

8th Principle - Smiling Energy



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November Principle Qigong Focus: Smiling Energy

Smiling Energy is the last of 8 principles in our year-long exploration of Self. As usual, we will touch on how the principle can be applied to three layers of your being: physical, mental and emotional. The level at which you choose to participate is always up to you. Awareness, empowers change.

Qigong Principle 8 - Smiling Energy

The practice of applying all previous 7 principles (Grounding Energy, Rising Energy, Minding the Breath, Expanding/Absorbing, Exploring Yin & Yang, Sinking Energy, & Listening Energy) in a manner which encourages the release of physical, mental and emotional tension, allowing the heart to open fully. The result becomes an ability to see the world anew and tap into one's child-like nature with a sense of freedom and of wonder.

Physical Level Goal: Learn to use Smiling Energy to release physical tension, thus increasing circulation, flexibility and overall well-being.

Remember when you were little and you played just for the fun of it? Even the most shy child, had the desire to cut loose and be playful. As our surroundings and circumstances begin to mold us, some people lose that sense of playfulness. Emotions such as fear and anger create a great deal of tension in the heart, mind and body. Simply put, when we feel threatened, our survival mechanism takes over, we move into high alert and tensions rise. If one is not able to move past that feeling of threat, a state of chronic tension and lack of fully expressive movement begins to take over which leads to poor circulation, pain, dis-comfort and eventually, dis-ease.

As you continue to explore the things that have been holding you back, use the principles to strengthen your foundation and inner being so that you may let go of the tensions and open up your body. Allow yourself to move in a more mindful and fluid manner.

Mental Level Goal: Recognize how Smiling Energy helps you to settle. By practicing Smiling Energy and mindful awareness, your mind will feel freer and more creative. You will experience more positive thought streams.

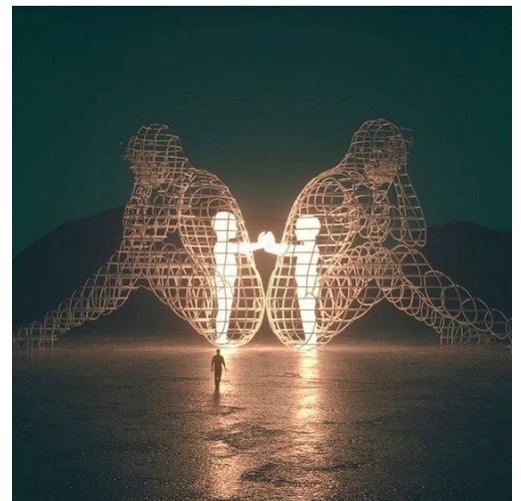
While it may not feel like it at times, our thoughts and words are a choice, and they hold a lot of power. They can be tools of motivation and support or weapons of mass destruction. Notice how triggers and patterns can feed "autopilot" behaviors which can cause a sense of helplessness or lack of control. Your words or actions may seem to come flying out without thinking, later feeling regret for the pain that may have resulted. Each month we have offered you perspective, suggestions and tools to help move from helpless and hopeless to awareness and understanding. Once you have done the work of understanding, your behaviors become a choice. As is true with all the principles, Smiling Energy takes a lot of hard work and practice to cultivate. But just like a good home cooked meal vs fast food, the way you will feel is worth the effort.

At times it may seem that accessing a smile is impossible, especially if we feel stuck. It is at those times that it becomes even more important to look for the opportunities to feed that energy. Even if you have to share someone else's. Allow even a fleeting laugh, a shared warm smile, gentle touch or embrace to help kick-start your journey up from the depths. Each time you make the effort, it gets easier. Each time you use a tool, you become more familiar. Each time you make a choice to take step into a positive direction, you grow.

Emotional Level Goal: Use Smiling Energy to create a non-judgmental window into yourself, allowing you to explore the emotions that present themselves and embrace who you want to become.

Smiling Energy practice is not about what shows up on your face, it is about what shows up in your heart. When your heart is grateful, your smile will be deeply and noticeably sincere. So consider that Smiling Energy is simply the process of embracing a feeling of gratitude. It's not about being grateful for your car, house or bank account but feeling grateful for the breath of life itself. No more, no less. To simply sit in gratitude of life is one of the most powerful meditation practices. If you are having trouble releasing difficult emotions in order to smile from your heart then ask yourself, "What is in my way?" Unless you are willing to identify the blockage and work toward a solution, the warmth in your smile will continue to elude you. For when the heart is unsettled, it will affect your physical and mental balance. To truly reach deep into your Smiling Energy practice, one must find compassion for self and others. The heart must be tended, nurtured, respected and helped to heal. Use the body and the mind to help the heart heal. The process of healing one's heart can take many forms and are often most powerful when blended together. Some of the many options are journaling, working with a life coach and/or counselor, meditation, practicing qigong exercises, or other deep, internal practice which serves to explore and strengthen your relationship with your heart. As you become more mindful in your Smiling Energy practice, you will begin to develop a more profound connection to yourself and will find that you become free from heartache.

Research suggests that a heart felt smile can help lower blood pressure and there is also a link to reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety. Smiling is one of the great pleasures of being human and we can share one almost from birth. Smiling triggers the pleasure center in the brain which helps lift our mood. It has the power to improve the way we are perceived by others and helps us form stronger social bonds. Sharing the warmth of a smile with someone can elevate their mood and reduce their physical tension. In fact, there is a study which showed that even just witnessing an act of kindness (such as a smile) I can have almost as much positive affect on the observer as it does the active participants. More importantly, performing acts of kindness boosts ones own happiness level. There is a lot of power in kindness and a simple smile can lead the way. If, at first, you have trouble smiling from your heart, then try smiling TO your heart. Start by giving yourself a smile. Please note, Healing the Heart is a life long journey, after all that is why we are on this planet in the first place.



Exercise - Exploring Freedom of Expression

What if you reconnected with your childlike freedom? Free to express yourself fully, without fear of judgement or ridicule. How would that feel? Comfortable? Uncomfortable? Use these exercises to explore your ability to let go and be free. Choose one or more of these suggested actions (or make up your own) and have fun with it. Use Listening and Sinking Energy to notice any "adult or parenting behavior" creeping in, then let it go. This could come in the form of judgmental self-talk, ego statements such as "what will others think of me" and so on...let go and have fun!

- Wash your car in the rain. (one of my personal favorites)
- Lay in the grass and watch the clouds drift by. Find pictures in the clouds.
- Use your non-dominant hand to color a picture without any care for staying in the lines or which colors I am "supposed to use."
- Draw or paint a self-portrait; freehand with your non-dominant hand.
- If you have children in your life, get down on their level and play a game by their rules no matter how silly it gets.
- Choose to do an activity which clearly places you out of your comfort zone: singing, white water rafting, rock climbing, skiing, swimming, public speaking.

During this challenge, and immediately after, tune your Listening Energy to your heart. What is different? Do you feel lighter, more relaxed, more available for life? Are you able to smile more freely and honestly?