the Mingmen

Ming Men is an acupuncture point (GV4) that is on the spine approximately behind the navel and technically between the 2nd and 3rd lumbar vertebra. Its name translates as Vital Gate or Life Gate. The energy center associated with Ming Men is on the inside of the spine at this level. If you hold your

abdominal muscles firm and direct your inhale to your low back, you will feel the Ming Men (mingmen) area.

During qigong and martial arts practices attention to the mingmen is considered very important and strengthening. Movements should originate here. This is especially true in side-to-side walking styles. Move from the mingmen then up to the shoulder blades which then move the arms and hands. When we stretch up and down like in Cat and Eagle walks, feel your whole spine stretch and especially above and below the Ming Men. Practice this kind of moving during the walks and notice its centering and strengthening effect for your low back.

Replenish Lower Dantian and Vital Essence

In qigong walking we gather or “harvest” qi and store it in the lower dantian with our movement, breath and visualization. In qigong philosophy, the lower dantian is a significant center of creative energy located approximately two inches below the navel in the front to center of the body. It is like the front side of the mingmen.

The lower dantian is the root of the “original” yin and yang we received before birth and the home of the vital essence called jing. The symbol for the yin, or original water, which is used in qigong practice is an ocean of qi in the belly. Life originates in the ocean. The yin of the body includes the tissue of the body, our blood, hormones, reproductive organs and other fluid substances.

The yang of the body includes our warmth, energy, movement and consciousness. Its like our inner sun and is often visualized in qigong practice as a condensed ball of sunlight in the lower dantian. A strong body with a balance of yin and yang is the basis for a strong mind and spirit. In a symbolic way, it is said that the warmth of the inner sun steams up the yin fluids to nourish mind and spirit. Even today we realize that mental health starts with the balanced vitality of the “microbiome” of the gut.

Jing, or vital essence, is both yin and yang. Yin because it is considered a subtle substance that develops the body in utero and beyond. Yang

because it is a condensed form of cosmic vitality. You can think of jing as the intelligence of the DNA which develops and maintains the body. As we live and age, we use jing essence. Too much activity (yang) without enough rest and good food (yin) exhausts the jing and we age quickly. Some of the ways we can replenish our stores of yin, yang and jing are with qigong walking, focused breathing exercises, meditation, beneficial diet and rest.

Flex the Spine

The walking styles fall into two types: those in which we move from side-to-side and those where we extend up and down. The side-to-side walks create a gentle spinal twist and the up and down walks flex and extend the spine and neck. The spine houses our central nervous system and has its own circulation and energy channels. Spinal health and flexibility determine how easily we can move and how vital and youthful we look and feel. Combining one or two of each in one walking session gives a balanced feel to your practice and your body.

Walking Styles

Storing Walk



Storing walk is the basic form of walking that can be done on its own and returned to between a sequence of other qi walks to help you relax and

integrate. It is designed to strengthen and revitalize the lower torso and legs to help with movement and balance. This walk benefits the reproductive organs and bladder in the pelvis, and revitalizes the lower dantian.

Walk with the foot pattern described above and hold your hands in the position shown below. As you walk, use your creative imagination to help you gather qi from the earth and store it in the lower dantian.

Hand Position

Curl your fingers into the palms of your hands and place your thumb over the cuticle of your index finger. This closes the palm and ensures that no energy is lost through the hands, so all energy is stored. Breathe naturally and keep your shoulders relaxed. There should be a little space under your armpits.



Proceed Mindfully and Enjoy Each Step

Each Step If you like you can imagine that you move one, ten, or even 1,000 miles with each step over vast and beautiful terrain. Master Wang says to walk 200 steps in each walking style. This way you really feel the effect. You can work up to this amount gradually. When you finish a walk, stop and be mindful of how your mind and body feel. If you do multiple walks in one practice, as in Walk Your Path, you can adjust the number of steps in each according to your time and energy level.

One way to turn any walk into walking qigong is to change your focus. Bring your awareness to the present moment and use creative imagination to gather qi, replenish your core and bring a smile to your heart and mind.

