

Walking With Qi: The Nine Jewels Of Qigong Walking By Jack Bray

Originally published in *The Empty Vessel*, Fall 2006. See www.abodetao.com

"I have two doctors, my left leg and my right."

George Trevelyan, 1913

"It is good to have an end to journey towards; but it is the journey that matters in the end."

Ursula K. LeGuin

"Good walking leaves no track behind it."

Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*

As the world's fastest racewalking gerontologist, I have discovered that blending Qigong movement and exercise has helped me stay healthy and maintain my world class ranking in my age group. Making new and beneficial Qigong walking exercises can be interesting and enjoyable; it is a challenge to creative people.

There are many names for walking with energy: qi walking, life walk, breathwalk, the dance of life. Whatever you may call it, walking makes you feel alive and full of energy. Any walking programs can enhance our vitality and energy in living our life.

Racewalking and Qigong walking have helped develop my own excellence in exercise and in life. There are many studies that have discussed the various aspects of walking that enhance health, energy and life.

For example, "recently Dr. Michael Gardener and medical researcher Roger Fox brought a fifth method of increasing the venous flow to the attention of the medical community. The pair working in England with paralyzed patients—subjects suffering from thrombosis and other related lower limb disorders—discovered the 'Plantar Heart Pump mechanism.' Medical science has for some time known that the action of walking aids in the return circulation through the venous system. No one had suspected that under the arch of the foot covered by the plantar fascia was a bio-mechanical pump activating an entire system of deep veins responsible for the re-circulation of venous blood to the heart. Walking, not running in a manner that allows the heel to touch down first with the weight of the body rolling over the arch of the foot onto the toes will compress the Plantar heart pump on the feet in the most efficient manner."—The Gompa Journal, October, 1999, page 3 www.jiulongbaguazhang.com. This sounds almost exactly like racewalking.

Another Qigong walking exercise I use in my racewalking workouts is called the wind healing walk. I use this method and its principles before and after doing a long racewalk event or a workout, which is often thirteen miles. The basic principles are "deep breathing.. .inhaling twice, followed by exhaling once. This is from the Taoist idea of taking in more Qi and releasing less to nourish the Qi depletion. Brisk walking is used to increase the blood circulation, generating more Qi."— Guo Lin's Qigong walking from various sources—this quote is from <http://users.erols.com/dantao/cancerQigong.html>.

When I am out in nature or in a road race, Qigong has a special message. Many times this message comes to me suddenly without rational cause or reason. I feel very close to the source of life, the way or Tao as it is called, when I am walking under the sky among the hills and mountains. I feel like I am walking with God. I believe that every sacred step I take is one of peace within and of help to the world and me.

I echo what Dr. Stephen Chang says in his Introduction to Taoism: Philosophy, Religion and Science, "When we live according to the natural law, we walk with God.

How do we live by the natural law? This is revealed by Taoism.. .Taoism is a science

because it is based on a detailed understanding of underlying physical, chemical, biological, mathematical, psychological, and political theories and laws.”
<http://www.thegreattwo.com/html/introyingyangtheory.html>

I have taught basic racewalking to thousands of students and have seen changes that are very beneficial. I use Qigong warm-ups and cool-downs in class. If the students continue with their racewalking practice they lose weight, tone their bodies and become more fit and happy; if they continue practicing Qigong they become more relaxed and happy.

A recent survey of complementary medicine by the Harvard Medical School found that there was “good evidence from several studies in humans suggesting that Qi Gong, when used with conventional treatments, may be of benefit for high blood pressure.”—
<http://www.intelihealth.com>.

One of my most amazing students started racewalking when she was 84 years young. She could hardly walk a hundred yards at the first class. She went on to become a national and world champion in her age category in the 5K racewalk event. She had a great time in the final five years of her life. She found a new passion, new friends and an exercise program that changed her health for the better. Instead of ending up in a nursing home, she traveled and had fun. It is good to see that there are scientific studies that back up the positive experience that she had.

