

# YOGA

MAGAZINE

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WARMTH & GRATITUDE

## A Boy Encounters **PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA**

## BREATHE AWAY *Ageing*

## Vedic Invocations

## **QIGONG** WITHIN YOGA



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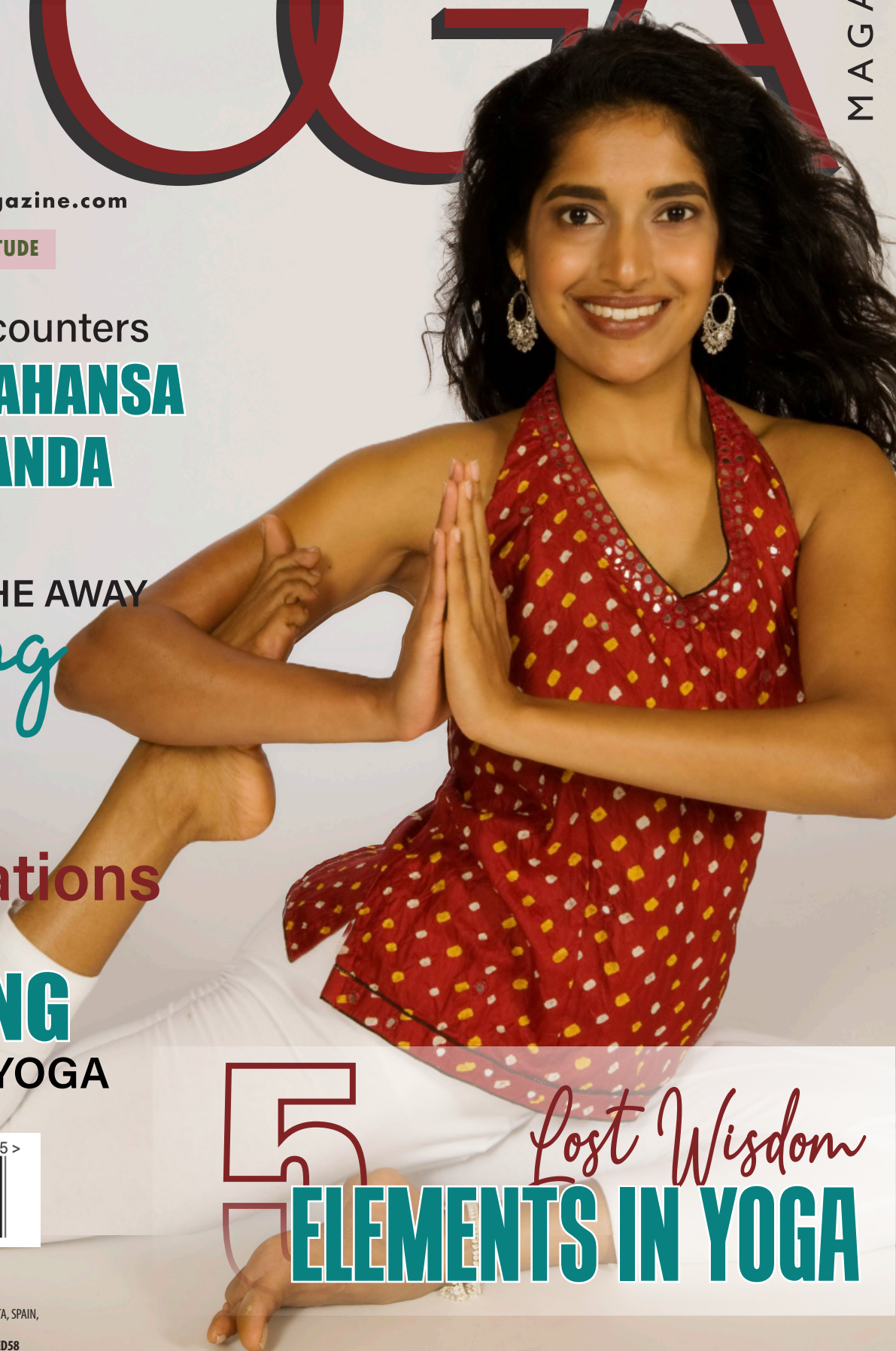
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# 5

*Lost Wisdom*

## **ELEMENTS IN YOGA**





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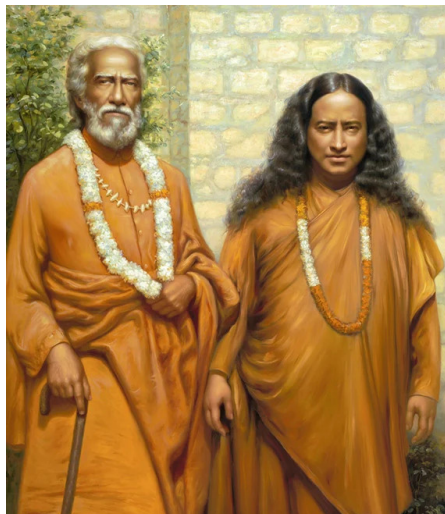


