

CHAPTER NINE: RESONANT SOUND

*"Sound is heard not only through our ears but through every cell in our bodies."
- Dr. Mitchell Gaynor*

The study of vocal sound is a specialized subject in *qigong* and not totally necessary for the practice of the techniques presented in this book thus far. Indeed, it's not uncommon to be in surroundings where producing sounds may be disruptive or otherwise inappropriate, yet we can still effectively practice *qigong* in one form or another. That said, sound can be a very powerful element to include in your practice and is most definitely worth taking the time to develop. Further, as we'll see with the practice of *Liu Zi Jue* (The Six Healing Sounds), we can work with subvocal or nearly silent sounds in nearly any setting and in combination with other styles of *qigong*. I will introduce the subject of sound in *qigong* in this section and encourage you toward deeper study according to your interest.

The study of vocal sound in *qigong* practice is largely a cultivation of the breath. It is this clear relationship with the breath that makes vocal sound a relatively easy matter to integrate with other techniques such as *Zhan Zhuang*, Heaven and Earth *qigong*, the Eight Pieces of Brocade, and others. The better control we have of our breathing and the greater its capacity, the easier it is to produce and sustain clear sound.¹ This, of course, is common knowledge among singers.

Vibration, Influence, and Resonance

Of at least equal importance to the breath in the use of sound is the study of vibration, resonance, and harmonious expression. Everything in the manifest world is in a state of vibration. Everything that is *in movement*. This is easy to see in living things, but even solid, inanimate objects such as rocks, tables, buildings – everything, is composed of molecules and atoms which are in constant vibration and motion. Intangible manifestations such as sound, temperature, light, and forms of radiation are also expressions of movement albeit at a higher state. It is said that even thought is a form of vibration and so everything in our experience is vibrating and thereby influencing everything else. Any influence will either challenge the integrity of a form or enhance and support it in either dramatic or subtle ways. *There is, however, no neutral influence.* This can be a profound thought to ponder.

And this, of course, is why we practice – to make use of our skills and intent to produce beneficial influence for ourselves and the world around us. Sound is another direct means to produce this influence. Vocal sound, as a form of vibration, is a powerful tool to create resonance with and beneficially influence our body, mind, subtle energies, and environment. Sound, properly applied, can help the body to energetically align and integrate new information, qualities, and skills during practice. Sound when allowed to arise spontaneously, feels satisfying and genuine and facilitates the movement of *chi* in and around the body.

According to Taoist tradition, behind the body's physical form is a subtler energy vibration which supports and gives rise to the appearance of form, yet the deeper reality is energy vibration and not immutable solid form. Sound is a tool with which to influence the subtler energy vibration state of our being.

¹ See Chapter Four: Conscious Breathing, in particular 3-phase breathing and the passive, active, and turn-around elements of the breath. Mastering these elements will enhance your use of sound significantly.

Many spiritual traditions make use of chanting, singing, and the repetition of words or phrases (*mantra*) which carry meaning and can powerfully affect positive change in those participating. This is especially effective when including a clear quality of feeling/emotion behind the sound (feeling is another form of vibration). Often practitioners will sense their body become quite warm or they will notice a stronger movement of energy or have other experiences related to a shift in consciousness as a result of using sound combined with feeling and sometimes movement.

We do not exist in isolation, our every action, every word, and every thought touches the rest of the universe somehow... There is no such thing as a neutral vibration.

The term *Resonance* refers to a state of full, deep, reverberating sound. We can make such sounds during practice in ways that vibrate and benefit our internal organs. *Resonance* also refers to a quality of harmonious agreement and healthy support and this is an experience we definitely want to bring to our practice. The following technique offers us a way to begin...

The Six Healing Sounds

The Six Healing Sounds (*Liu Zi Jue*) is an ancient Taoist healing qigong practice that makes direct use of this idea of resonance. In its original form, it was presented as a method of breathing, sound, and internal focus the purpose of which is to balance, strengthen, and refine the body's energies for greater health and longevity. As the method developed over time, specific movements were added to each sound and a deeper connection with Traditional Chinese Medicine was established.