“—walking is preferable to jogging, as the impact stress on the knee joints during walking is only a third to a sixth of that during running. The risk of slipping or of twisting an ankle is also much lower for the walker than for the runner. Training cannot restore tissue that has been destroyed by disease, but it may offer some protection against the diseases of old age and it can make a major contribution to the quality of life by maximizing residual function. It is no small prize to enjoy the strength, the flexibility, and the aerobic power equivalent to a sedentary person 20 years younger. Given such physical rewards, it is hardly surprising that the exercise class member will report that exercise makes him or her feel better. On this basis alone, regular exercise merits commendation to the frail elderly patient.” *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, Jan. 1990, Vol.38, No.1, *The Scientific Basis of Exercise Prescribing for the Very Old* by Roy J. Shepard, MD, PhD. DPE, pages 67,68-69

“Present results, coupled with evidence from epidemiological studies suggest that after reaching retirement age, regular participation in planned physical activity sustains optimal cerebral perfusion and cerebrovascular health status.” *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, Feb. 1990, Vol.38, No.2, article by Robert L.Rogers, PhD. et al, page 127.

Using the Nine Jewels of Qigong Walking exercises can help one to develop strength, balance, flexibility, focus, calmness, and courage. Used successfully one may regain health and fitness. Combined with excellent racewalking technique, it is an open secret for a champion. Using the Nine Jewels of Qigong walking has helped me on my journey to become a world champion racewalker.

Many years ago, during my third world championship race, in Turku, Finland, I experienced the first two laps of the five kilometer race as if I was walking on a cloud; my body was moving in space as if I was floating. I did not understand why I felt that way; it was amazing. Then I came back into ‘reality’ and I came in sixth place.

Four years later, with four more years of Qigong and racewalking training, I felt similar sensations in the five kilometer championship race but I was more focused, more disciplined, so I was able to become a gold medal winner. Flexibility in mind, body and spirit is what master racewalkers need. Qigong can supply that need. Learning to warm up by opening the mind and thoughts; warming up all the internal pathways of the body, is an excellent way to prepare.

“Be aware of the contact between your feet and the Earth. Walk as if you are kissing the Earth with your feet... Each step we take will create a cool breeze, refreshing our body and mind. Every step makes a flower bloom under our feet. We can do it only if we do not think of the future or the past, if we know that life can only be found in the present moment.” —*Peace is Every Step: the Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life* by Thich Nhat Hanh, page 28-29

Jewel of Qigong Walking # 1 - Shamanic Walking - Balance the Mind

Walking and landing gently with the heel first, rocking forward and pushing off from the toes—heel, toe, rolling, when the leg goes forward, bend the knee. This works better than stepping forward with a flat foot or overstriding. As you walk forward in a straight line for

eighteen steps (nine steps on each leg), breathe in. Let the air breathe you, don't you breathe the air; your body will give you as much air as you need.

Then start the next series of steps in snake-like moves to the left and then to the right like weaving in and out; in other words, move softly to the left for nine steps and then softly to the right for nine steps for a total of eighteen steps (nine steps on each side), as if your path would resemble the winding progress of a snake. The Western mind is conditioned to focus on walking in a straight line forward; give the brain a chance to work on left/right integration as you move forward. The movements first to the left and then the right will harmonize the two sides of the brain as well as help the mind and body become one. Breathe deeply in a natural way, arms can be down at your side or up at a 90-degree bend up by your waist. Continue walking heel, toe, roll.

"The father of Chinese medicine, Hua To, concluded that the single greatest secret for a healthy life lay in the practice of correct movement." —The Five Animal Frolics: a Form Workbook by John Du Cane, page 2.

Jewel of Qigong Walking #2 - Opening up the Heart

Continue walking. Place your right hand on your heart area. Move your hand in a circle around your heart area; your left arm is extended out to the left side, making a circular movement. As you walk, breathe in the color red. After nine steps, change hands; left hand on your heart and the right hand out to the side—both of them making circular movements. The balance of yin and yang will be restored and the meridians will open allowing the unimpeded flow of qi and blood.

In this exercise, I focus on that feeling I had racing in Finland, light as a feather, walking on a cloud. I try to be one with the natural universe and breathe in the qi that surrounds us.

