Qi Gong for the Yin Brain

by John Stan, DrTCM

Teaching or helping patients to develop the ability to switch regularly from the “main screen” to the “second reference screen”, or in other words, from Left Brain thinking to Right brain thinking, requires a bit of effort and time. But after a bit of practice and encouragement, patients will get used to switching frames of reference easily, thus helping to discharge building stresses throughout the day.

This exercise will utilize a sequence of five images that reference the five positive aspects of each of the five elemental phases. You will teach your patient to reference these five images quickly. As the images are being recalled, the patient will simultaneously touch the corresponding five element finger of the left hand to the corresponding finger of the right hand. This whole process is accomplished in the amount of time it takes to do five breaths.

This technique can be practiced once an hour. The beauty of the technique is that it takes literally 30 seconds. By breaking up our day and injecting this little technique into our daily mix of things, we train ourselves to switch perspectives frequently. It is akin to doing a little recalibration of our nervous system so that a balanced and empowered perspective is cultivated.

Theory Behind the Technique

As mentioned before, one of the fundamental concepts in Qi Gong is that our mind directs Qi and therefore our vital responses. This implies that our emotional responses to change and challenges throughout our day will determine how our Qi, or our internal responses, react. Will our Qi and internal responses expand, promoting circulation? Or will they contract and lead towards stagnation? Far too often, in an individual, the default emotional responses to “change” or “challenges” will be a combination of the red flag, fight/flight emotions of the five phases. Those being: frustration/anger, sadness, worry, grief/helplessness, or anxiety/fear. These types of emotional responses by nature are contracting, and if persistent over time, will stagnate circulation.

The theory then, is that by promoting the co-existing positive emotional states of the five phase cycle (creativity, playfulness, compassion/trust, letting go and resourcefulness), we encourage our brain and nervous system to respond to changes/challenges with these positive attitudes. Over time and with consistent practice, we train ourselves to access these “strengths”, as opposed to collapsing into “weaknesses” during the ups and downs of our day.

Since the right hemisphere of the brain is uniquely wired to process images, creating images associated with the healthy five elemental phase emotions and cycling through them will reinforce the qualities that the images represent.
In addition, the physical aspect of this exercise engages the patient to initiate a movement of fingers on the left hand (governed by the right hemisphere), to touch the corresponding fingers of the right hand (governed by the left hemisphere of the brain). The action of these movements switches our left brain dominance to right brain activity. By adding the images on top of these physical processes along with the breath, we engage a dramatic switch from left brain to right brain dominance for a moment.

The more we practice this exercise over time, the more our healthy emotions become the default responses. When that happens, changes and challenges in our day will then become opportunities for healthy emotions to kick in, versus instances for us to collapse into the usual negative responses.

Here are the nuts and bolts of how to use this awesome technique:

**Teaching your patient the following Second Screen, Right Brain exercise - Qi Gong for the Yin Brain**

**Frequency of Practice**
Recommend this exercise to be done once an hour. It will only take as long as it takes to do five full, conscious breaths. This exercise can be performed anywhere: in a bank lineup, waiting at the stop light, at work, or at home. It is easy and requires no special music, setup, or place.

**Programming the Yin Brain Images - Overview**
The first step is to help the patient develop five distinct images that they will refer to while performing this exercise. These images will operate as “perspective switches”. As the right brain is the dominant image processor, cycling through these images will actively engage this hemisphere of the brain.

This first section involves you guiding your patient in creating images associated with each of the healthy emotions of the five elemental phases. Those being: creativity and flexibility for wood, playfulness and humour for fire, love/trust for the earth phase, letting go and getting the big picture for metal, and finally resourcefulness and faith for water. Remember, Yin and Yang cannot exist without each other. For one state to exist, the other is immediately implied. Explain this to your patient. You can point this out, for example, by reflecting that while they may experience, say... worry often, the opposite experience of trust is also coexisting. In order to access it, one has to direct their mind to it (remember: where thoughts go, that is where the Qi goes).

Like a gardener watering a seedling, by paying attention to something, we create energy around it and promote its growth.

**Helping Patients Generate their own unique Images: Story into Image**

**Note:** When teaching your patient this technique, take notes about the image the patient is generating for each elemental phase. Once they have the images, go over it with them and help them make it crystal clear in their mind.

