



Guelph Tai Chi for Health
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What are the "Three Treasures" - Jing, Chi, Shen?¹

From time to time you may have heard me refer to the "three treasures". In order to intensify your qigong experience you need to know what these are and how they pertain to our training. In future topics we will discuss Taoism and inner alchemy. This overview of the "three treasures" will provide a brief introduction to the relationship between Taoism, qigong, and tai chi - subjects that we will return to many more times in upcoming papers.

Sometimes called "San Bao" - which means the three treasures, these are also termed "San Yuan" (the three origins), or "San Been", (the three foundations). Together they form *the root* of your life force. This is the *root* we are talking about in qigong and tai chi practice.

These treasures have a strong connection to the 3 Taoist treasures of Heaven, Earth, and Mankind. Each of these treasures contain 3 treasures. Heaven: sun, moon, stars. Earth: fire, water, air. Mankind: Jing, Chi, Shen - respectively, original energy, life force or energy, and spirit.

Jing

Depending on the part of speech (noun, verb, adjective), "Jing" means slightly different things. We most often use "Jing" as a noun, and it translates in English as "essence". In humans "Jing" is passed from each parent (combination of sperm and egg) to create the essence of a new human being. Once the child is formed *Chi* circulates and the *Shen* grows - but neither can exist before Jing. The storage place for Jing is the kidneys. In order to preserve the original essence - which is finite in quantity - we must keep the kidneys strong, and avoid extreme behaviours that may deplete it (for example, too much sexual activity, or too much consumption of food and drink.) In our qigong practice we use our hands to keep our kidneys warm and nourished with chi. Jing resides in the lower dan tien, close to the navel, the original umbilical/nourishment connection with our mother. It is also the treasure closest to Earth.

Chi or Qi

In the context of the three treasures, there are two types of Chi - pre-birth, pre-Heavenly (before the baby sees the sky) or original chi. This kind of chi is kick-started by Jing, then grows and develops as the baby grows. Post-Heaven or post-birth chi is taken from the air we breathe and the food we eat. Post-birth chi - which resides in the middle dantien (near the heart) is called "fire chi" and brings the body to a Yang state. Too much fire or Yang is unhealthy for the body, stimulates negative emotions and a confused state. Pre-birth chi,

¹ Most of the information from this report is taken directly from: Jwing-Ming, Yang. The Root of Chinese Chi Kung; The Secrets of Chi Kung Training. Boston : YMAA, 1995, chapter 3. All kinds of information about the three treasures can be found on the Internet through a Google search.

"water chi" cools the body and emotional state and allows the mind to become clear and focused. When the two types of chi mix properly they travel up the spine's marrow to nourish the brain and activate Shen.

Shen

This is the spirit or soul energy of the body. It is located in the upper dantien (near the pituitary gland), and is the body's emotional and knowledge root. Cultivation of Chi stimulates Shen. In our qigong and tai chi practice, we pump Chi through the microcosmic orbit cycle. Too much stimulation and we become agitated and unable to sleep, but the right amount produces a state of emotional well-being and an acute self-awareness as well as awareness of our surroundings.

Tao

In Taoist philosophy the ultimate aim of human cultivation is to refine and purify our original essence (Jing), through the production of balanced and effective energy (Chi), so that we may attain a kind of perfect spiritual state (Shen) that is independent of the body. In the highly cultivated person the Shen can detach from the body. At this stage we achieve immortality (Tao) and are free to transcend space and time.

Qigong practice and the three treasures

Perhaps some of the preceding explains the importance of our basic qigong stance and posture while performing the tai chi form. In the previous handout about the meridians we talked about the flow of energy like a series of rivers and streams that circulate chi throughout the body. The lower dantien - the original source of Jing and Chi - is the energy ocean, the pool from which we draw energy from birth to death. The middle dantien, near the lower end of the sternum is closest to our source of air needs (heart/lungs) and food needs (stomach) - the raw materials for the production of Chi. The upper dantien is the source of our spirit and wisdom - activities that consume the energy that is supplied by the lower and middle dantiens. All three dantiens are on located on the Conception Vessel, one of the two vital suppliers of qi to the body's meridians and organs.

Our aim is to align the three dantiens, and that is why there is concentration on relaxing or opening the abdomen and chest, and gently straightening the curve in our spine. As well, we need to focus our conscious mind on the microcosmic orbit cycle, gently leading Chi around the body to nourish and replenish our body and soul.

As a final note, one our great contemporary teachers, Sam Masich, chose a symbol for the three treasures as an integral element in his club logo.



Sam Masich, Extraordinary Tai Chi Master