Yin Yang Walk

Yin Yang walk is great for coordination and balance. It opens the chest and upper back. The yin yang symbol represents the balance of opposites. Healing journeys often involve balancing opposites in our lives like rest and activity, giving and receiving, feeling confident or insecure. During this walk you can imagine the yin yang symbol on the ground in front of you and the movement of your arms trace this circle.

See the video: <https://vimeo.com/347670196>



In this walk the step is the same as Storing Walk. Start with your hands resting at your waist. Women start on the right and men on the left as in all the walks and Jin Jing Gong practices.

Inhale and lift your right (or left foot) and as you place it on the ground extend the arm and hand on the same side in front of you at waist level. Your hand is flat, palm down and fingers extended. Focus your attention on the middle finger and fingertips of your hand. Extend your arm out in front of you and around to the right side of your body, almost behind you, and then return it to your waist. Remember to move from the mingmen and let that move your shoulder blades which move your arms.

The movement looks like you are gliding your hand over the landscape. Visualize that you collect earth vitality (harvest qi) with your hand to replenish the storehouse of vitality in the energy center in the low belly, also called the lower dantian. During this time the opposite hand rests at the waist at the top of your hip. Most of the movement of your arm comes from turning at your waist. Keep your mind focused at the mingmen. Exhale and repeat on the other side, palm down. Inhale with the first step and exhale with the second. After a time switch the inhale and exhale to the opposite side.

When I saw Master Wang demonstrating this walk he had a laser like focus on his middle finger and fingertips and was intent on his mission of harvesting qi. I could really see the martial artist in action.

Variation 1: The movement of your arms is the same, but now one palm is down and the other is up. With the first step extend the palm that is down and with the second step the palm is up. **Always inhale with the palm that is down and exhale with the palm that is up.** Walk several steps like this and then stop momentarily. When you commence again start on the opposite side (so for women the left and men the right). First step palm is down, and you inhale. Second step palm is up, and you exhale. The upward palm is gathering energy from the sky. I like to visualize that I collect vitality with the palm that is down and offer it back to life with the palm that is up in a gesture of both giving and receiving.

Variation 2: Start as in variation one. For women start on the right. With the first step the palm is down, inhale. On the left the palm is up and exhale. Men the opposite. Do two rounds in this way and then pause momentarily. Turn palms over and then begin on the left with the left palm down, inhale and exhale on the right with the right palm up. Men the opposite. Repeat this as you walk, changing after two sets of steps. The quicker change in this variation is great for right-left coordination and balance.

Yin Yang Palm flows well with Soft Ball Step and Cloud Hands walks which are explained below, so they can be nicely combined in one walking practice session.

Soft Ball Step Walk



Now we will open the solar plexus and chest and massage the organs of digestion located under the ribs. Keep the same walk and let your arms transition to holding a ball of qi in front of your navel and solar plexus. Palms face each other as you hold the ball of energy. Inhale as you scoop up your right foot and step to the right (or left for men) with your right arm on top of the ball and roll the ball to the right side of your body. As you roll the ball your right arm slides under it and your left arm is on top. Experiment letting the ball be large or small.

See the video: <https://vimeo.com/346764915>

Scoop up your left foot and as you place it, exhale and move the ball to your left side with the left hand on top of the ball. Continue back and forth in this manner. After a while reverse your breathing. Enjoy!

I heard a story about a qigong master who could cook an egg between his hands with the energy he generated while doing this walk!

At times I like to visualize the ball of energy as the planet earth and my hands as the hands of the universe holding and healing our planet. At other times I let the ball represent issues I'm dealing with and ask universal intelligence to enlighten me. See what comes to you.

Right Left Cloud Hands Walk



We will transition our walk so that we further open the chest and breast area and expand the breath. This meditative walk benefits the lungs, opens the heart, exercises the eyes and calms the mind.

See the video: <https://vimeo.com/346764241>

As you scoop up your right foot, raise your right arm in front of you so that your fingers point up to the sky and your palm looks at your face at eye level. Your eyes have a soft gaze and focus on the middle crease in your fingers. Your left hand faces your belly below your navel, guarding your lower dantian. As you place your right foot, inhale and gracefully move your right arm to your right side pivoting at the waist and mingmen. Turn as far as is comfortable. Your arm is like a cloud that moves gently across the sky.