But for now, as you are reading through this article, try creating these images for yourself. With each phase, build the images that are clear and personal to you. Then, when we get to the final stage of putting it all together, you can practice the technique yourself and see how easy and empowering it is! By the way, the images I created here are just examples of images I chose to describe this process for the purpose of this article. Definitely create your own for maximum benefit.

**Wood:** This is the action phase of the energy cycle and the healthy feeling/image we are encouraging our patient to develop here is one of creatively solving a problem. The wood phase in its healthy state is about being flexible and finding creative solutions to unexpected obstacles.

The goal for this image is to have the patient think of a time in their life when a problem occurred and they resolved it through their creative input or by being flexible. Then, using that story, have the patient create an image of that feeling of being a creative problem solver. Have them describe the image to you so you can see if it is reflective of the spirit of this Wood phase image. If they cannot access/create an image from their own personal experiences, then encourage them to use, or remember a story that had occurred in their family, or was told by a friend. If there is no story that they can recall, then you can encourage them to imagine how nature is always creatively overcoming obstacles - for example, a growing vine finding its way around a boulder. The goal for the wood image is to imprint the idea that nature is inherently a problem solver and nurturing our own creative abilities.
will help us do likewise. Try creating your own Wood image now.

Fire: This is the zenith of the energy cycle when energy has peaked. For this image, ask your patient to remember a funny scene that made them laugh and brings a sense of lightheartedness to mind. See if they can remember a personal, family (or any story) that broke up a tense moment into a moment of laughter. The goal here is to imprint the idea that nothing is so serious that it cannot be laughed at or made light of. Create your Fire image now.

Earth: This phase is the stable phase where for a time energy is stable. In health, this phase is about abundance, caring, compassion and trust. Encourage the patient to find an image that is reflective of these qualities... a picture of a kitten, a baby, a tender moment between a mother and child, anything that provokes warm comforting feelings and trust. With this in mind, try and generate an Earth image for yourself.

Metal: Developing a Metal image can unfold in two ways, or it could be a combination picture. The Metal image should be one of getting the “big picture” and having that “a-ha” moment that moves you into a place of awe. It is a scene, that, once you imagine, puts things in perspective. Metal energy in health is about clarity, seeing the overview and having a sense of perspective and connectedness. Ask your patient if they have ever had a moment like that. An example to give would be like having hiked on a forest trail that ended with a viewpoint that was magnificent and moved them to a place of awe. Or maybe a scene of being in the forest and seeing a canvas of green with golden sunlight filtering through... in other words, a scene that through its beauty stopped them in their tracks. Other examples could include an image of our solar system, a cell, a snowflake... anything that can help the patient be reminded that there is beauty and order in our complex, seemingly random world. The other alternative image that can be used is one of a moment that depicted an action of letting go of emotional garbage, or even physical garbage. For example a time when the patient cleaned their messy closet and how good it felt to have gotten rid of things no longer in use. The Metal image should, in one sense, capture that feeling of things being in place and the garbage or the “weights in life” have been let go of and repurposed. Pause for a second and create your Metal image now.

Water: The water phase captures energy in its lowest state, consolidating itself and being still. Here we are hoping to have our patient create an image that invokes a sense of stillness, quiet power, resource, and faith. Encourage the patient to remember a time when they tapped into some inner resource, moved into a moment of faith, or relied on a higher source and by doing so, overcame a challenge or moved through it. If the patient does not have a personal memory of doing so in their life, nor can recall a story of a family member or friend doing so, then choose a story that is related to the spiritual tradition of the patient. For example, if the patient is from the Judeo/Christian tradition, suggest the use of the story of Daniel in the Lion’s Den and create an image around that powerful moment. Explain that in health, all humans have the ability to tap into deep faith and trust. It does not matter if it is our story or someone else’s story, the truth is that all of us, in the right circumstances, have the ability to do so. Taking time to think about this, explore personal stories and look for inspiring stories to create one’s own personal image will help reinforce this quality. Try creating your own personal “resourcefulness” image now.

The Second Screen or Yin Brain Technique
Once the images for each of the elements have been established, work with the patient to have them cycle
through the images starting with the wood image first. Have the patient practice this over and over and associate the images with the emotion associated with it.