"Several languages acknowledge the essential connection between breath and spirit or life by using the same word for both. In Latin, the word spiritus means both breath and spirit. The Sanskrit language speaks of prana, the life force found in the breath... Still, we often forget that breath contains the miracle of life... The power of deep rhythmic breathing to enhance physical, mental, and spiritual well-being forms the foundation of many ancient spiritual and healing practices... Traditional techniques of relaxation and meditation use the breath as a focusing device to still the mind and quiet the distracting chatter of a demanding world. If you are consciously following each breath in and out of the body your thoughts can't be racing around. Breath links the inner and outer worlds, unifying action and intention."—The Spirited Walker by Carolyn Scott Kortge, pages 94-5.

Jewel of Qigong Walking #3 - Cultivating Qi-Pumping Your Arms

Continue walking heel, toe, roll and breathe in and out deeply. With both upper arms down by your sides and bend the forearms forward at a 90-degree angle, which will bring the forearms up around the waist area. In this position move your arms forward and backward, alternating so that your left foot is stepping forward while your right arm is extending forward. At the same time be breathing in the color of the sky, with your shoulders relaxed. Do the movements for eighteen steps (nine times on each side). Drop your arms, give yourself a hug, and say to yourself, "It's great to be alive."

"How chi gong achieves healing effects is not fully understood, though several mechanisms of action have been proposed. From the standpoint of traditional Chinese medicine, chi gong energizes the body's vital forces, balances yin and yang, strengthens blood circulation and improves the patient's emotional and mental states. From the viewpoint of Western medicine chi gong increases the absorption and utilization of oxygen from the blood, as does yoga. Nobel Prize-winner Otto Warburg found that oxygen deficiency is typical of cancer cells and that when the body is rich in oxygen, cancer cells die. Practicing chi gong exercises has a positive effect on certain enzymes that play key roles in the body's maintenance of health and in phosphorylation, a basic biochemical process that supplies the energy necessary for cell work. Phosphorylation is central to oxygen provision for all of the body's cells and is vitally important to immune response" —Richard Walters, Chinese Medicine and Cancer

Jewel of Qigong Walking #4 - Cultivating Qi-Clearing the Space in Front

Continue walking heel, toe, roll and continue to breathe in deeply.

Bend both arms and place your right hand on your left shoulder and your left hand on your right shoulder. As you walk, bring both arms and hands straight out in front of you at the same time and return them to the same positions on your shoulders; as you walk eighteen steps forward (nine steps on each side) you will bring your two arms forward with one step and back to the shoulders with the next step. Your arms will extend out at eye level with your palms raised.

Then walk another eighteen steps forward (nine steps on each side), this time alternating your left and right arms so that as you step forward with your right foot, your left arm extends forward and vice versa. Make an effort to put the arms straight out in front of you to stretch the muscle groups, tendons and ligaments. Then drop your arms, relax and keep walking, breathing deeply.

This exercise is one part of 'silk reeling'; it opens the pathways of the arms and fingers. See - How to Develop Spiral Energy' by Dr. Paul Lam, Tai Chi Vol 22 No 5 October, 1998 pp.24-27

Jewel of Qi Gong Walking #5 - Cultivating Qi, Rolling the Ball of Life

Continue breathing deeply. Heel, toe, roll, walking with relaxation, thinking with a peaceful mind.

The modified Guo Lin qi gong walk starts out with arms swinging from side to side, with chest up, fingers parallel to mother earth down by the lower dan tian; as the left foot steps forward, both arms swing to the left and vice versa. Rock your body on each step by bending the knee when you land on your heel. Take eighteen steps (nine steps with each leg). Then move both arms in a large circular movement, continuing to walk with heel put down first, rolling through to the toe. Reverse the circle to the other side.

This can be done first in a straight line or in a large or small circle depending on the group size, i.e. one person can lead the rest of the group forward in a straight line or around in a circle. Cancer patients in China may do this for an hour or two in a group of 200 - 300 people. Guo Lin walking techniques include deep breathing and relaxed mindfulness. Take two breaths in for every breath out. Breathe in, breathe in, and then breathe out in time with your walking.

Guo Lin (1906-1984) believed that qi gong walking could fight illness. It combines movement and meditation plus social interaction for the best technique in overcoming illness.