When you are fully turned to the right, smoothly lower your right arm and let your left arm begin to rise with fingers pointing to the sky. As you scoop up and place your left foot, exhale and begin to move your arms across your body to the left side and turn as far as possible, with the right hand guarding the lower dantian. Repeat in this way right and left. After some time change your breathing so you inhale on the left and exhale on the right.

As a meditation, associate your mind with the vast blue sky and let your thoughts be like the clouds that move through. Let the thoughts pass and deepen into the peacefulness at the heart of your experience.

Ocean Walk



Graceful Ocean Walk* benefits the organs of the pelvis namely the intestines, bladder and reproductive organs. You move as if clearing a path through the water. This walking practice also strengthens our sense of being centered and grounded in the body. Use your creative imagination to visualize that as you move through the water you wash away toxins and disease, leaving the inner organs rejuvenated.

See the video: <https://vimeo.com/347440907>

We use the same foot movements as above and combine them with hand movements that switch from side to side and are coordinated with the breath.

Start with arms at your sides. Pull up your right foot and as you place it on the ground, bend both knees to your comfort level, inhale and move both of your arms to the right and behind as far as you can while turning at your waist. Both palms face right and are like paddles moving deeply through water.

Imagine walking through the ocean and moving the water to the side of you. On the other side, as you place your left foot, exhale and start to bring

both arms to the left. Move your arms all the way to the left and behind as you turn from your waist and mingmen. Continue right and left in this way. After walking for several minutes, reverse your breathing so that you inhale on the left and inhale on the right.

**Ocean walk is adapted from a style of qigong I learned from Gayl Hubatch, OMD, LAc.*

Microcosmic Orbit

Cat and Eagle are walks that emphasize moving up and down and stimulating the spine. This up and down movement stimulates the physical and subtle circulation in the spine. The energy pathways that flow up and down the center of the body are called the central channel.

The channel associated with the spine is called the Governing Vessel. The channel associated with the front centerline of the body is called the Conception Vessel. In qigong practice the energy in these channels are guided by mind and breath from lower belly to tailbone, tailbone to head, over the head and down the front centerline of the torso to lower belly (lower dantian).

One image is that there is an ocean in the belly (the ocean of qi). The waves from that ocean wash up the spine, over the head and back down in the front to return to the ocean in the belly. **The beauty of doing these walks is that this cycle is opened for you without thinking about it.**

Cat Walk



This walk is good for the spine and neck. It also benefits the lungs and is recommended for any lung problems. To take in extra oxygen you can take two quick inhales instead of one and then exhale deeply to release breath and toxins.

See the video: <https://vimeo.com/347667517>

While you raise one leg, raise both arms with wrists relaxed and fingers pointing downwards drawing energy from below with your hands as you are doing with your foot. Raise arms to chest level with elbows raised slightly and inhale. Curl your spine forward and stand for a moment balanced on one leg, like a cat who is poised to pounce. Keep your eyes focused on the ground a few feet in front of you like you are watching your prey.

As you step down, exhale and transfer your weight to that leg. Then press your palms firmly towards the ground and extend your fingers forward. Straighten your spine quickly and elongate your neck by keeping your chin down and raising from the crown of your head. You should feel a stretch from your tailbone and lumbar area (Ming Men) to the top of your head. As you raise your head, bite your teeth together as if you have caught your prey. Let a sound come as you exhale forcefully.

Keep your weight on the front leg as you scoop up the other foot. Spend a little time balancing on one leg if you can as you curl forward. Then place your foot and transfer your weight to that leg. Remember legs should be at least shoulder width apart and preferably out in a slight arc for better balance.

In the first part of the walk you are soft, curled and poised like a cat. Relax your abdomen. This pose allows the lower belly to fill with qi as you inhale. The second part is strong and quick. This opens the spine, loosens the neck and allows energy to move naturally from the lower dantian to the head to increase circulation there. When you again curl up and get ready to pounce, your awareness goes to the lower dantian and sends energy there. This cycles energy in the microcosmic orbit.

