

Wang Qingyu

Born into an aristocratic family in 1937, Wang Qingyu has lived through remarkable changes in fortune and circumstance during the course of his life in China. As the political climate shifted first one way and then another, he found himself thrust from affluence and high-regard to poverty and vilification as the son of a long line of martial arts masters and generals of the Qing empire. Drawing upon the mysterious alchemy of the human spirit, he turned misfortune and persecution into a life of compassion and service for others.

Dr. Wang is now recognized by the Chinese government as one of the outstanding masters of the ancient Taoist healing art known as Qigong. In 1987 he served as the poolside physician to the Sichuan diving team during the Sixth China Games. He was then called to Beijing by the Olympic training committee to treat China's star divers including gold medal winner, Gao Min. He is a member of his country's prestigious Chinese Qigong Academy and serves as the government's primary consultant in assessing the credentials and skills of Qigong masters around China. Dr. Wang recently retired from a strenuous healing practice in Beijing to continue his research and teaching in the city of Chengdu where he chairs the Sichuan Society of Taoist Studies. He is the author of a number of articles and two books, *Esoteric Taoist Internal Alchemy Channel and Collateral Qigong*, and, *A Glimpse at the Secrets of Taoist Medicine*.

The word Qigong literally means energy (Qi) work (gong). It includes quiet meditation or inner alchemy, and moving meditation that is used to open up the channels and meridians in the body – somewhat like hatha yoga. The meditation practice focuses on four components: visualization, specific body postures (mudras), breath, and sound or vibration (mantras). A Qigong master has learned to nourish the essence in the lower abdomen so that it can be transmitted to others as healing energy. Dr. Wang is the lineage holder of the Taoist Jin Jing Internal Alchemy Qigong, one of the most ancient and respected forms of this practice.

From a young age Wang Qingyu was raised to be a master in an environment rich with tradition in martial arts, scholarship, and medicine. He studied martial arts with some of the most renowned teachers in China, including his father who used to lash him with a whip if he failed to hold a training posture for the required number of hours. At the age of ten he met his primary teacher, Li Jie, a wandering Taoist hermit whose abilities as a scholar, healer, and martial arts master made him a living legend in China's Southwestern provinces. Under Li's supervision, the young Wang became adept in many areas including herbalism, fingernail diagnosis, acupressure, and Qigong.

A few years after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Wang Qingyu was assigned to teach middle school in the wild Tibetan regions of Sichuan Province -- the Siberia of China. The conditions were both

dangerous and harsh, but Wang continued his various disciplines and studies, broadening his knowledge of therapeutic plants by apprenticing with herb collectors from the local villages. During this period he found his calling to become a Taoist healer and dedicated his life to helping the sick.

During the chaotic period of the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s, Wang continued to treat ill people even though it placed him in constant danger of being discovered and jailed by the red guards. Over the years, Dr. Wang built an impressive record of healing a wide variety of serious illnesses including post-stroke paralysis, cancer, and rheumatoid arthritis.

The interview with Wang Qingyu was translated by his long-time friend and student Heiner Fruehauf, Ph.D., a professor at the National College of Naturopathic Medicine. The power and richness of Dr. Wang's stories were conveyed not only by his words but also by his vibrant, musical voice and the expressiveness of his face and hands. At one point in the interview he burst into a favorite childhood song; at another moment he wept at the memory of his beloved martial arts teacher Li Jie. Throughout our meeting, Dr. Wang radiated inner peace and centeredness, qualities that are crucial for his healing work and that no doubt contributed to the remarkable flowering of his life in the face of so much external adversity.

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Q: Could you begin by speaking about mastery and what the term means in China?

WQ: The term for mastery in Chinese, "dashi," contains two concepts: "da" which means big, and "shi" which means teacher. Literally, it's somebody who is not only a teacher but also a teacher of teachers. Such a person stands out from the masses which is always difficult to do in China because there are so many people. The "shi" or teacher element suggests great knowledge; the master really knows what he or she is doing. But this knowledge is two-fold because "da" reflects not just having greatness of the mind, but also having a greatness of the heart. The Chinese word for master implies that it is not just what you can do that's important, but also what you do *with* your accomplishment. It is implied that you should use this knowledge to benefit other people and not just yourself. Masters retain mental aloofness from the ordinary material world.

Q: Why is "aloofness" important?

WQ: Aloofness simply means "high and up" in Chinese. It has a very elegant, almost religious connotation. A master is like a noble person. Such people are above the ordinary material world; being noble and highly ethical they use their mastery for the common good.