*“One should take air in through the nose and let it out slowly through the mouth... There is one way of drawing breath in and six ways of expelling breath out.”
- Tao, Hung-jing, a 5th century Chinese physician*

As is often the case with ancient, traditional practices, there are multiple ways in which to use the Six Healing Sounds. Various versions have emerged depending on the region and dialect in which it was practiced as well as its philosophic background (Taoist, Buddhist, etc.)² Even the sounds themselves are not always consistent between traditions, and yet they can all work well so long as our core principles are present along with a sense of clear resonance. To this end, it's good to explore several different

approaches as you develop the way you'll work with this technique. As always, we are going for our personal sense of heightened wellbeing – the approach that helps *you* to feel a deeper, stronger sense of harmony and integration.

Below, I'll present the way in which I practice this technique with the sound, its element from the *Wu Xing*, its attributed organs, its color, and the positive qualities associated with each. Additional information, including variations in how each sound can be expressed, can be found in Appendix 13.

Method of Practice: Within a comfortably seated position³ and with a background feeling of gratitude and well-being, inhale deeply then exhale the first sound (HU for the element Earth) in a serene, meditative fashion. (At first, I suggest that you make this sound without tone – a simple exhalation based on the basic sound. Later, experiment with tone and notice the differences.) Meanwhile, focus comfortably on the region of the spleen/stomach and the specific quality(s) associated with it that you

2 One account attributes this practice to a sixth century Buddhist hermit. Another attributes it to Tao Hung-jing, a famous fifth century physician.

3 The practice of the Six Healing Sounds can easily be incorporated into the seated phase of Zhan Zhuang qigong. Align, breathe, work with the sounds, and then continue with sitting to standing Zhan Zhuang. Or this practice can be used by itself. It can also be an excellent practice just before sleep.

choose to work with such as *balance*. When you are complete with the first sound, move to each of the others in order of succession. (See below.) It is common to work with each sound for 3, 6, or 9 repetitions for a balanced overall approach, then move to the next.⁴

The first five sounds/organs relate directly to the Five Elements (*Wu Xing*) as discussed earlier. We will thus be reviewing and expanding on this concept. The five sounds help stimulate, regulate, and energetically support the five organ pairs, while the sixth sound for the Triple Warmer helps harmonize all five and supports the body as a whole. The six healing sounds can also be used to correct organ imbalance and assist in the body's healing processes.

You'll notice that each sound/element has multiple qualities associated with it. In the beginning, its often best to focus on only one at a time, whichever one feels most relevant to you in the moment. Over time, expand the qualities you use with this technique. Also, don't feel that you must constrict yourself to the ones listed below... If a related positive image or principle comes to mind, you can include that as well.

The Six Sounds and their Attributes

1. The first sound is **HU** (pronounced like “*who*”).

Its element is **Earth**.

Its organs are the **Spleen/Stomach/Pancreas**.

Its positive attributes include stability, balance, centering, fairness, practicality, patience, thoughtfulness, nurturance, and harmony.

Its color is yellow.

2. The second sound is **SI** (pronounced like “*ssss*”).

Its element is **Metal**.

Its organs are the **Lung/Large Intestine**.

And its positive attributes include courage, integrity, self-worth, determination, focus, strength, clarity, and persistence.

Its color is white or clear.

3. The third sound is **CHUI** (pronounced like “*choooo*”).

Its element is **Water**.

Its organs are the **Kidney/Bladder**.

And its positive qualities are wisdom, insight, intelligence, flexibility, gentleness, rest, and calmness.

Its color is black or dark blue.

4. The fourth sound is **XU** (pronounced like “*shhh*” with rounded lips.)

Its element is **Wood**.

Its organs are the **Liver/Gall Bladder**.

And the its positive qualities are kindness, generosity, idealism, leadership, growth, expansion, and altruism.