For both Cat and Eagle walk there is a focus on eyeing the prey and capturing it. Traditionally, that prey is qi. If you like, you can use your imagination to focus on a more personal issue. Perhaps it is something you want to accomplish. Maybe it is a solution to a problem you face. The focus and determination in these poses can help you see with new perspective and increase your determination.

Eagle walk



Eagle walk increases balance and helps you enjoy the feeling of flying and observing from above. The up and down movements stretch out the low back and are good for the kidneys. Arms and shoulders also benefit. With your right foot on the ground scoop up your left foot and keep it raised as you raise yourself up on your right toes as far as comfortable. Inhale and bring your arms up by the sides of your body as if they are wings and raise them high above your head. Imagine you are an eagle flying high. Enjoy the perspective. At the high point of your flight gaze at a point on the ground as if you see a mouse that you want to catch.

Then exhale and descend. Place your left foot on the ground with a slight arc to the side and transfer your weight to that leg. Bend your knees and squat down as far as you can. Bring your wings down and almost touch the ground in front of you with your fingertips. Stretch out your low back as if pressing your sacrum towards the sky. Feel the stretch between your low back and your fingertips. Then transfer your weight to the forward leg as you rise, scoop up your right foot and keep it up as you inhale and rise on the toes of your left foot. Raise your wings high into the sky then exhale and descend. Place your right foot on the ground, squat as low as you comfortably can and stretch from your low back to your fingertips. Repeat a few times. Stop when you get tired.

When you stop your walking practice stand for a few moments with your hands over your lower belly and allow your breathing to settle. Notice the

sensations in your body and enjoy the changes you feel. This is an important time to relax and let your body integrate the experience.

Walk Your Prayers: Mantra Walk

Mantra Walk is an exercise for those who want to amplify healing in an area of the body that is ailing or diseased. It wakes up the healing and regenerative force that is already within us and takes us out of the fear of being consumed by something we can't control. We do this by regaining trust and remembering that we are part of a much larger and benevolent universe with an infinite capacity to nourish and to heal. Illness is often a wakeup call, and with this walk we are waking up our cells to their innate capacity to heal and our minds and hearts to clarify their purpose in life. For this we are taking the help of a mantra. This is a great exercise to do to augment other methods you are using in your healing journey, and to be clear about the next steps in your path.

Mantra walk is not in the Jin Jing Gong tradition but came to me as a result of the practices I did when I was healing through cancer in 1999. During that time of my life there were many difficult decisions to be made. My life seemed torn by fear and yet I experienced great love. When I first did this practice I simply walked swiftly and with determination as I chanted the mantra that I explain below. I called it "my power walk" and it gave me calm, confidence, and clarity. At a meditation retreat in 2004 I extended this mantra walk to include all the organs of my body as I describe below. If you like this walk, use it as a healing method and personalize it to your own situation.

Find a place outdoors where you can walk comfortably and sing without feeling self-conscious. It could be around your house especially if you live in a rural area. It could be in your back yard or in a nearby park or at the beach. You can also walk in a circle either clockwise or counterclockwise.

In this walk, step naturally without the scooping gesture in the previous walks. Be aware of your feet and let the soles of your feet feel alive. Your hands can be in the storing walk position with your fingers curled into your palm and your thumb over the nail of your index finger, or your palms can

be open and turned up towards the sky. Let your arms feel relaxed and free.

Find Your Mantra

Remember a song, word, prayer or chant that helps you connect with a universal feeling of sacredness. Something that inspires and has meaning for you will work best to open your heart. For example, you can say the word love, truth, joy, peace or oneness. You can chant “om (aum).” You can sing a song or prayer from your place of worship or from your childhood.

The word mantra means that which liberates the mind. It liberates the mind by giving it a rhythmic sound to focus on which helps the mind slow down, focus and expand its awareness. Traditionally a mantra is coordinated with a slow and regular breath which further relaxes the mind and body.

Secondly, the mantra lifts the mind out of its everyday thinking habit and focuses the heart with its inspiring meaning. It is auto suggestion that reminds us of who we truly are. This takes us out of fear and into clarity about our purpose and direction. There is a yogic saying, “as you think, so you become.”