"Dashì" originally comes from Taoism and Buddhism and refers to the field of meditation and such things. Although the term "mastery" is now used in China -- as in Western culture -- to show respect for people who have achieved a high level of accomplishment, it still retains its original religious implications.

Q: What importance do you ascribe to talent or various personality traits on the road to mastery?

WQ: In Taoism we consider both pre-natal and post-natal factors. In order to become a master you need some kind of talent that gets passed on to you from your parents and from prior generations. The second factor, the post-natal, refers to the environment in which you grow up and this includes a teacher, your parents, and other people who encourage your studies.

But the most important thing -- and that is either a product of these first two or occasionally something entirely different -- is what I call the human spirit. You need to have the spirit -- as powerful as an instinct -- that no matter what your circumstances, you will strive to refine your knowledge and your talents. And this process will be challenged by the external environment. Sometimes the more difficult your situation, the more you will feel challenged to develop and refine your talent. This was the case in my own life. So you could say that the external difficulties and the process of overcoming them is a fourth element that leads to mastery.

Q: How did these various elements unfold in your life?

WQ: When I think back over my childhood, to even my earliest memories, it all adds up to this intense curiosity and interest in nature. When I was young I thought everybody was like this - whereas now I realize that this fascination with everything is unusual. When I looked at a flower I saw a whole world I wanted to know about. I wanted to know why there is a sun during the day and a moon at night. I followed the peasants in the countryside and wanted to understand why the manure was so smelly, and I contemplated the hidden world in the stinkiness of the manure. Most of all I had an interest in people and why we are so different from other kinds of living things.

So, I seem to have been born with a quality of spirit that was sharpened by the process of meeting all kinds of difficulties. Later, when I was in school, and when I had a special teacher, I actively studied the Taoist texts and was able to systematically approach all these things. What I had only a cloudy notion of before coalesced and began to make sense.

Q: What role did your father play in your upbringing?

WQ: I come from a very wealthy family of land-owners that were generals since the Ching Dynasty. I grew up in an environment where there were all these houses and a lot of land. Out of all the children my father had from various wives, he particularly respected me because I was able to look at a page of classical writing and immediately have the whole thing by memory.

Because of this talent my father made sure I got a special education and spent more time with me than with his other children. He molded my talent by giving me opportunities to learn to play the piano and by giving me a private teacher to instruct me in the classics. That spirit of childlike curiosity turned into a profound thirst for more and more knowledge. I noticed that what I learned so easily was very difficult for others, and that also increased my desire to learn. My striving wasn't so much for specific knowledge or directed towards a goal. It was just a pleasure to learn, and I was motivated to learn everything really well.

The tragedy of my life is that I had all these talents that theoretically I could have carried to a very high level. But then all of a sudden the tables turned and the landowner class was like the lowest of the low. Standing out in the new system was something bad. My father, who had been respected before, suddenly became a burden -- because of what he had been I could not go to college. Along with other children who had parents like mine, I was called "the black kind," meaning we were dirty. All our money had to be given to the government. There were so many of these huge golden coins that it took twenty-four bearers to deliver it all. There were many times when I had only one set of underwear and I didn't have enough to eat. My father died the next year.

But the new political system was not the only challenge. My mother had died when I was two, and then my father died when I was thirteen. I was basically an orphan because even though there were other family members around -- my father's other wives and sons -- they didn't care about me. Actually there were several attempts to poison me by my own family.

Q: Such a change of fortune would break many people. How did you manage?

WQ: At thirteen I was already, in a way, a mature person because of my special education. Thanks to my father I learned different systems of martial arts; I memorized the Taoist classics; I learned how to play music and write poetry. But most importantly, I was sent to the mountains to study with the Taoist hermit, Li Jie. With him I learned to value that instinctive drive for knowledge I mentioned earlier. The reason I was able to survive and had the power to overcome all these difficulties was because of the moral stamina and the spirit that Li Jie passed on to me. I knew that no matter what the circumstances, as long as I still had a breath left, I would strive for what I thought was right.

It was Li Jie who gave me the name Qingyu which comes from *The Book of Changes*. It means that if you do good things for other people, it will never be a waste; it will come back to you with ever greater abundance. So this name was

also part of what gave me the power to survive the difficult times. Even when people were being stingy and competitive, I knew the good I did would come back to me eventually.

