



LI QING YUN'S

FOUR SECRETS TO A LONG LIFE



Li Qing Yun (李清雲) was a Chinese herbalist, martial artist, and tactical advisor.

In 1928, when a New York Times correspondent went to China and interviewed many of the people in Li's village, they claimed that their grandfathers knew him when they were young -- and he was already a grown man at the time.

I'm not a believer in old wives' tales, and I don't believe that Li Qing Yun really lived to be 256, but his story is fascinating. More important, we know he was a real historical figure who was not only featured in TIME magazine (in the United States), but also met with several historical figures. And most importantly, he studied Daoist longevity techniques, and I think the four principles he shares here are

incredibly important. Whether you are trying to live a healthier, more peaceful life, or whether you are engaged in the fight of your life with illness, these principles can help.

The Secret To His Longevity

As far as his childhood, Li began gathering herbs in the mountains around the age of 10 and also began learning longevity practices -- apparently only eating a diet of herbs and rice wine.

One of his disciples, a Tai Chi master known as Da Liu told a bit about master Li's story:

“At 130 years old Master Li encountered a hermit in the mountains who taught him Baguazhang and a set of Qigong exercises with breathing instructions, movement training coordinated with certain sounds, as well as dietary recommendations. Da Liu reports that his master said that his longevity ‘is due to the fact that I performed the exercises every day - regularly, correctly, and with sincerity - for 120 years.’”

He returned home a year later after telling this story to his disciple, and promptly passed away -- some say of natural causes, others say because he finished “his work.”

Sometime before he died, a general known as Yang Sen investigated the truth about his claimed background and age and wrote a report about it. Li worked as an herbalist, selling goji berries, wild ginseng, as well as many other Chinese herbs. He apparently also produced over 200 descendants in his lifetime with a total of 23 lives. On May 15, 1933 an interview with him appeared in TIME magazine in New York City.

When asked for his secret to a long life, he said:

- **Keep a quiet heart**
- **Sit like a tortoise**
- **Walk sprightly like a pigeon**
- **Sleep like a dog**

The image you see above is an actual picture of Li Qing Yun taken in 1927 by General Yang Sen (who wanted to attempt to verify the story and his age).

Regardless of whether or not you believe his claim to have died at “256 years old,” his wisdom for a long life is something that is well supported by science.

“WHEN THE WINDS OF CHANGE BLOW, SOME PEOPLE BUILD WALLS, OTHERS BUILD WINDMILLS.”

~ CHINESE PROVERB

Keep A Quiet Heart

This has sometimes been translated as “keep a tranquil mind,” which is most likely a clear reference to meditation, seeing as he spent his time as a Taoist learning longevity practices.

We now know a couple awesome things about meditation:

- It produces, real, tangible changes in the brain
- Regular meditation has been shown to improve baseline levels of happiness
- It slows down aging of your brain
- It plays a key role in how resilient we are to stress

But meditation has a whole host of other benefits that are pretty subjective.

For example, my girlfriend starts yelling at me for something. If you meditate, there's a much greater chance that instead of freaking out and throwing a shoe, you'll calmly take a breath and ask, “What's up?”

Another example: sitting in traffic. I have many relatives that absolutely freak out when someone cuts them off. They get pissed off and angry, and start complaining and moaning and groaning about life. And then I get pissed off, because they're pissed off, and suddenly it's a car full of pissed off people -- and it just started with one person cutting off another in traffic.

When you meditate regularly, the changes that take place within you encourage this internal calm that is constantly there despite how the world outside of you is working (or not working).

Subjectively, it will massively improve the quality of your life.

“WE ARE SHAPED BY OUR THOUGHTS; WE
BECOME WHAT WE THINK. WHEN THE MIND IS
PURE, JOY FOLLOWS LIKE A SHADOW THAT
NEVER LEAVES. ”

~BUDDHA

Sit Like A Tortoise

The second piece of advice that Li gave was “sit like a tortoise”.

If you've ever seen a tortoise sit, they sit almost imperceptibly still, sometimes for hours.

Li was said to have done the same thing – sometimes he would just sit up straight, close his eyes, and not move for hours. Stillness.

But if there's one way to describe the modern world, it could be this: full of distractions. Unsurprisingly, even adults these days have no idea what stillness means. Even if our bodies aren't moving, our minds are.

We hop in the car to go to work, and we put on the radio, we fiddle with our iphone, and we eat our breakfast.

We sit down on the computer to do some work and open up Facebook, Gmail chat, and a youtube video.

Many American families can't even turn off the TV and set aside time to sit down together and eat dinner.

Unsurprisingly, the quality of life hasn't improved much, despite the fact that many of us are getting wealthier. Despite the fact that we have access to all the information ever created on earth, and the resources to do virtually anything we want, life satisfaction hasn't improved much.

Why?

I would argue that there are too many distractions. It's easy to forget what's really important in life when we are constantly distracted by the ever-increasing number of shiny objects in the world.

The remedy? Slow down and stop multitasking. When you talk to someone, put the iPhone away. When you eat, turn off the TV. Get rid of distractions and focus on what's truly important.

“SLOW DOWN AND ENJOY LIFE. IT'S NOT ONLY THE SCENERY YOU MISS BY GOING TOO FAST~YOU ALSO MISS THE SENSE OF WHERE YOU ARE GOING AND WHY.”