Thirdly, a mantra is also a word, phrase or prayer that has been sung or chanted by many people who are feeling uplifted, so it gives it a power in our minds and hearts.

In short, we want the mantra to slow and focus the mind and open the heart to universal healing, so we can embody a new sense of meaning and being. In this exercise we are infusing our cells with the healing power of these sacred sounds to enhance their innate ability to heal.

I internally repeat a mantra that has been with me for 30 years and comes from the Ananda Marga spiritual path. The words are “Baba Nam Kevalam.” It is a mantra that allows me to tune into feeling the greater presence of benevolence and love that is around, within and available to me. It reminds me that I become aware of the spaciousness of that inner reality through

body awareness, and with my heart which understands love through relationship.

The word “Baba” can mean father, but in this mantra refers to your innermost source of loving presence. It implies a personal relationship with the divine. “Nam” means *name* or *vibration* and “Kevalam” means *always, only or everywhere*. Many people have tried to translate this mantra, and it is difficult for words to express the deep resonance it can cultivate in the heart with practice. Perhaps the easiest translation is “All is love.”

The Secret to Success

Repeating sacred words and feeling their meaning has the power to transport us to expansive inner awareness and connect us with the real healing force which is life itself. The secret to this walk is to have the experience that your cells are singing the mantra. This is different from singing the mantra to your cells. Here the healing sound is coming from within and you are listening to it as well as expressing it verbally. Listen to the song of your cells that is telling you something very important.

This takes the ego out of it and allows the mystery of life to enter and come through. When you have the feeling that your cells are naturally full of life and love, your heart will feel great joy. This will brighten your mood, lighten your step, and heal your body.

A musician and yogic meditation teacher who inspires me with his music, teaching and work in the modern, corporate world is Dada Nabhaniilananda, aka the Monk Dude. Check out his website, www.themonkdude.com, and book: *Close Your Eyes and Open your Mind*, www.themonkdude.com/products/close-your-eyes-open-your-mind/. You can listen to him sing Baba Nam Kevalam and follow his guided meditations.

Personalize the Practice

Each of us has different ways of sensing so give yourself permission to let this walk be most healing for you. Connect to each part of your body in whatever way feels natural and easy. If you are a visual person, you may have colors or images come to mind during this practice. If you are more kinesthetic, you may enjoy moving your body and breathing while you feel an inner sense of love.

Have patience. At first you may feel you are singing or smiling at your heart or your lungs, filling them with healing vibration. This is a powerful practice. Gradually you develop a deeper connection to the actual organ in your body and imagine and sense that the cells themselves are singing and shining. If you don't know where the organs are in your body, follow the directions below and focus on the area in general. If you are interested, you can find a book that shows you pictures of your internal organs and their location.

The simplest way to effect healing is to picture or sense the body part or organ that is ailing and let it be saturated with healing light and sound.

Take it From the Top

This sequence follows a qigong practice called inner smiling which energizes the internal organs. As you walk and repeat or sing your sacred words, bring your awareness to each organ or body part. At first sing and smile at them and then listen to them sing to you. Spend extra time in the areas of your body that are ailing and/or need it the most.

- Start with your brain and your pituitary and pineal glands in the middle of your brain.
- Then your eyes. Let them soften, relax and feel rejuvenated.
- Go to your neck and thyroid gland, which is near your Adam's apple, and spend some time there.
- Move to your chest. Let your lungs and heart join in the melody. Your heart is on the left and your lungs span your entire chest from front to back and from your diaphragm to your shoulders.

- Under your lower ribs on the right is your liver and gall bladder and to the left is your spleen and pancreas. Directly behind them in your back behind the lower ribs are your kidneys.
- Then move to your intestines.
- Women can follow that by letting your ovaries, uterus and bladder in your lower pelvis resonate,
- Men can let their bladder and prostate vibrate with color and sound. Spend extra time at any organ system that is ailing.
- You can focus on joints or bones as well. Imagine all the joints or your bones glow brightly and the mind of each cell sing and fill with color and sweetness.

Finish by feeling that your spine is flexible and light from your tailbone to the top of your head. Let the palms of your hands and the soles of your feet feel open to the light of the moon and the sun, bringing their healing vibration.