Talking about Li Jie brings up your question about the important elements in achieving mastery. We've already mentioned talent, environment, human spirit, and adversity. The teacher is a very important part of this. But there is one other element, and the teacher is included under this as well. I'm talking about the moments in life when all of a sudden everything comes together and a gate opens up.

Q: What were these turning points in your life?

WQ: Some of these moments I had with my teacher, but there were two other important ones as well. One of these key experiences happened as our middle school class sang a song that describes the wonders of nature around the famous Sword Gate Pass in northern Sichuan. During the many political uprisings in the past, the Emperors fled to Sichuan through this narrow opening in the mountains because you can defend that whole pass against a pursuing army with only ten men. The song describes layers of mountains in the distance, the sound of rippling water close by. [singing] "This is where our school is, this is where the future of our country grows, *this is the place where we can unite with the wonders of nature.*"

At the moment when we sang the last line of the song I thought, "What is the significance of my individual pain? I'm a person, but in comparison to all of nature I'm just a little speck of dust." If you can reunite with your source, with the wonders of nature, then individual pain doesn't really matter all that much.

Q: Was this the first time you had heard this song?

WQ: I sang it every Monday morning even in elementary school. And I had been studying Taoist philosophy with this amazing master, I knew the texts by heart, but suddenly all the knowledge came together inside and gave me this life force. Even though we were growing up in the most terrible circumstances, in an environment that promoted hatred and suspicion, there was this power and this love that stood up in me. I discovered my love for people, for every river, every stream, and every mountain. All of a sudden I was always optimistic. Although from an external perspective I was the worst off, I was able to not only uplift my own spirits but other people's spirits as well. I was really motivated to practice my Qigong because in Taoism that is the way we reunite with nature. So I practiced even on the coldest days of winter and was warm in spite of having only one layer of clothes to wear and not enough to eat.

The other important moment of illumination in my life came when I discovered I could heal. Because I was in the "black kind" category, I was sent to

the western part of Sichuan Province and installed as a teacher in a middle school. There was no electricity or medicine available in this area and conditions were generally extremely harsh.

I used to walk out into the countryside to practice Qigong and one day I exercised too vigorously and injured my ankle. I was some distance from the village and there was no one around to help. At that moment it occurred to me to try the healing techniques on myself and they were immediately effective. Even though I had learned all the techniques and seen my teacher do amazing things, until this experience I had always been more interested in the *spirit* of healing. It was the broad education and love of nature and humankind that I treasured. But at this moment I experienced the power of these practices, and made up my mind that this is where I would direct all my energy. I started experimenting with the techniques and healing other people.

Being a sports and literature teacher at different schools in the area, I came into contact with people who hurt themselves and I started treating various injuries like broke ankles and shattered bones. I began studying the collection of local herbs with an old peasant. By combining herbs with Qigong and acupuncture, there wasn't a single person whose condition did not improve.

Of course, during the cultural revolution this kind of healing was considered feudal superstition. I couldn't hang up a shingle announcing myself as a doctor of Taoist medicine. However, I put all my free time and effort in this direction and people in the area slowly got to know about me as a special healer.

During these years I was in a strange position because I wasn't supposed to do anything great; that would have been a crime. I healed people because I wanted to help them, and they loved me for helping them. But on the surface they had to pretend that they hated me because I was a "black kind." At night people would throw two ears of corn or a handful of wild mushrooms into my window. This was another thing that gave me the power to proceed.

Q: Weren't you under tremendous risk of being turned in by a patient?

WQ: Yes, because during that time the political climate created a system of cowardice where you needed to turn other people in to protect yourself. I was in the most vulnerable position because of my family background. One morning when I arrived at school I found stories written on the wall -- they called them "wall newspapers." There was my name, Wang Qingyu, followed by accusations: "He just wanted to cheat me out of some food." "He claimed to be an amazing doctor and later I found out he didn't really have a license." "He practices this feudal superstition every night at three o'clock, communing with ghosts and doing weird movements." You see I was practicing my Qigong secretly in the middle of the night. They said, "Your grandfather exploited the people, your father exploited the people, and now you are doing the same thing; from no-goods there can only be no-goods."

I was locked me up in a prison called the ox-stall. Every day I had to write pages and pages of reports about why I was so bad. They would rip up the pages and demand that I write more. They would torture me and not allow me to sleep. During this time my wife was pregnant with our first child. They tried to force her to divorce me. But I came out of it without being broken.

