March Principle Qigong Focus: Rising Energy
This is the second Qigong Principle in our year long exploration of self through each of 8 Qigong Principles. We will share perspective on all three layers, physical, mental and emotional. The level at which you participate is always up to you. Awareness, empowers change.

Qigong Principle 2 - Rising Energy
The uplifting energy that flows through you mentally and emotionally when you practice being grounded and work to optimize postural alignment and structural integrity.

Physical Level Goal: Understand structural alignment and work toward optimum, personal posture.
Structurally, we find 24 articulating (moving) joints (vertebrae) and 9 fused joints in the typical human spine. Top to bottom, there are 7 articulated joints located in the cervical spine (neck), 12 in the thoracic (mid spine) and 5 in the lumbar (lower spine). The final 9 joints are fused together in the sacrum and coccyx (tail bone), at the base of spine. The vertebrae are separated by cushions called intervertebral disks which are made of a thick, leathery outer covering filled with a jelly like material. Proper alignment allows the 4 natural curves in the spine to be maintained, ensuring the disks are evenly distributing the load across their centers. When the spine is in a chronic misalignment, over time, pressure on the disks increase and will weaken them significantly. Learning to listen to, and work with (not against) your spine, are critical to developing overall strength and health. Rising Energy begins at the lower Dan Tien with a grounded stance and moves into the mid back by lifting up toward the Middle Dan Tien, then gently forward. Once the lower and middle Dan Tien are stable, we move our attention to the Upper Dan Tien by drawing the chin in toward the spine, which then lengthens the cervical spine and lifts the crown of the head toward the sky. At first this can feel awkward but with practice, you will become more comfortable and able to maintain a stronger postural alignment.

IMPORTANT: Always listen to your body and avoid increasing pain levels during practice. If something feels sharp, stop immediately and seek further training before continuing.

Mental Level Goal: Understand how our mental perspective can affect physical posture and alignment.
Consider the expressions “Rise to the occasion” or “Stand on your own two feet.” Each represents a manner of standing in your own light, of being strong when challenged. When your body feels aligned and stable, you are more likely to take on difficult tasks and see them through with confidence. What about when you are overwhelmed or depressed? Does your posture and alignment change? Typically, it will begin to weaken and feel vulnerable, reflecting your thoughts back to you in physical form. Well just as your thoughts can affect your posture, so too can your posture affect your perspective. When faced with a difficult task, do you believe you can do it, or is it hopeless? Are you a victim or survivor? What is your current posture telling you to believe? What if you took a moment to create a strong, grounded stance and a tall, properly aligned spine? What do you think your answer would be then?

Emotional Level Goal: Understand how your structural integrity can affect emotions and how emotions can affect structural integrity.
I have never met anyone who stood up tall and strong to announce, “I am depressed” or someone who felt a deep, rage level anger and looked structurally weak doing it. If you accept that our emotions can overwhelm us and cause our posture to change, then it is reasonable to also accept that a strong, healthy posture can help support our emotional well-being. It is a two-way street. Let’s explore this concept a little more. What does your posture do when you feel overwhelmed by an emotion? It really depends on the emotion. Some will cause you to spring forward, others will cause you to fall back, or even down. How do you feel when you sit in your favorite chair? At first probably wonderful because it is so familiar but after...
a while, does your spine collapse into weakness? How does that affect your mood? Your ability to focus? To care? What about your sitting position at work? Does it offer structural support or do you quickly become misaligned, uncomfortable, distracted? Does your driving posture help keep you alert or does it relax you into a stupor? These are just some examples of how posture can affect your emotional well-being and at times, even your safety. Training Cautions Reminder: Throughout the year the Qigong practices we share will become progressively more challenging. With this in mind, it is important that each of us work within comfortable limits. There are three layers of attention we ask you to keep in mind for all manners of physical training; strength, flexibility and pain. Please do not push past what your body is willing to do, today. Learning to respect boundaries, is a vital part of our journey together.

Exercise - Breathing Up the Spine
In a standing position, feet are parallel and hip width apart, pelvis is settled, spine is tall, shoulders are relaxed. Arms will be hanging by your side. First, draw attention to your breath. As you inhale, feel the flow of air moving past your nostrils. Notice the temperature and humidity level (often cool and dry). As you exhale, again feel the breath leaving your body and notice the temperature and humidity level. (often warm and moist). As random thoughts enter your mind (and they will), notice them, then release them to be tended to at a later time.

Once you become aware of your breath, visualize the inhale slowly filling up the spine from the pelvis all the way to the top of the head. With this strong attention to spine, your arms should feel loose and simply hang off your shoulders. As you exhale, allow your spine to settle and relax being careful not to give away your strong posture. Repeat this pattern working to deepen your breath and strengthen focus on the spine. Lengthening on the inhale and settling into relaxed alignment on the exhale.

This internal practice allows you to begin connecting with intricate muscles close to the spine which are often difficult to intentionally activate. As you begin to move your spine within other practices, this new found awareness will serve you well to strengthen alignment, maintain stability and reduce the potential for spinal strain.

From a strong, grounded stance, attention begins to divide at the Lower Dan Tien with half moving toward grounded roots [1] and half moving upward toward the crown of the head.

As your attention moves into the Middle Dan Tien, lift the chest up and slightly forward. Make sure you keep your pelvis settled to prevent arching your back. [2]

As your attention moves into the Upper Dan Tien, draw the chin in toward the spine allowing the neck to elongate, being careful to keep the jaw line parallel to the floor. [3]

Once you are well rooted and tall spine is in place, gently move the shoulders to the sides, allowing them to relax open. [4]

Visualize you have an egg under each arm being careful not to crush, or drop them.