Its color is green.

⁴ I often practice in this fashion; other times, however, I will use each sound according to the number of repetitions that feel best internally in the moment, spending more time with one and less with another. This approach makes more sense with a deeper understanding of Chinese Medicine as one can augment organ systems according to Five Element Theory and a sense of what one's body most needs for greater balance.

5. The fifth sound is **HE** (pronounced like “*hahh*” somewhat like a sigh or a laugh).

Its element is **Fire**.

It's organs are the **Heart/Small Intestine**.

And its positive qualities are joy, passion, enthusiasm, love, sincerity, inspiration, creativity, and laughter.

Its color is red.

6. The sixth sound is **XI** (pronounced like “*s-heee*” with initial emphasis on the “s”). It's “organ” is the **Triple Warmer**. This triple warmer is unique to Chinese Medicine and relates more to function than to a particular anatomical structure. It is often suggested that this last sound is produced sub-vocally or at least quietly. This practice is good for balancing the three *dantien*. We begin with a full breath as discussed previously – inhale first into the lower abdomen, continue into the mid torso (ribs expand to the sides), and into the upper back and chest. This is done to full but comfortable expansion. While exhaling *sheee*, imagine relaxing from the top of the head (upper *dantien*), through the chest (middle *dantien*), into the abdomen (lower *dantien*). In Chinese medicine it is said that heat tends to rise (fire element). In this practice, as we relax, we do so with the intent of drawing excess heat from the upper to the lower *dantien* where the energy can be safely stored. The practice of the Six Healing Sounds concludes with the Triple Warmer which balances and integrates the body as a whole. This can be done either sitting or lying down and is especially good to do prior to sleep.

About Tonality and Volume: I have experienced this practice done both with and without an emphasis on tone. With tonality, the experience is more closely akin to singing; without, it is a simpler expression of the breath as it passes through the mouth as in “hissing”, for instance. It is a question of whether or not to vibrate the vocal chords. This is a personal choice depending on what works best for you. Similarly, some practitioners produce these sounds vocally, sometimes fairly loudly, and others do so sub-vocally (silently or more like a whisper). I use both approaches, again based on what feels best in the moment. You may notice that louder expression of sound tends to raise or engage one's energy more dramatically while a quieter approach is more calming and can be a good way to end a session, especially with the Triple Burner sound.

While producing these sounds, do so with a comfortable, relaxed feel. Avoid any sense of strain; *try to feel the sound naturally arising from within you, connected to the organ and to the positive quality associated with it.*

Additional Thoughts on this Practice

* Gently enhance Your Depth of Feeling: A key element of this practice is to cultivate a keen and deep sense of the organ/region you are working with as well as its positive attribute(s). You might find it helpful to visualize the color or an image/symbol of the quality you are focusing on. The value of such visualization is to bring an internal quality, *determination* for instance, from an abstract concept into a tangible felt experience.

When working with the Heart sound, for example, you may wish to remember a time when you felt quite happy and engaged with life; perhaps visualize a blazing fire or a candle flame... whatever makes that feeling and quality more present for you. The purpose for *any* visualization done during qigong practice is to enhance our “felt-sense” physically, energetically, and emotionally during practice. This is far more effective than visualization that is merely abstract or visual in nature. Dig deep into your experience.

* Explore and Experiment: Because sounds are difficult to convey in words, you may wish to do some

research online for examples of the six sounds. As always, I am a great believer in exploration and using those methods that you personally find most powerful for you. I am convinced that experimentation is both worthwhile and necessary. Hear how others are working with this, experiment a little, and use what feels best to you in the moment.

* **Further Your Study of Chinese Medicine:** The above approach to the Six Healing Sounds is an effective way to practice. There is more to it, however, that further integrates 5-Element Theory, movement patterns for each sound/element, and other aspects of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Depending on your background, you may wish to learn the anatomical positions of the various organs, how they are viewed in Chinese Medicine, and the path of their associated acupuncture meridians. All this will further your ability to make this qigong technique – and all others – that much more effective and satisfying for you.