Q: Has there been a situation during these years when you felt particularly masterful?

WQ: The Cultural Revolution wasn't a time when I was allowed to feel like a master or even dare to think like that. Being successful was a crime for someone like me. I lived by the Taoist symbol of longevity -- the turtle that keeps its head inside its shell. I wanted to keep myself in a low position because if you stick your head out too high it's going to get chopped off.

But in 1976 everything changed because some of the new leaders, who had also been in the "black kind" category, said, "Let's just forget about all of this." So even though I had endured many hardships, when the government asked me to participate in the national competitions [to locate the great healers] I was willing to give it my best. All of a sudden I went from being an obscure country doctor to being one of three people that were chosen from the whole country. I went from healing a few people to dozens of people. They asked me to treat many of the high officials who go from conference to conference eating rich food and getting strokes. Many of them were paralyzed and I was able to make all of them walk again. This was a time when I really felt I had come into my mastership, where I was on the highest level.

Q: Even though you have reached such a high level of your potential, do you still have more to learn?

WQ: As long as I have breath left that journey will never end. My understanding of Tao of each person is that you don't say, "I'm here, now I'm going to rest on my laurels." At the age of sixty, for the first time in my life, I've reached a stage where I have the time and freedom to really practice my Qigong (Gungfu), do more research, work on my herbs, and really lead this ideal scholar's life that I have envisioned for years.

Q: Would you talk a little bit about the challenges to becoming famous. What brings masters down?

WQ: Becoming rich and famous is not my path, because even though I always had a burning desire to reach a high level of accomplishment, I never had the idea of being better than other people. From the Taoist perspective being better

doesn't mean elevating yourself above others. It means that you bring out your own best potential.

After I healed the Olympic divers there were stories about Master Wang in the newspapers and on television. I was invited to travel abroad to heal. I was happy that I came into my own mastership, that I reached what I truly felt was my potential because I needed to give that to my teacher. I was happy that I didn't waste what he taught me, that I was able to really make good use of it.

From a Taoist and Buddhist perspective, when you reach a high level of accomplishment you want to lower yourself because you know that what comes up is going to come down again. During those years of hardship I was trained to always duck. I get afraid if people want to give me fame and money. I feel like, "Bye, bye! I did my job, I'm out of here." I never wanted anything from the famous people and officials I healed. I never took any money or special privileges from them. I just wanted to prove to myself that I could heal them.

Q: Would you say a little more about your master Li Jie. What made him such a great teacher?

WQ: There were three things that I think made Li Jie a true master. The first was his level of looking at things... that quality of "aloofness." In a country like China where you have so many people and nobody has enough, there's a lot of this pettiness. People envy each other and want to have this person's money and that person's fame. My teacher saw through all that. He was called the "Hermit of the Ubiquitous Smile" because he just laughed everything off, and make people better just by this kind of attitude.

The second thing was that Li Jie had a profound love for everything alive, for nature and for people. This probably inspired me the most.

And the third thing was his technical knowledge of the internal and external arts. He was one of those rare people who could do really amazing things like heal a broken bone in ten minutes or break a branch off a tree from a distance. Many people claim the ability to do these things but their claims are false. I have run into a lot of these fake masters in my job for the Qigong Society. But Li Jie not only had the knowledge, he also had greatness of the heart and the mind.

Because my teacher was a great healer that has always been my ideal -- to make sure that the people in my immediate environment are doing as well as possible. The only thing I feel really sad about in my life, is that I was never able to "repay" my teacher before he died. He never knew how I lived my life according to his spirit and developed the ability as a healer.

Q: Do you feel your teacher is still with you in some ways?

WQ: Yes, of course he is always with me. That's why I always cry when I start talking about him. He was truly a Renaissance person. Along with being a master of martial arts and a healer, he was also a calligrapher. He did wonderful paintings with his long fingernails. He could tell somebody's fortune from their face and hands. And like a Renaissance man, he was always willing to study more.

The most amazing thing about him was this internal power, a deep source within himself. He was given the name "Hermit with the Ubiquitous Smile," but it wasn't a smile that was on his face. It was a deep laughter he had within his heart. After seeing him, you would walk away with it and think, "What's my pain? My disease really doesn't matter." There was an upwelling of a stream of light that came out of his chest that made you realize that all of the troubles you came to him for didn't really matter. As you walked away you were already healed.

So I only need to think about my teacher and I experience this source that eternally feeds me no matter how difficult situations may be.