Lie down if you can. Put the palms of your hands over your eyes and let them feel saturated with healing energy. Then rest your hands just below your navel and follow your breath for a few minutes. Relax into a sense of loving and being loved. Soften into a feeling of oneness with life.

Enjoy qigong walking as one more resource to help your life unfold. You can use it to strengthen your body and firm your physical foundation. You can use it to calm your mind and balance your emotions as an antidote to stress. And most importantly you can use it as a meditative practice that can help you feel the inner essence of who you are, a conscious, loving presence walking in the field of a conscious, abundant and beautiful universe.

*Cosmic Consciousness abides in one's sense of existence,
in one's very heart's desire.*

Shrii Shrii Anandamurti, founder of Ananda Marga

Walk Your Path

Five Element Walking to Guide Your Journey

If we do not walk, there is no path.

Master Liu, Path of the Good Person

The word walk here implies the conscious steps we take to grow in love for ourselves and others and transform closely held patterns that get in the way. In this chapter we will combine the walking qigong forms we've learned with a five-element orientation. This is an example of how your qigong practice can be a form of personal therapy and a symbolic, intuitive dance that helps transform situations in a positive way.

A physical practice like walking qigong done with a guiding philosophy like the law of the five elements can become a walking stick and signpost for clarity and direction. The qigong focuses the mind and clears the body and the five element philosophy provides a map of our bodymindspirit terrain. The law of the five elements, also called the five phases (of a cycle), comes out of the cosmology of old China. It describes the progression of the cyclic, seasonal flow of nature and thus the natural progression of movement in every cycle and situation in life.



There are countless associations with the five elements looking from different points of view. The ones I've noted here are based on some of the associations made in classical Chinese medicine, and the integration of five element philosophy and Confucian principles of relationship taught in the Path of the Good Person, or Shan Ren Dao. To find out more about Shan Ren Dao go to: www.classicalchinesemedicine.org

I experienced the power of Shan Ren Dao in a retreat I attended in China in 2010. It opened my eyes to how I could change to be a better daughter, mother, spouse and friend, and has had a lasting impact on my life.

In this practice, I will encourage you to start by considering a life situation, relationship or other question that you would like guidance on. As you proceed to metaphorically walk through a five element cycle, each element and walk can give you guidance about where you are in the process you are considering and clues about what to do next. This is like consulting the I Ching (Yijing), or the Book of Changes, which gives us guidance about the greater universal energies that influence our question. Here we are consulting our inner I Ching.

Consciousness and Intuition

We must assume that we are conscious beings in an inherently conscious universe, and we are an integral part of a great cosmic presence and intelligence. Consciousness and energy animate us. By doing a focused practice like this, we calm the mind, regulate the breath and can tap into the resourceful creativity and vitality that is always within us. So, as you practice, feel that you are aligning yourself more closely with the greater whole of life, and trust what comes to you

Be unconcerned if nothing comes to you immediately or with a dramatic or sudden flash of insight. It doesn't always work that way. Insights come in many ways and in their own time. You may find that an answer pops in your mind later while you are taking a shower. So, don't give up. Practice regularly and trust that an answer will come.

I have associated a walk (or in the case of Wood and Earth two walks) with each of the five elements according to my own sense of how they manifest the essence of that phase of the cycle. Other walks could easily be associated, and you may find after practicing the walks for a while that you prefer to choose a different one for any of the elements.

Aids to Walking and Blocks to Walking

For each walk and element, I have listed the strengths which are called aids to walking (our path), and those behaviors and complexes that interfere with walking and bringing through the clear energy of the element into our life situations and our relationships. These are the aspects to gently consider as you move.

I use the word gently because this practice is not meant to let thoughts dominate your practice, but to be a touchstone for awareness of new possibilities. Read through them before you start walking. You don't have to remember them all, some will naturally stand out each time as needed. These are cues and clues to spark your intuition and help you get the sense of the next steps for healing.