"In China, Guo Lin qi gong is performed by cancer patients as a group activity. This gives the participants an opportunity to share their concerns and experiences with others who are dealing with similar problems.. lessens stress, gives..hope.. it is believed that working within a group can be helpful in developing chi energy.. ."—The Way of Walking: Eastern Strategies for Vitality, Longevity, and Peace of Mind by Jacques MoraMarco, O.M.D, p. 104, also see pages 15-22 for description of walking.

"First of all, the circular movements of the feet may help improve your health and this function is served by the change of direction, the repetition of movements, the coordination of the dynamic and the static and the lowering the qi into the dan tian, an area 5 cm below the navel. In so doing, you can improve your internal and external exercises and moreover make them better coordinated.

"Specifically, internal exercise is to dredge channels and collateral passages, promote blood circulation and improve the function of internal organs while external exercise, which consists of the techniques executed with the hands, eyes, trunk and feet, is to limber up your muscles and joints and strengthening your physique. To walk in a circle can also provide you with an opportunity of adjusting your breath....clear away all distracting thoughts, concentrate your energy on practice, relax your muscles,....look straight at the center of the circle and coordinate your breath and body movements....make abdominal respiration your main breathing method, which should be done through the nose with the tongue on the hard palate.. .keep your breath long and even and your movements slow and natural.

If you practice according to the above-mentioned principles for a long time, you will

probably find that your qi and blood flow freely, your internal organs function effectively and your lower limbs become strong and flexible.”

—“The Function of Circular Walking in Baguazhang by Wei Qunjie, Martial Arts of China, Vol2, No. 1, Page 27.

See a complete description of walking Qigong-“The Healing Promise of Qi”, by Roger Jahnke, pages 46-4

Jewel of Qigong Walking #6 - Cultivating Qi, Fanning the Energy

Keep walking, placing the heel down lightly first, then roll through and push off from the toes. Keep breathing in and out deeply into the abdomen. Be mindful of the journey. Walking in a straight line with your arms down by your sides, relaxing, your eyes focus on the beauty in front of you. Bend your left arm and bring it to your navel area (lower dan tian). Extend your right arm straight out to the side. Alternate left and right arms side to side, around your navel (lower dan tian), brushing your body lightly. The arm that is going out to the side is gathering qi and bringing it back to the dan tian. As your arms swing from side to side you are fanning the qi. Do this nine times on each side with your left arm out to left side when your left foot is forward and vice versa, then bring your arms up to your solar plexus region (middle dan tian) and repeat nine times. Then bring your arms level with your throat area and repeat nine times brushing your neck lightly. Then bring your hands down to your navel area (lower dan tian) and smile. Put on your best yoga/qi smile, relaxing your face and your entire body’s nervous system. Qigong walking readjusts the mind, body and breathing. The peace of mind, the strong motive and faith to become and stay healthy combine with all the benefits from this holistic exercise to promote the body’s neuroendocrine systems to adapt to a more beneficial pattern of functioning.

Jewel of Qigong Walking #7 - Cultivating Qi; Rocking the Baby High & Low

Relax and walk; put the heel down first, lightly, and roll through onto the toe. Standing tall, breathing deeply into your lower abdomen (lower dan tian), place your left hand over your right hand in front of your lower dan tian, lightly brushing your navel area, elbows out to the side. Your arms and hands will be around your lower abdomen. Swing your arms from side to side eighteen times (nine times on each side), breathing in and out; when you step forward with your left foot, your arms swing to the left and vice versa. Next, raise your arms up to your chest. Swing the arms left to right in a relaxed but strong motion. This exercise is called ‘rocking the baby low’ and ‘rocking the baby high’. Repeat the exercise as above but at the chest level; continue to walk in a heel, roll, toe fashion, breathing deeply for eighteen steps (nine steps on each side, nine arms swings to each side). Drop your arms and relax with a gentle smile.

Jewel of Qigong Walking #8 - Eagle Walk

Continue to walk with heel down first, then roll through to the toe and breathe in.

Relax your body and shoulders. Place your arms at your side so that they point down to the earth. Breathe in, raise both arms out to the side, and start moving as if you were flying like an eagle or a crane. Continue walking forward right and left in your own time with all the variations.

Make nine large wing-like motions up and down and then nine slightly faster wing-flapping motions.