* **Personal Alchemy:** As mentioned previously, qigong is change work. We practice to improve our health and well being as well as to enhance the positive aspects of our nature. We can view the positive attributes of the Six Healing Sounds as inherent human powers that, through focused attention, we can further develop and more consciously express in our daily life. All of us tend to be stronger in some areas and less so in others. This practice offers us one way in which we can begin to enhance ourselves in new and uplifting ways by directing our energy and attention.

* There are different ways of working with the sounds depending on the desired effect. For example: The Fire/Heart sound HE can be expressed and/or inwardly heard as *Ha!* as if loudly and clearly shouted from a mountain top, to raise one's spirits and in a feeling of joyful vitality. Compare this with a quiet, internal repetition of *haaa...* to calm the heart in a feeling of inner well-being. Both uses have their place depending on what you are wanting to do in the moment.

Spontaneous, Harmonious Expression

The use of specific vocal sounds including toning and the in-depth use of mantra⁵, are present in many traditions. Likewise, the singing of hymns in churches, national anthems, and even pop music has also long been used as a method of focusing emotional, physical, and subtle energy around a particular theme. Such things are also used to bring groups together in harmonious agreement whether it be of a life-affirming nature or otherwise. Regardless of how it is used, however, sound and the intention which accompanies it, is powerful indeed.

The two approaches we can take to nearly anything is whether to master a particular traditional system and/or to work on a more intuitive level. Techniques such as the Six Healing Sounds or yogic tones used to activate the chakras for instance, can be helpful and beneficial or they can be, like overly systematic approaches to anything, artificial and limiting. The key is to make wise choices as to *which* systems we employ, making sure that we have a fundamental sense of rightness about them, and then use them in ways that are

"Modern science is now in agreement with what the ancient mystics have told us: everything is in a state of vibration, from the electrons moving around the nucleus of an atom, to planets and distant galaxies moving around stars. As they're creating movement, they are creating vibration, and this vibration can be perceived of as sound. So everything is creating a sound, including the sofa that we're sitting on, or this table, or our bodies. Every organ, every bone, every tissue, every system of the body is creating a sound."
- Dr. Jonathan Goldman, Healing Sounds: The Power of Harmonics

⁵ *Mantra*: a specific sound, word, or phrase repeated as an aid in meditation. First use of these is believed to be in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, though many indigenous cultures have utilized this principle throughout history.

flexible and adaptable to our own inner intelligence.

The other side of the coin when working with vocal sounds is to intuitively and spontaneously allow sounds to arise during our practice. Spontaneous sound, of course, happens all the time as we make noises that express and *facilitate* our state of being. We sigh when tired or sad, we laugh when happy, we yelp, cry, shout, cough, gasp, etc. all very naturally in response to how we are feeling in the moment. In similar fashion, we can listen to how our energy is moving and what sort of sound would most effectively augment/enhance our sense of strength and wellbeing during practice. We can express that in a sound, a tone, or even a word that is then sustained in our voice and empowered by our breath.

I am also reminded of the *kiai*⁶ found in karate and other martial arts. A *kiai* is a shout which is expressed at the moment of a strike, kick, or other technique. Its purpose is to sharply focus one's energy and intent making the technique more effective. This kind of expression can be done in a predetermined way as in a form or kata, or it can emerge naturally in the course of deep practice. I often experience this when immersed in Taiji form work. I find that as the energy gathers during various parts of the form, a vocal expression bubbles up from lower dantien in a natural and satisfying way. It has the effect of deepening and integrating my practice and is often unexpected. This is a bit different than a traditional *kiai* in that it is less pre-determined and more about the organic expression of energy and breath.