~ EDDIE CANTOR

Walk Sprightly Like a Pigeon

The third piece of advice that Li gave was “walk sprightly like a pigeon.”

Pigeons have this kind of peppy, cheerful walk that is pretty quick.

My grandma has a similarly peppy walk and is one of the most energetic 77 year olds you will ever meet. She's more flexible and peppy than my 57 year old dad.

Her natural walking speed is 2x the speed of the average person -- it's like comparing a New York city walk with an Omaha, Nebraska walk.

Now I'm not saying you should go ahead and start adopting a NYC walking pace, but I'd like to make an interesting comparison here.

In many of the blue zones reports (the 'hot spots' of the world where people live to 100+ more frequently), the centenarians living to be 100+ weren't necessarily people that actively exercised.

They just naturally lived in areas that required frequent, low-level activity.

Walking to meet friends. Herding animals in the hills. Fishing and hunting. Taking care of gardening, farming, and yard work.

Similarly, many of the Chinese exercises that are touted as keys to a long life don't involve going to the gym and lifting weights. Rather than increasing circulation by working the heart harder, they increase circulation by slowing it down and relaxing.

It's good news if you hate going to the gym: rather than forcing yourself to do hours in the gym (if you don't like it), focus on doing a little bit of low-level activity, but doing it frequently.

“SIMPLICITY, PATIENCE, COMPASSION. THESE THREE ARE YOUR GREATEST TREASURES. SIMPLE IN ACTIONS AND THOUGHTS, YOU RETURN TO THE SOURCE OF BEING. PATIENT WITH BOTH FRIENDS AND ENEMIES, YOU ACCORD WITH THE WAY THINGS ARE. COMPASSIONATE TOWARDS YOURSELF, YOU RECONCILE ALL BEINGS IN THE WORLD.”

~LAO ZI

Sleep Like a Dog

The last piece of advice that Li gave was “sleep like a dog.”

At first I was trying to figure out what exactly this meant. Sleep like a dog?

And then a friend summed it up perfectly:

“To sleep like a dog means that you can sleep anywhere, anytime. Your mind is calm, clear, and there aren't any thoughts in your mind messing up your sleep. A dog will casually plop down, let loose a sigh of relief, and quickly, effortlessly fall asleep.”

If you ask me, sleeping like a dog is kinda that subtle reference to quality of life.

Is your life something that constantly stresses you out, or is it something that lets you sleep at night?

For some people they immediately think of their jobs. They think about how much they hate going to work, how much they hate their boss, how much they hate their coworkers, how much they wish they could quit.

For some people it's their health that keeps them up. Maybe they recently went to the doctor's office and got some grim news. Maybe the doctor said you need to take better care of yourself, or maybe the doctor prescribed you a drug, or two, or three.

For others they don't even know what they want - they just know that they don't want this. What they have now. There's this nagging feeling that there's something better and bigger out there in life. “This can't be all there is,” we tell ourselves.

“FOR THE MEANING OF LIFE DIFFERS FROM MAN TO MAN, FROM DAY TO DAY AND FROM HOUR TO HOUR. WHAT MATTERS, THEREFORE, IS NOT THE MEANING OF LIFE IN GENERAL BUT RATHER THE SPECIFIC MEANING OF A PERSON'S LIFE AT A GIVEN MOMENT.”

~VIKTOR FRANKL

Sleep Like a Dog (Continued)

For many of us there is this gnawing feeling of dissatisfaction in life.

“Job, eh, could be better.” “Money, eh, could be more.”

“Vacations, eh, wish they were longer.” “What am I really here for though?!” “Is this it?”

Few of us truly sleep like a dog anymore. If it's not something in life that is constantly stealing our attention, it's stress.

We think about that meeting we have tomorrow. Or we think about that new project at work. We think about our to-do list. We think about the things we forgot to do. We think about things to do for the kids like driving them to all their appointments.

So if you ask me, it's a combination of two things:

The easy one: stress.

And the tough one: life dissatisfaction.

But what steps are you taking to fix that? That's the million dollar question.

“IF YOU DON'T DESIGN YOUR OWN LIFE PLAN,
CHANCES ARE YOU'LL FALL INTO SOMEONE ELSE'S.
AND GUESS WHAT THEY HAVE PLANNED FOR YOU? NOT
MUCH.”

~JIM ROHN

The Four Secrets

Li Qing Yun gave us his four secrets:

- **Keep a quiet heart**
- **Sit like a tortoise**
- **Walk sprightly like a pigeon**
- **Sleep like a dog**

Are you taking steps to slow down, and stay calm throughout the day? Are you making a conscious effort not to get pissed off when someone cuts you off in traffic? Are you trying not to let that jerk barista at Starbucks put you in a bad mood?

What about the tortoise? When you sit down to do something, are you focusing on just that? With live in an era of collective ADD where no one can focus on anything - it's insane. Are you putting your phone away when you talk to people and just totally being present with them? When you sit with your kids at dinner (if you even sit with them) do you turn off your TV and just talk?

What about the pigeon? If you aren't already healthy, are you falling under the mistaken idea that you need to spend hours and hours in a gym to improve your health?

Remember that most of these people living to 100+ were not actively "working out." They just walked a lot. They gardened a lot. They did manual labor and chores that required a little bit of exertion. So maybe next time it snows, you'll view it as a blessing instead of a chore.

And what about the dog? Is your life meaningful? Do you feel like there's a reason for it, and that you're living the story that you want to be living?



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