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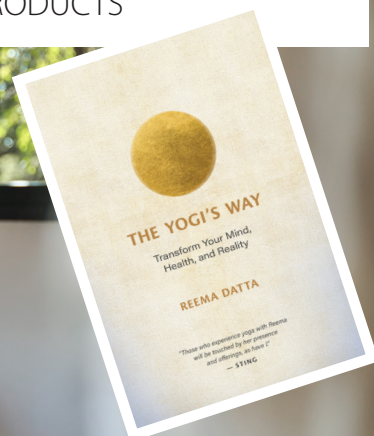
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# EXPLORING *Qigong* within your

# *Yoga Practice*

Words: Annie Cryar, BWY Accredited Yoga and Qigong Teacher Trainer



"Simplicity, patience, compassion. These three are your greatest treasures" – Lao Tzu\*

When I tell prospective Shiatsu students that both *qigong* and yoga are an integral part of training at The Shiatsu College, they are surprised – though most are delighted to discover that these mind-body practices are interwoven. Shiatsu, a form of Japanese bodywork therapy, shares much common ground with yoga and *qigong* through its focus on breath, energy flow and body awareness.

These traditions may originate in different parts of the world, but they all explore how we move and nurture our energy. After more than five decades of yoga practice and almost as many teaching, I'm still amazed by its richness. Yet, incorporating *qigong* has allowed me to play. Gentle, flowing and rooted in the rhythms of nature, *qigong* complements yoga beautifully.

## What is Qigong and why integrate it with yoga?

*Qigong* is based on *Dao Yin*, an ancient practice that combines slow, deliberate movement, breath work and meditation. Like yoga, *qigong* emphasises presence, fluidity and internal awareness. The two disciplines may use different terminology, but they share deep-rooted similarities in how they understand energy and healing.

Bringing *qigong* into your yoga practice isn't about filling a gap – it's about exploring the shared essence between these traditions. Whether you're drawn to meditative stillness, dynamic movement or intuitive

listening, *qigong* offers a way to approach your practice with a spirit of playful enquiry.

*Qigong* principles, postures and themes can enrich yoga – especially when inspired by the approach of Vanda Scaravelli, a yoga teacher known for her intuitive way of working with the spine and gravity. Vanda Scaravelli was a pioneer as she moved away from rigid forms, encouraging practitioners to release effort and trust the body's inner intelligence.

Her focus on grounding and the dynamic flow of energy – down into the earth and up towards the sky – echoes a key element in *qigong*. Rather than striving or forcing, her approach invites us to let go, using breath and awareness to find space and ease. Interestingly, Vanda also trained in *Tai Chi Chuan* – a martial form of *qigong* – and her teaching reflected its qualities of lightness, spaciousness and playful movement.



Daoyin tu - This is a reconstruction of a 'Guiding and Pulling Chart' excavated from the Mawangdui Tomb 3 (sealed in 168BC) in the former kingdom of Changsha.





## Embrace the principle of Wu Wei

A foundational concept in Taoism, *Wu Wei* translates as 'action through non-action' or 'effortless effort'. It encourages us to move with the natural flow, rather than pushing or going against it. This idea is echoed in the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, an ancient text in yoga philosophy. In *Sutra* 2.47 it states:

*Prayatna Saithilya Ananta Samapatribhyam* - 'As the body yields all efforts and holdings, the infinite world within is released'\*

Vanda Scaravelli also captured this idea in her book, *Awakening the Spine*. She described movement as "the song of the body,"\* flowing without strain or force. The art of *Wu Wei*, which runs through *qigong*, reminds us of *Patanjali's* wisdom – inviting us to hold both focused attention and a sense of letting go. When we frame our practice with the idea of 'undoing the doing', we start to peel back layers of unnecessary effort, bringing ease and freedom into the body's natural rhythm.

Understanding energy pathways  
Both yoga and *qigong* work with a concept of life force that moves the energy field of the body through channels. While it's too simplistic to equate meridians directly with *nadis*, or *prana* with *qi*, both yoga and *qigong* share the aim of creating space in the body for energy to move freely. However, excessive effort or strain can disrupt this natural flow. Vanda Scaravelli's words, "*Elongation and extension can only occur when the pulling and the pushing stop*"\* sum up this idea beautifully and offer a helpful reminder when we find ourselves striving too hard in our practice.