#1-Wood: Creativity  
#2-Fire: Playfulness  
#3-Earth: Trust/love  
#4-Metal: Clarity, letting go, big picture  
#5-Water: Resourcefulness

Try it now yourself, mentally cycle through the images as you count them out starting from 1 to 5. Do it over again and again until it is as easy as saying one, two, three.

By creating and referencing these five emotions, we are promoting activity in the right hemisphere of our brain. In a relatively short time and with practice, these images will form an essential group of prominent, internal positive emotions that the patient will default to during times of change.

Putting it all together

Explain to the patient that each finger on our hand can be used to represent one of the five phases. Taken from Korean hand Therapy, the five phase associations of the hand are as follows:

Thumb – Wood  
Index finger – Fire  
Middle finger – Earth  
Ring finger – Metal  
Little finger – Water

Instruct the patient that this exercise takes five breaths and five actions.

Each breath has two phases, the inhalation and the exhalation. With the inhalation, you instruct the patient to imagine that they are pulling energy in and gathering it. Then at the end of the inhalation, the exhalation process starts. When they exhale, tell the patient to imagine blowing the energy they just gathered into one of the images. Just like when blowing on hot coals, the coals get brighter, explain to them that when they exhale, imagine the image they are activating to be brighter, stronger and more alive. This is a key aspect of this visualization. Exhaling and seeing the exhalation feeding and brightening the image really amplifies this technique.

Try this now yourself, choose one of the five images you have created and inhale with a sense of pulling energy into your chest, then when exhaling, breathe into the image in your mind, seeing it brighten, glow, expand and in doing so, affirm that this quality is a part of your nature... you are that quality!

Once you understand this process, follow along with each of the breaths and complete one cycle of the five phases with five breaths and five fingers touching as outlined below

**Breath #1** – Inhale, and then take the left thumb and touch the right thumb while exhaling and imagining the Wood/image.

**Breath #2** – Inhale, take the index finger of the left hand and touch the right index finger while exhaling and imagining the fire image.

**Breath #3** – Inhale, take the middle finger of the left hand and touch the right middle finger while exhaling and imagining the earth image.

**Breath #4** – Inhale, take the ring finger of the left hand and touch the right ring finger while exhaling and imagining the metal image.

**Breath #5** – Inhale, take the little finger of the left hand and touch the right little finger while exhaling and imagining the water image.

That’s it! All it takes is five breaths, coordinated with five powerful images, and five finger movements. Try it again to confirm the process. Now that you have the process
established, try to insert this 30 second technique multiple times in your day.

Your goal, along with your patients, should be at least 10 or 12 times a day. Since this can be practiced anywhere and anytime, insert it as often as you can. Set a timer on your phone, Fitbit or other time-tracking device to remind you to pause and perform this technique. Other less device-restricted ways would be to schedule the technique at times of change during your work day - for example, every new patient, walking into a new room, or meeting with someone. The goal here is to use this technique as a tool to regularly switch our brain back and forth from left to right hemisphere dominance and then back again.

Another consideration is work environment. As we all know, sitting has become the new smoking. Therefore if our patient’s workplace environment involves sitting all day, encourage him/her to get up from their desk and move around during these five breaths. Doing so will create a regular break in the sitting, for a moment of self-care and movement. Or, on the other hand, if the patient’s work day consists of movement, then recommend this “reframing” exercise be done sitting or standing still.

Over time, the back-and-forth switching encouraged by this technique helps us modulate our day-to-day experiences by accessing our strengths and not our weakness.

I encourage you to try this technique as I have used it with most of my patients. They reflect back to me how helpful it has been to have this as a tool to use throughout the day.

One note of caution, if when teaching or practicing this technique you, or your patient struggles with the images then don’t try and force them into creating positive images that may not feel right for them. Or if they do manage to create these images and report back to you when practicing this technique it does not have the empowering or positive effects that it is intended to have, here are some considerations and responses.

#1 - Relate to the patient that not every technique works for everybody and that they should just stop trying it.

#2 – Express that engaging these positive images may challenge some core beliefs that may be acting as inhibitors to health. These should be explored through deeper investigation with a trained counsellor or life coach.

If you have any questions or feedback, feel free to contact me at jstan@easterncurrents.ca

I hope you enjoy practicing and teaching this very special technique!

Yours in Health,

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