

Return to Samye Ling

What a pleasure to be back at Samye Ling (even on a freezing weekend in December), after the long recess and to practise with an enthusiastic group guided by Bob Lowey who was full of his usual pearls of wisdom and boundless good humour. Sally Eccleshall reports



Understandably, there were still ongoing safeguarding measures in place to protect both residents and visitors. They included being served in the dining room by monks and nuns and not being allowed to volunteer for washing up duties.

Our practice took place in the workshop which was toasty and warm and lit by most welcome sunshine on Saturday morning. Bob took us through our paces as we started to learn shujin zhuang gong, or the muscle and bone form of daoyin yangsheng gong developed by the late Professor Zhang Guande.



As usual there was an eclectic mix of people from novice to 'old timers' but it wasn't long before we formed a cohesive group learning, laughing and enjoying. We all opted to continue the study well into Saturday evening when, after completing the work for the day Bob led us through the most amazing body massage and relaxation. This resulted in a profoundly deep sleep for all that night.

Although I have been practising this form for many years it never ceases to amaze me that there is always more to learn and refine in both theory and movement. As there



were a good number of experienced teachers attending we were able to share our knowledge in small groups on Sunday morning, an excellent way to share our enthusiasm and deepen our practice.

We closed the session with the completed shujin zhuang gong to music, the whole group moving in unison and harmony.

At the close of the weekend, Ian from Ayr summarised it thus: "Informative, entertaining and professional tuition by Bob at his best."

As we said our goodbyes I realised that I had once again been re-motivated and energised by both being at Samye Ling and benefiting from Bob's tuition.

These words by Jayna, a 'qigong newbie' perfectly sum up the whole experience:

- 'Perfect pacing
- Wonderful teaching
- And a gift to take home'

And finally a huge thank you to Samye Ling for opening their doors to us once again. 🇨🇰

Sally Eccleshall is based in North Yorkshire and has been a tai chi and qigong student for, she says: "too many years to count". She has been a teacher for 20 years

Journey to well being

WOW... I can hardly believe I have been practising qigong for the last ten years. That has to be, to date one of the biggest commitments I have ever made to looking after my health and well-being writes Marge Morgan

Where did it all start? I began classes with Christopher Handbury in 2012, but it wasn't until 2018 that I really felt a personal connection to my practice. Christopher had just published a book *What is Qigong?** and he had included some student stories, mine being one of them as a sufferer of MS. It quickly became one of the best books I have ever read, a book I always have with me now. When I read back over my initial story, I feel a huge sense of warmth come over me, looking at me now, and what I have achieved. I know how I struggled. At the start of my qigong journey, it was different, something totally new to me. Looking back, I see how far I have come.

Since writing the first part of my journey, I have met with other difficult challenges. Qigong was instrumental in supporting and guiding me through difficult times. In February 2018 I was diagnosed with stage three breast cancer. Being told this is the most frightening and devastating thing you can ever imagine. It was life-changing to me, being thrown into the unknown and a life of chaos. Attending many scary appointments, surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy and then all the horrid side effects that came along. It was unimaginable, impossible to explain.

This story in itself is huge but for another day. However, what I will say is how qigong helped me get through this. After the initial shock I made the decision; I was going to be positive, I was going to beat this, and qigong played a part in achieving my goal. I count myself lucky that I was already practising qigong regularly, so my knowledge, commitment, understanding and qi were already there. I felt prepared for what life was throwing at me. I just needed to adapt my practice to fit what I was going through.

The initial first year of my battle with cancer was the most challenging. It can take years to completely recover, but the first one was the hardest. I used qigong in many different ways to recover. When I was physically exhausted or incapable of moving around much, qigong was there for me. I used breathing techniques and small gentle stretches. I would close my eyes and visualise doing qigong, being at one with my breath and going through the qigong routine. Most of my practice was spent sitting on the sofa. This was the best way for me at the time, it gave me a sense of doing something and was such a boost for me. I believe that because of my continued work with my inner energy, my qigong supported my healing. I recall one time after surgery when the nurse, who was checking my wound, said: 'Oh my god!' Her reaction filled me with fear, I didn't know what was happening. She went on to say:



Marge Morgan

'I can't believe how well you have healed in just a week.' I told her: "That's qigong."

My daily practice was with me through my cancer and throughout my road to recovery. It helped me find strength and regain my confidence. It helped me to smile and live again. Just recently, in early 2022, I was sent by my neurologist for an MRI of my brain and spine to check on my MS; this was to check for any differences since my last MRI in 2016. At my follow-up appointment, the news was good. My neurologist said there had been no changes since 2016. He said to me: "Whatever you are doing is working, so keep doing it."

I replied: "That's qigong, that is what keeps me well and why I will always have qigong in my life."

Where am I now? Ten years on? I am always learning. At times, I go back and re-read my books. I always seem to find something new, a different meaning or feeling, a way forward. I love this as it helps me with my continued qigong learning. Qigong gave me a better idea of what normal and healthy is: if I feel out of sorts, I have the information to figure out why, and how I can use specific movements to benefit the organ system and balance the elements, to help me. With qigong, I find I can connect to myself more easily and be more in touch with everything going on inside, and outside of my body. I feel I am more grounded, and more energised, I smile more, feel happier, and generally feel good about myself.

I thank Christopher Handbury for teaching me, and for sharing his wisdom and guidance. Without him, I would not be here today. I have found myself, I have a better understanding of my body, my spirituality, and my inner being. I have peace. 🙏

**What is Qigong?* Christopher David Handbury
Amazon £12.99