Breathe in and out each time you lift your arms up and down. Next bring both of your arms up in front of your body and fly like an eagle or a crane with a slightly different motion—both arms in unison up and down nine times—and then alternate left and right arms up and down. Do this nine times also. Be sure you continue to breathe in and out and relax your body completely. “The Five Animal Frolics: A Form Workbook” by John Du Cane, See pages 30-31 for traditional crane exercise explanation.

Jewel of Qigong Walking #9 - Shamanic Dance II-to the Nines

Continue to relax and walk by placing the heel gently down first and then roll through to the toe. Relax the mind, body and soul; breathe in and out deeply putting it all together for the last jewel in this set. Bring your arms up to a 90-degree angle at waist level with your fists facing forward with your thumbs over each index finger at hip level. Start pumping the arms back and forth with special attention to pumping backward so the laws of physics can propel us forward. (For every movement, there is an equal and opposite force in the opposite direction.) Walk nine steps forward. Walk nine steps to the left and then nine steps to the right in a serpentine fashion. Walk nine steps backwards.

Then put it all together and relax completely walking forward with perfect technique; breathing in, arms at a 90-degree angle by the waist, eyes looking out in front, walking like the wind.

This exercise helped make me a world champion in the USATF National Masters Indoor Championships three thousand meter racewalk in Boston. Although there is never enough oxygen at an indoor track, I was able to relax my mind and body and breathe in fresh air. My mind was focused which relaxed my body and allowed it to move at its maximum speed in that moment setting a new world record for my age group.

Also last year in Spain at the World Masters Athletic Championships, I was only going to walk the 5K racewalk event and therefore I had only trained to walk 3.1 miles. I did, however, sign up for the 20K racewalk, perhaps because I have done the 20K event at all the other WMA Championships. But I felt that 12.4 miles was just too much stress on my mind and body. When the coach for the United States team heard I was not going to walk the 20K, he said to me, "You have to do it for Team USA. We need you to get a gold medal for the team." The other team members were with him, how could I say no.

The 20K started at 6 P.M. When the gun went off, it started to rain. My wife told me that it would be a piece of cake, "Just do all of your Qigong exercises, focus and breathe in universal qi from the heavens."

Instead of being up in front where I needed to be to win my age group, tense and anxious about the race, I started at the back of the pack of 200 plus men. A feeling of deep peace filled me; I merely watched with detachment how nervous they all were. I felt more focused and calm like the unknown energy of the universe was flowing through me to direct my journey on the 12.4 miles of the race I'd not prepared for.

The gun went off and I was in last place. All of the walkers had numbers on their back to show their age. Slowly I was passing all the numbers with my age group on them.

One hour and forty minutes into the race I had only two walkers to catch and pass. I was tired. My wife Sue urged me on from the sidelines and told me to breathe—I understood that she meant to breathe in deeply into my dan tian; that I should relax and focus on walking.

It was amazing. I felt a new flow of qi, strength, power, enjoyment and yes, a smile on my face as I passed that number two walker. There was only one walker left in front of me in my age group and I did not catch him. He is an ex-Olympian and the world record holder in both the 20K and 50K, so naturally I couldn't catch him without training!

As I came into the stadium for the finish, I felt as if I had the same energy and power that I had at the start. It was almost dark and it was lightening and thundering and the rain was pouring but the qi energy was awesome. So without training for the 20K, still I was second in the world and our U.S.A. Team won the gold medal.

So contemplate the example of Dai Zong. He was a Taoist master during the Sung Dynasty (960-1279 CE). He was called the 'Swift footed Master' because it was said that he could walk 100K in 8 hours or less. The current 50K Olympian gold medal champion racewalker Robert Korzeniowski is able to walk 31 miles in about 3:30 hours. He is a great athlete.

As you walk, the mind is in a state of tranquillity and you are focused on your journey each step of the way. While walking, look ahead about 20-25 meters. Listen to your breathing. This acts as a stimulus to your brain and keeps you from being distracted.

