

What is Chi and Where does it Come From?

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What is Chi, or Qi and where does it come from? Many Martial Arts instructors will tell you that the power of your techniques is derived from controlling your Chi. Ask your Sensei to explain what Chi really is and how to use it. For the most part, many instructors don't understand it themselves.

Chi is energy on the brink of becoming matter, and matter at the point of becoming energy. It is vital energy, the life force. When chi gathers, life is formed, when it dies, so the body dies. The Chinese character for Chi is gas (or energy) setting atop the character for rice. Hence, the energy that is food.

But where does Chi come from? To completely understand the answer to this question, we must look to Eastern Philosophy. It is difficult to explain Chi or it's actions to one who is not open to accepting the Eastern mindset. There are many different types of chi, and all must be understood to understand the whole. I have listed the different types of Chi below with a brief layman's explanation of each.

- Yuan Chi - The original or "Before Heaven" chi, this is the chi that is immediately inherited at the time of conception. Nothing you do can change this type of chi.
- Gu Chi - This is "After Heaven" chi and is derived from food. It is the chi of the spleen.
- Kong Chi - This also is "After Heaven" chi but it is derived from air and is the chi of the Lung.
- Zong Chi (Chi of the chest) - The gathering of both the Gu Chi and the Kong Chi.
- Zheng Chi - This is "normal" chi, it is the product of the Zong Chi being catalyzed by the Yuan Chi.
- Ying Chi - The nutritive Zheng Chi that nourishes the organs and tissue.
- Wei Chi - The defensive Zheng Chi that circulates on the surface of the body and protects it from external factors.
- Zangfu Zhi Chi - This is the Zheng Chi that flows through the organs.
- Jing Luo Zhi Chi - This is the Zheng Chi that flows through the meridians.

As you can see, the question "What is Chi, and where does it come from?" is much more complicated than it appears. As martial artist, we need to understand all of the different types of chi. You cannot develop one type of chi without effecting another. The focus for the majority of martial artists is the Wei or defensive chi. This is what protects us from an attacker's blow or allows us to smash through boards and bricks with our bare hand.

To develop Wei Chi, we must not only concentrate on meditation but also on our diet and exercise. Wei Chi is a type of Zheng Chi, Zheng Chi originates from Gu (Food) and Kong (Air) Chi. If one has a poor diet or does not participate in a regular exercise program the Zong Chi will suffer disharmonies thus inhibiting the development of the Wei Chi. Disharmonies include deficient chi; the process of aging and illness, sinking chi; leads to organ prolapse, stagnant chi; bruising, and rebellious chi; chi flowing in the wrong direction. An example of rebellious stomach chi would be hiccups or vomiting.

Chi flows from the chest, down the front of the arms to the fingers. It then travels up the back of the arms to the head. The chi then travels down the back to the feet and back up the front of the body to the chest. This flowing chi is the Jing Luo Zhi Chi. It travels through the meridians of the body that can be best described as electrical channels. There are 12 main channels; 8 extraordinary channels; 12 transverse luo; 12 tendinomuscle channels; 12 divergent channels; and 16 longitudinal luo. The transverse and longitudinal luo and the tendinomuscle and divergent channels are merely "connections" between the main and extraordinary channels. There are points along these channels that are chi vortexes which we know as "the pressure points" used in Atemi Waza. These points are the exact same points used in acupuncture and acupressure.

Chi is one of the 3 treasures that are the essential components of life. Chi - energy, Jing - essence, and Shen - spirit. When the three treasures are in harmony the individual is radiant, physically fit, and mentally sharp. Just as developing one aspect of chi affects another, so does it affect the other two of the three treasures. One should find a balance of the three treasures through meditation, exercise, and living well in general. Any disruption of the three treasures leads to an imbalance of the whole. This imbalance can be manifested as physical or psychological abnormalities.

Causes of disharmony can be internal or external. Internal disharmonies are called the "seven emotions". They include Joy, Anger, Sadness, Grief, Pensiveness, Fear, and Fright.

Joy - According to Eastern philosophy is a state of over excitement or agitation and leads to problems with heart fire.

Anger - Anger includes resentment, irritability, and frustration. It affects the liver resulting in stagnation of the liver chi. The liver energy rises to the head causing headaches, dizziness and in the long run high blood pressure. It will eventually cause problems with the stomach and spleen.

Sadness and Grief - Unresolved sadness and grief that becomes chronic creates a disharmony in the lungs making the lung chi weak and interferes with the function of circulating the chi. Normal expression of sadness and grief is sobbing that originates in the lungs with deep breathes and expulsion of air with each sob.

Pensiveness - is the result of too much thinking. The organ most affected is the spleen. Pensiveness causes a deficiency in spleen chi that causes fatigue, lethargy and the inability to concentrate.

Fear and Fright - Affect the kidney when it becomes chronic. Kidney chi lessens and leads to a decrease in kidney yin.

External causes of disharmony include the "six pernicious influences" or "six outside evils". These "influences" or "evils" include; wind, fire, cold, dryness, dampness, and summer heat. A brief explanation of each is provided.

Wind - This is a yang pathogenic influence. Wind disharmonies are characterized by a sudden onset such as the common cold. As the wind disharmony takes hold, the symptoms turn to heat as yin transforms to yang to show fever, sore throat, dry mouth and thick yellow phlegm. Internal liver wind is very serious and can lead to conditions such as epilepsy and stroke. Wind is related to spring according to the five elements theory. This suggests that an individual is more susceptible to external wind disharmonies in the spring.

Fire - This also is a yang pathogenic influence. Fire leads to a large group of heat type symptoms: fever, inflammation, red eyes, hot skin eruptions, and an aversion to heat. It has a drying effect on the body fluids causing dry skin, constipation, and scanty urine. Extreme cases of fire disharmony include: hyperactivity, mental agitation, delirium, and mania where the heat disturbs the shen.

Cold - This is a yin pathogenic influence. Sudden onset leaves the individual feeling chilly and headachy with an aversion to cold, general body aches and no sweating. If not dealt with, cold can affect the lungs, stomach and spleen. This leads to abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. Cold can also affect the liver channel especially in the genital area causing pain and discomfort.

Dryness - This is a yang pathogenic influence. Dryness follows the same symptoms as fire but with more emphasis on drying up the body fluids. This influence can lead to cracked dry skin, dry lips, nose, and a dry cough. Dryness is associated with the fall.

Dampness - This is a yin pathogenic influence. When dampness invades, it leads to sluggishness, tired and heavy limbs, and a general lethargy. Bodily discharges are sticky and the tongue will have a sticky coat. The spleen is especially susceptible to dampness. This will inhibit the transportation and transformation functions leading to abdominal distension and diarrhea. Dampness can also affect the joints leading to stiffness, aching, and swelling. These symptoms are predominate in the morning. Dampness is associated with late summer.

Summer Heat - A yang pathogenic influence that follows fire. It is associated with the height of summer. Summer heat depletes the chi and bodily fluids leading to exhaustion and dehydration.

As you can see, the question "What is chi and where does it come from?" cannot be answered in a few sentences. To truly understand chi and how to develop it to improve your health and martial arts performance takes an in-depth study and knowledge base. Your studies must be accompanied by meditation and exercise. Once you have discovered chi and developed it you will understand not only the martial applications but also the healing applications. There cannot be one without the other. Keep in mind the five excellences during your search for the answer to this question:

Knowledge through study

Compassion through healing

Strength of spirit through martial arts

Wisdom through meditation

Refinement through the arts

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