We can cultivate the use of sound more actively in qigong practice by simply giving sound more attention, giving ourselves permission to make sound, and experimenting with what feels good. What vocal sounds give us the effect we are wanting in the moment. Do we want to feel relaxed, energized, focused, expansive, compassionate, creative, etc. The Six Healing Sounds are a great place to begin your exploration with this. Also the familiar *Ohm* and *Ahh* sounds⁷, in various tones, are both simple and effective to use. From there, one could experiment with other vowel sounds and see what resonates the most in any given moment.

As you begin to feel more comfortable working with various sounds/tones, whether it be the Six Healing Sounds, or *Ohm*, or more spontaneously arising sound, begin to infuse this practice with positive emotion. Give this some thought and use emotions that are readily available to you. Remembering a time when you felt a certain good way can help to bring the feeling more to the surface. Then its just a matter of combining the positive emotion with the sound you are generating and possibly a movement you are working with. Duration can be just a moment, or it can be quite sustained. The greater your breathing capacity, the more easily you will be able to sustain the sound and the deeper the resonance will go.

Enjoy this level of practice. Sound, used intuitively in this fashion, can run quite deeply. It will move energy and shift your consciousness in a positive way if that is your intention. Again, let yourself commit to the process. Explore, experiment, and see what others have to say on this fascinating topic.

I end this section with a quote by Dr Richard Gerber, author of *Vibrational Medicine*: "Sound therapy is one of the prototypical vibrational healing modalities. Sound produces measurable vibratory feelings throughout the body, depending upon the frequency and amplitude of the sound used. There have been a wide variety of sound healing developments over the last ten to twenty years. Certain sounds most

6 The term *kiai* is Japanese; in Korean martial arts the shout is referred to as a *ki'hap*. In Chinese martial arts such as Taiji, there is either no emphasis on vocal expression or there is the use of *hen* and *ha* sounds that are more like natural expressions of the breath within movement with perhaps some emphasis given at punctuated moments.

7 See Wayne Dyer's book *Meditations for Manifesting* for a powerful application of Om and Ah sounds – also on Youtube

likely have a healing influence upon the body because they influence the *geometric patterns* and *organization of cells and living systems*." I would add that sound is also of great importance due to the profound affect it has emotional and psychological states on both conscious and subconscious levels. These in turn directly influence our patterns of thinking. By choosing what sound influences we allow in our environment and by using sound in ever more skillful and focused ways, we can harness this to our great benefit.

Quick Review

1. The use of vocal sound, while not necessary for practice, can be a very powerful element to include during certain qigong practices.
2. Mastery of vocal sound is partly a study of breath and partly a study of authentic resonance and relaxed concentration.
3. The Six Healing Sounds, or *Liu Zi Jue*, is an ancient practice that connects certain sounds to the five elements, their associated physical and metaphorical qualities, and a sixth sound that helps integrate the body as a whole. It is a practice that runs very deeply and can be used in many ways. It is presented here in a simple, but effective form upon which you can build with experience and further study.
4. Vocal sound can also be used spontaneously/intuitively as one practices either still or movement based qigong.
5. A good way to begin working with more spontaneous/intuitive use of sound is to simply feel into how your body wants to express sound during deep qigong, Taiji, or other practice. Using *Ohm* and *Ah* while in a meditative state is a good way to begin.
6. When working with sound, take it slow and quietly at first, feel into how sound affects your body, emotion, and state of consciousness as you go. Use sound in such a way that it either calms and deepens your state or raises your sense of vitality and well-being, etc. depending on what you are wanting to experience. Always feel into a sense of authentic expression rather than performance in your practice.

Action Plan for Chapter Nine

1. Continue with your practice as outlined above and during the seated phase of Zhan Zhuang, introduce the Six Healing Sounds... You can also practice them just before bed as it has shown to promote a relaxing night's sleep.
2. When practicing Taiji, moving qigong, or other forms of exercise explore how the body may wish to express itself... allow yourself to make sound, whether very quietly or more loudly, so as to further integrate and empower what you are doing.
2. Review this section, Appendix Thirteen, and additional related materials for further understanding on the topic of Sound. Most importantly, respect your own experience and build upon that.