Practice all the varied walking techniques to concentrate production of vigor and energy inside your body as you move forward on your journey. Continue walking at least 10-15 minutes. Imagine becoming one with Dai Zong; he could walk 100 kilometers (about 62 miles) in

8 hours—he had to be racewalking....no one can continually run that far and fast! -Adapted from “Dai Zong’s Magic Walking Technique” by Lan Blan. Qi Internal Arts, Vol 3, No.6, November, 1988, p.38

Let us review why the nine jewels of qi gong walking are so important and practical to use. Qi gong walk and racewalk for 30-60 minutes each day. It will also improve your overall fitness and cardiovascular health. Focused walking will help reduce stress, improve the metabolism and the level of glucose in your bloodstream. It will also give you more strength and flexibility in all parts of the body. Racewalking helps maintain complete body fitness and body weight. Studies in walking scientifically demonstrate walking causes fewer injuries than running or other more vigorous conditioning exercises.

Qi gong walking and racewalking are effective in facilitating links between the mind and body. Increased awareness of breathing and breath control give us the tools to create healthy exercise experiences and can lead to powerful changes in our body and life. Exercising your whole body including your feet will help your heart pump blood to the entire body. It will make you feel more energetic, lighter and more balanced. It can unlock the secret code key to the various systems in our intricate bodies.

A great coach motivates his team with the thought, “Exercise with attitude.” The attitude includes the concept of relaxing the body, being in the qi flow and enjoying the nine jewels. Be fully in the present, seeing in yourself the spirit, beauty and potential that you possess. Become full of confidence; remember to exercise daily. When we walk, body and mind unite, affecting all of our other powerful patterns of health.

Qi gong walking and racewalking move the body in fully energized ways. We move, we breathe in to fill ourselves with high energy, qi energy. This sparks our spirit.

Combining the nine jewels of qi gong walking with racewalking brings our spirit, mind and body, nourishment. It fills us with energy to stay extraordinarily healthy and to maintain excellence in our life programs. The dance of life, walking with qi will help you live life to the fullest.

Bibliography

The Healing Promise of Qi: Creating Extraordinary Wellness Through Qigong and Tai Chi by Roger Jahnke, O.M.D.@2002. Contemporary Books, a division of McGraw-Hill Companies. www.HealerWithin.com. Also tapes and DVD's

Peace is Every Step: the Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life by Thich Nhat Hanh @1991, Bantam Books

Thinking Body, Dancing Mind: Taosports For Extraordinary Performance In Athletics, Business & Life by Chungliang Al Huang & Jerry H Lynch, Bantam Books, 1992.

The Great Tao & The Complete System of Self-Healing Internal Exercise; both books by Dr. Stephen Chang, Tao Publishing, 2700 Ocean Ave, San Francisco, CA 94132.

The Spirited Walker: Fitness Walking for Clarity, Balance and Spiritual Connection by Carolyn Scott Kortge, @1998, Harper San Francisco

Breathwalk: Breathing Your Way to a Revitalized Body, Mind, and Spirit by Gurucharan Singh Khalsa, Ph.D. and Yogi Bhajan, Ph.D. 2000 by Broadway Books, New York

The Way of Walking: Eastern Strategies for Vitality, Longevity, and Peace of Mind by Jacques MoraMarcco, O.M.D, with Rick Benzel, M.A. @2000, Contemporary Books

The Five Animal Frolics: A Form Workbook by John Du Cane @2002, Dragon Door Publications, P.O. Box 4381, St. Paul, MN 55104 www.dragondoor.com

As the world’s fastest racewalking gerontologist. Jack Bray combines healing energy in life and sports to energize people for a better quality of life. He is a certified fitness instructor with the Cooper Institute, Dallas, Texas and is a USATF Level One certified coach. He worked as an Activity Therapist at Laguna Honda Hospital and he continues to teach exercise programs for seniors in convalescent hospitals and senior centers.

Jack Bray is the founder and president of Marin Race Walkers, the largest masters racewalking club in the USA. Jack Bray was selected Master Racewalker of the Year for 2003. He holds 61 World and National age group championships in racewalking. He is also the president of Vitality Plus Institute, a non-profit corporation which has the goal of energizing people through exercise, education, socialization, competition, and community for a healthy and vital quality of life.

Jack Bray has studied tai chi and Qigong for many years and integrates them into his class instructions and his own physical exercise program. He is a certified Institute of Integral Qigong and Tai Chi instructor and has presented his program of Dancing Qigong at the National Qigong Association.