The experience of *qi* or *prana* differs from body to body and from moment to moment. Yet, some archetypal movements and patterns can help us connect with the meridian system. It can be both informative and fun to explore how certain yoga postures or themes align with the qualities and locations of these meridians.

## 3 WAYS TO INTEGRATE QIGONG INTO YOUR YOGA PRACTICE

### Simple standing practice

- Stand in *Tadasana* or mountain pose, feet facing forward, hip-width apart, knees softly bent.
- Check that your upper body is upright and relaxed.
- Allow your shoulders to drop, armpits open and hands resting naturally.
- Feel your feet rooted into the ground, your footprints wide and deep.
- Imagine yourself as a tree, with the earth at your waist, your lower body sinks into the earth like roots.
- Your upper body represents the trunk and branches of the tree – light, lifted and free, anchored by the downward-moving energy.







Note that nothing in this standing posture is forced. Simply rest in it – soften, release and relax.

Notice the breath, feel the rise and fall of the breath moving through your body – a gentle wave with each inhalation and exhalation.

Once you feel steady and at ease, allow your awareness to deepen:

- Feel your feet grounding even more firmly into the earth.
- Centre your weight evenly through both feet, feeling it balanced in the middle of each sole. This is where you'll find the energy gate, *Yong Quan* (Bubbling Spring).

Visualise a connection with the earth – energy rising through your feet and flowing up through your legs and throughout your entire body.

Now, gently imagine your head being lightly suspended from a thread rising from the crown of your head into the sky – light and free.

Reflect on Vanda Scaravelli's words: 'Connection is crucial, connection between earth and sky, matter and brain. It links the human with the divine and heaviness with lightness in our body. It is produced by gravity, which is in trees and plants, corresponds to the movement from the roots upwards, towards the sun.'<sup>\*</sup>

Stay here for a while. Breathe and connect.





## Two hands hold up the Heavens

Inspired by 'The Eight Strands of the Brocade' as taught by Carola-Beresford Cooke, a founding teacher at The Shiatsu College. This practice is similar to *Tadasana Urdhva Baddhanguliyasana* or mountain pose with upstretched arms in yoga.

- Stand with feet hip-width apart. Interlace your fingers, palms facing down and raise your hands above your head. Keep elbows and knees slightly bent.
- As you inhale, rise onto tiptoes if comfortable, turn the palms upwards and stretch gently upwards from the soles of your feet.
- As you exhale, return slowly to the starting position.
- Repeat a few times, moving with the rhythm of your breath. On your final round, lower your arms slowly to your sides, pressing the palms down as you go.



Annie Cryar

## PRACTISE WITH ANNIE

You can experience Annie's approach first-hand at the BWY Summer Solstice Celebration on Friday 20 June, where she will lead a Qigong-inspired yoga practice. Tickets for the day long event are just £45.

To book:

<https://portal.bwy.org.uk/user/events/874>

**Annie Cryar** is the Principal of The Shiatsu College in Hastings. She is Co-Director at Teaching Yoga Naturally, a BWY Approved Training Organisation. She also co-leads the Qigong Teacher Training programme. Annie believes that nature is our greatest teacher.

Find out more at [teachyoganaturally.org](http://teachyoganaturally.org) or [qigongteachertraining.co.uk](http://qigongteachertraining.co.uk), or email [info@teachyoganaturally.org](mailto:info@teachyoganaturally.org).

## Drawing the bow

You can now dance into a movement similar to *Virabhadrasana* or Warrior pose in yoga.

- Step your feet wide, toes pointing forward.
- Make a loose fist with your right hand and point your right index finger up.
- Slowly extend the right arm out to the side, turning the right foot and head to the right. At the same time, draw the left elbow out to the left, as though pulling back a bowstring. Arms remain at shoulder level.
- Exhale and slowly return to your original position.
- Repeat the sequence to the opposite side.
- Be mindful that it is not a shape you have to make but a mindful movement of release from the inside out.

*Qigong* and yoga both invite us to reflect on how we live, while also offering playful ways to build strength, foster wellbeing and let movement become meditation.

With roots in the wisdom of the natural world, *qigong* can be a gentle companion on our yoga journey. With its focus on the internal flow of *qi* within the tissues, rather than on muscular effort, it can help bring us back to the original footprints of yoga – meditation, equanimity and ease. We can then return to an easy attitude in our practice and know there is nothing to do or achieve except adopt a willingness to let work become play.



### References

- Lao Tzu, Chapter 67, Tao Te Ching.
- Patanjali, Sutra 2.47, The Secret Power of Yoga, Nischala Joy Devi pub. Three Rivers Press
- All quotes from Awakening the Spine, Vanda Scaravelli (2012). Pinter and Martin





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