As you walk, affirm and feel the five element strengths in yourself. This relaxes your brain and nervous system and makes it easier to recognize and transform the limiting behaviors and emotions. Anger, fear, worry and your inner critic are backed by anxiety. We can more easily soothe ourselves, loosen these mental and emotional patterns and make other choices in the presence of the felt sense of our wholeness.

How to Proceed

Start with the Storing Walk and as you move, pose your question internally and ask for guidance. Proceed to the Eagle Walk related to the Wood element and the Spring season. Gently reflect on the qualities of the Wood element and feel them within you. Consider how embodying those strengths can help the situation you are asking about. Continue the walk for as long as seems right and transition back to the Storing Walk to let mind and body integrate the experience.

Then go to Cat walk, which I have also related to Wood, and proceed as above. Follow it with Storing Walk. Continue with each of the walks in the order listed below which follows the generative cycle of the five elements. The generative cycle describes how one element's energy supports or gives birth to the next.

When you finish Ocean Walk, related to the Winter season, you are at the end of the five element cycle. Complete with Storing walk for a short time and then stop. Place palm over palm on your lower dantian (between navel and pubic bone) and let your breath and energy settle there. Ask yourself what seems most important from the practice and how you can implement it.

After walking through the cycle, you may find that one element or walk really appeals to you and you want to do it more than the others, or you may want to do only that walk for a while until you get what is important about it. Go ahead and do what feels right. Make it your own practice.

I suggest writing your insights in a journal to further anchor them in your awareness and so you can read them again for inspiration. Journaling can help hidden insights come into awareness. Even if you start the journal and say *I'm not sure what to write*. The process of writing with the intention to let new information come can bring inner wisdom forward. Enjoy!

Storing Qi Walk and the Earth Element



Storing Walk is grounding and renewing so we can start with it while we internally voice our question and ask for guidance. It is one of the walks I associate with the Earth element, because it is focused on drawing energy from the earth and storing it in our lower dantian.

Earth element energy represents balance and a still point, so it is active during the transition between the end of one season and the beginning of the next. In our walking we will imitate that ritual of nature by returning to Storing Walk between each of the others.

Eagle Walk and the Wood Element



We start with the Wood element in our five-element journey because it expresses the assertive energy of new beginnings and Spring which bursts forth with clarity and direction. Eagles fly high and see a great distance, so let this walk help you see the big picture. Once we know where we are going, we can plan and execute the steps needed to get there. This is the strength of Wood. Fly high and swoop low to capture what you are after.

Strengths that aid walking:

- Emotional warmth like Spring
- Creative imagination and dreaming
- Starting and completing projects
- Planning and moving forward
- Growing straight like a tree
- Compassionate leadership

Behaviors and complexes that interfere with walking:

- Frustration and anger

- Being too timid and shy
- Impulsiveness
- Self-righteousness and rigidity

Cat Walk and the Wood Element



Like the eagle, a cat is also intent on catching its prey. A cat is poised and quiet as it waits for an opportunity and then pounces. Both animals have determination and move towards their goal in an assertive way. Eagle Walk and Cat Walk can compliment each other. With Eagle you get the bigger picture and with Cat you steadily move towards your goals one step at a time. Do Eagle first and then Cat as you consider the strengths and imbalances of Wood and how they give you guidance about your question.

Soft Ball Step Walk and the Fire Element



The Fire element expresses the energy of Summer when nature is in full bloom and the sun is prominent. Internally, Fire is our passion, inspiration and creative efforts that allow us to bloom and manifest. It is the power of relationship to manifest unity through love. The sun has always been a giver of life and a symbol of spirit. The Fire element also encompasses the spirit we truly are at heart because it is considered the home of Shen, or consciousness, which is the matrix for bodymindspirit wholeness.

As you walk, maintain the unity of the soft ball with your arms, palms and chest. Consider how the universe does this same thing with us and the entire creation. This includes your question.

