

The Genesis of Embodying the Light

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I teach a Qigong/Tai Chi/Yoga class for Reno Friends three times a month and was recently asked how I came to this practice and what it means to me. I thought a blog post would be the perfect way to answer that question.

I have been practicing yoga since 2008 and Qigong/Tai Chi since 2014. I came to these practices after injuries and during rehabilitation. You might say I discovered them after breaking myself repeatedly. In Western culture, we are programmed to push ourselves to attain physical goals and fitness. Like many people, I was able to do this in my youth, but as I aged, this strategy was no longer working!

What began as a means of physical healing, has become a path to emotional healing and spiritual growth. It is difficult to put into words the power of these practices, but I will try. What I first noticed was how quickly and forcefully I wanted to perform each pose and form. I was often onto the next one in my mind before my body had completed the last one! I realized this is how I live my life—no wonder I was stressed out most of the time and was injuring myself. As I learned to slow down and be present to each movement, my mind began to slow down and settle. I'd been meditating since my mid-20's and never had much success in settling my mind, but these moving meditations were powerful gateways to settling my busy brain. I grew calmer, more peaceful, able to move from my center rather than my head. After a session, I felt energized and clear, yet also calm. This was a new and powerful experience for me.

I studied with different teachers both in person and on videos. Every teacher has gifts to bring, and I am grateful to all of them. I began teaching myself, first subbing for one of my teachers. That is when my practice reached a whole new level! They say you teach what you need to learn, and I found this is true. For a few years, I had my own studio and taught what I called "yogachilates"—a combination of yoga, Qigong/Tai Chi, and Pilates.

Now I do the Embodying the Light practice every morning and my day no longer feels right without it. I decided I wanted to share it with Reno Friends and have found great joy in doing so! Some of my friends and their friends also attend the class, including some who used to come to my studio. It is a way I can share something that has transformed my life and my relationship with my body and the Light that animates it.

Both yoga and Qigong/Tai Chi are ancient practices from the East designed to open the flow of "Prana" or "Chi" through the body, similar concepts to the "Light" in Quaker thought. Both are pathways to tap into and feel the Source of all Creation that lies within us, to understand at a visceral level the flow of this Light through us. Our consciousness shapes this Light as it enters the world, like the shaping of the forms used in these practices. They help to slow us down, clear blocks, and mindfully channel the Creation happening through us, to feel the inner Chi/Prana/Light which animates us and all we do. When I can settle deeply into my practice, I feel the Light that connects us all with each other, all things, and the Divine Source. This is truly a magical space, full of creative potentiality. We are all miraculous conduits for Light and Love to enter this world.

That's another blessing the practice has given me: learning to really love myself, to be kind and gentle in how I treat myself and others. I've learned that this kindness must begin with me on my mat and then go out into the world. One of my teachers has this slogan: Off the Mat and Into the World. I think it naturally resonates with Quakers who strive to live their testimonies in the world as their message. I love the Quaker query: *Are your commitments and activities within your strength and Light?* We Westerners tend to overdo and push ourselves to do more. These Eastern practices teach us the value of non-doing, of allowing action to flow effortlessly through us, that less can be more.

The Stewardship testimony is also captured in Embodying the Light, which is designed to help us be good stewards of this sacred vessel which carries our Light through this life. These practices have been used for thousands of years to promote health and wellness, to clear out toxins and energetic blocks, to heal. Good stewardship begins within.

An extra bonus of my morning practice is that I can center down more easily during Silent Worship. It settles my active mind, so that when I sit, I can be quiet (or at least quieter than I usually am). I find myself more open to the messages coming through to me from the Beyond that is Within.

I have found Qigong and Tai Chi to be delightful teachers of the play of opposites going on within and around us at all times. This Yin/Yang symbol captures this idea in mandala form:



When we are moving through the forms, opposites are always at play: left/right, up/down, earth/heaven, active/passive, yin/yang. Yet, there is a Witnessing Presence in the center directing and observing the flow of the forms into one another. At the end of each form, we bring the two opposites together and unify them by settling the Chi. For me it is a reminder that we live in the world of forms, of opposites at play, but the forms come out of a unified field of loving Light. Here is a mandala I created to capture this idea:



The caption that goes with this mandala reads: *The play of Light and Dark is contained within a field of pure loving Awareness.*

It reminds me of this Quaker quote: *I saw that there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness. In that I also saw the infinite love of God, and I had great openings.* George Fox, 1647

Because of these powerful, simple practices, I live my life in a new way. I am grateful for the leadings that brought them into my life. *Namaste*—the Divine in me honors the Divine in you.

If you are interested in the practice, you can find out more and do the practice using my videos on my website: <https://rhondaashurst.com/embodying-the-light/>. My class schedule is on the calendar on this website: <http://www.renofriends.org/calendar/>. If you would like to be added to my email list, send me an email at rhondalou14@gmail.com. All classes are free and open to anyone wishing to attend.