



IN POSITION Qi Gong teacher Lee Holden will lead a workshop on Oct. 17.

Don't Push the River

The human alchemy of Qi Gong | BY JOHN MALKIN

Playing with energy. This is the idea behind Qi Gong according to Lee Holden, who has studied the ancient Chinese art of movement and meditation for more than 20 years. Holden is a founding director of the Santa Cruz Integrative Medicine and Chi Center and also an acupuncturist. He will be leading a Qi Gong Intensive Workshop at the Santa Cruz Center on Sunday, Oct. 17.

"Qi means life-force energy," explains Holden. "It's the energy that keeps us alive and that animates our body. It's the energy behind thoughts and consciousness and it's the energy that beats your heart." Qi Gong—pronounced "chee gung" and sometimes spelled "Chi Gong"—is used worldwide by some 100 million people. The practice is described by Holden and others as self-healing and is characterized by slow, fluid movements and stretches, deep breathing and the vocalizing of specific sounds that correspond to the body, mind and spirit.

Holden has appeared often on PBS, and Qi Gong with Lee Holden can be seen on Santa Cruz Community TV. Last month, Sounds True released a new CD/DVD kit by Holden titled *Qi Gong for Health and Healing*. "The real focus in my work," he says, "is giving people tools and resources to be able to heal their own bodies and activate the internal healing power that is already innate and powerful."

Lee Holden first became aware of the possibility of playing with energy after being offered meditation by his parents. "My mom and dad were into visualization, hypnosis and NLP. They sort of experimented on us kids. Before we'd go to sleep they'd tell us to relax, focus on our breath, visualize this and visualize that. It became sort of our nightly ritual," he recalls. "As I was visualizing and breathing deeply, I could feel electricity and energy in my body. It freaked me out. I didn't know what it was."

It wasn't until he was going to college at UC

Berkeley and reading about Taoism and Qi Gong that Holden fully understood the experience: "They described the energy paths in the body and how it moved and I thought, 'That's what happened to me!'"

Holden also played soccer at UC Berkeley and had a severe back injury. He took some Qi Gong classes and went to an acupuncturist who taught him how to heal his own body. Our bodies have tremendous healing potential and power. If we can unblock the flow of this life force energy, the natural healing starts. Holden later traveled to South East Asia, China and Japan to absorb the roots of this human alchemy practice.

"Taoism gave birth to Qi Gong. It's the moving meditation form of Taoism," explains Holden, referring to the ancient Chinese philosophy encapsulated in Lao Tzu's book "Tao Te Ching." "Taoism is a way of life, a suggestion on how to live more effortlessly and fluidly with enjoyment, integrity, balance and harmony. Qi Gong is derived from watching the way that nature works."

Qi Gong also includes a kind of musical meditation, with sound playing a vital role in transforming physical and mental energy. "In Qi Gong we think of sound as vibration, just as light is vibration," says Holden. "When we make a sound in Qi Gong we are directing that sound to a particular area of the body. Sound has a way of clearing and cleansing particular areas."

Holden reminds his students that Qi Gong is a method of healing through pleasure instead of pain. "In Qi Gong we don't use force to have an affect." Holden recalls a relevant motto: "There's a saying in Qi Gong: Don't Push The River."

*Santa Cruz Integrative Medicine and Chi Center is located at 21511B East Cliff Drive. Visit santacruzchi-center.com. John Malkin is a journalist, musician and host of *The Great Leap Forward* on Wednesday nights from 7 to 9 p.m. on Free Radio Santa Cruz, 101.1 FM and freakradio.org. Tune in this Wednesday to hear the complete interview with Lee Holden.*