Strengths that aid walking:

- Recognize the presence of Original light in all beings and circumstances
- Proceed with deep respect, especially for parents, elders and teachers
- Feel an inner joy of being
- Let yourself be inspired daily
- Lead and teach from an inner place of inspiration and optimism
- Laugh, especially when things are difficult
- Practice active listening and speak with authenticity and truthfulness

Behaviors and complexes that interfere with walking:

- Bitterness
- Jealousy
- Restless distraction and life dramas
- Self-absorption
- Long held anger, hatred, passive aggressive behavior
- Feeling entitled, superior and vain
- Held captive by old hurts and betrayals

Yin Yang Walk and the Earth Element



See the video: <https://vimeo.com/347670196>

Yin Yang Walk is the second walk I am associating with the Earth Element. In the Five Element generative cycle, Fire burns to create Earth. Therefore, as part of the seasonal cycle Earth is associated with Late Summer. The earth element and planet earth are central to our lives as human beings. Our bodies are our earth, and the soil of the earth is a symbol for the muscles that give form to our bodies.

In earliest times, Earth was associated with the center direction. It carries the energy of balance and stability that contains all the activities of our lives. Yin Yang Palm walk can help us achieve balance and harmony by reminding us to attend to the yin and yang opposites within us. These include but are not limited to activity and rest, focus and distraction, giving and receiving, containment and overwhelm. When you do this walk glide your palms over the earth and absorb its qualities and strengths. When you do variation 1 or 2, embody the sense of the balance of opposites and see how this guides your process.

Behaviors that support walking:

- Trust, trustworthiness, integrity
- Fertility
- Containment and healthy boundaries
- Take personal responsibility
- Empathy and encouragement
- Accept and give support
- Eat well and exercise
- Sing

Behaviors and complexes that interfere with walking:

- Doubt
- Worry
- Blame
- Mental obsession
- Over thinking
- Lack of Body Awareness

Left Right Cloud Hands Walk and the Metal Element



The Metal element expresses the energy of Autumn when nature is pulling herself back and beginning to send energy to her roots. It is a time of harvest and abundance. The light in Autumn has a special glow so there is

radiance in the air which is crisp and clear. Breathe it in and let it go. Precious metals grow within the earth. This adds to the radiant nature of Metal. Our inner radiance grows when we realize we are precious and have important gifts to share in our community.

Because the Metal element is associated with the lungs and the inhale and exhale of respiration, it represents our ability to discern. We can use our powers of discernment to accept life as it presents itself and let go of our expectations, personal agendas, judgments and criticisms that limit our ability to radiate our gifts in the community.

Let the cloud hands walk help you free your breath and open to accepting life as it is, without judgment and criticism. Just as clouds move effortlessly across the sky, let your thoughts float through your mind without getting attached to their story so the mind can feel peaceful and expansive.

Strengths that aid walking:

- Discernment
- Fairness and fraternity
- Service without personal interest
- Transparency
- Organization and precision
- Accept yourself and your limitations
- Understand what the real needs are

Behaviors and complexes that interfere with walking:

- Overly judgmental and critical
- False pride and arrogance
- Betray or split organizations or relationships
- Use words to gossip, cut, manipulate or constantly argue
- Unrealistic expectations and perfectionism

Ocean Walk and the Water Element



The Water element expresses the energy of Winter when nature is resting deep in her roots and germinating the seeds that will sprout the next spring. Water in nature is soft yet powerful. It sinks to the lowest ground, so it is humble. Water flows around obstacles in its path. Softness overcomes hardness by following its nature.

Let the Ocean Walk help you feel soft, harmonious, flowing and strong. You can move around obstacles with ease and the waters clear and refresh the internal organs in your abdomen.

Strengths that aid walking:

- Be humble and seek the lowest common ground
- Use softness to overcome hardness
- Enjoy craftsmanship, creativity and beauty
- Network with others and make positive connections
- Entertain the brilliant ideas that come from deep reflection
- Align your will and use your power to benefit others

Behaviors and complexes that interfere with walking:

- Feeling either inferior or superior
- Disdain

- Desire to dominate or come on too strong
- Feelings of victimization
- Shame
- Paralyzed by fear
- Spread fear and doctrinaire ideas

I hope the practices in this book inspire you to expand the scope of your awareness and offer your gifts to the world by using movement and intention to connect with your essential nature. They have certainly done that for me. I am forever grateful to my teachers and the other beautiful beings in my life. As we move together may we become a healing force for ourselves, others and our world.