



Painting the Rainbow Newsletter

<http://www.paintingtherainbow.co.uk>

Community Based Tai Chi & Chi-Kung for everyone

Improvement cannot always be measured, it is something you feel

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'How to be a Tree'

The Root of the Problem

Over the last 12 months I have on 3 occasions been within a hairs breadth of falling over, and most probably injuring myself. Once when I slipped backwards on wet leaves as I left work, once when I tripped up on a curb when walking my dogs, and the 3rd time when a young child stopped dead directly in front of me as I was walking forward at quite a pace. By adjusting my centre of gravity and regaining my root (connection to the earth) I was able to the humiliation of falling flat on my back or face as the case may be.

At the critical moment, just as I was about to reach the point of no return, my brain automatically took over and set into motion all the body mechanics I had learnt in my years of practicing Tai Chi and the day was saved (or should I say my face).

It was purely an automatic action, that I have evolved because of my practice of the form and perhaps even more importantly, developing my root, my connection with the ground beneath my feet, keeping my spine aligned (as if suspended from above) – after all if you are suspended how can you fall over? All of these things apply when pushing hands, being pushed over after all is caused by the same principles as losing your balance and falling over – no root and poor body alignment leading to poor balance.

As students progress in their training they commence their search for 'the golden root', its no wonder they look bemused when they are told that when pushed whilst practicing, to let the force go into their root. And where, if they dare ask, is this root; "Simple, in the ground like a tree" replies the instructor. How you get it there is the difficult bit.....

Roots are funny things, they are not visible to the naked eye, you cannot simply purchase them, and frequently just when you think you have at last got one..... oops..... someone half your size pushes you over whilst playfully pushing hands in class. You try to push them back, but low and behold discover they seem to have a root on par with an oil drill....

You may feel that if you are not interested in cultivating the martial aspects of Tai Chi Chuan then you do not need a root; maybe you can take a short cut to form excellence with one less skill to develop. WRONG. Unfortunately there is no way to go except all the way..... every principle that has been developed along the Tai Chi path is necessary, and personally I think rooting is one of the fundamental skills to focus on even at the beginning of your training. You will hear your teacher incessantly saying "Sink into your root, know where you are placing your feet, be aware of your connection to the ground, receive the force and mentally direct it down through your body through the point in your foot and into the earth". Remember the saying "Where the mind goes the Chi goes". I know this to be true because as soon as I started concentrating on emptying and filling my legs (with each weight change) when practicing the form, my legs began aching. My mind was definitely there, so was my chi by the feel of it..... in abundance!!! Try it sometime.

The mind is a powerful thing as we all know, just think of the Fakirs who lie on beds of 6" nails and then have people stand on them. Because they believe they will not be harmed nor the skin pierced, they relax and nothing happens to them. So on that basis if you believe as I do that a tree with a deep root cannot be moved and your 'roots' are firmly embedded in the ground, then who can move you? You must however remember, even though you are firmly rooted your body must remain relaxed and flexible, your branches able to 'bend with the wind' or perhaps more appropriately deflect a blow. It is said the Chinese believe we die from the feet upwards (which I interpret as becoming immobile); so if you keep your legs strong you'll live a long health life. Tai Chi will certainly give you strong legs, it will increase your muscle power thereby removing the strain from your joints and in turn making last longer. However none of these wondrous benefits will occur without hard work, mentally and physically; Tai Chi may look effortless to the casual observer, but I have learnt to beware of the effortless punches. Like many things, the best results come when you are not really trying that hard, and really that is what the art is all about; let your body move freely, don't resist, be grounded, firm but relaxed and perfectly balanced.

Always remember the tree: the trunk and roots are still and strong, the branches when young are strong but yielding, but with age become brittle and snap. If we keep ourselves supple, practicing our Tai Chi, hopefully we will remain supple well into old age. Perhaps we cannot change our genes, but at least we can give them all the help we can.

Press Pause - Learning to Relax



Relaxation can be thought of in many ways to many people

Rest, refreshment, recreation, chilling out, switching off, talking five, or maybe hanging loose.

In other words taking a break from an activity that requires concentration or hard physical effort, and doing something enjoyable or nothing at all.

Giving yourself time and space to recover physically and mentally from situations that cause stress and anxiety. Clearing the mind of unhelpful thoughts, giving it time to “re-group” and reassess what is going on.

So how about at these times pressing the pause button in your head?

When people feel pressure, they may also feel mentally and physically threatened. Our instincts are to resort to our inbuilt “fight or flight” response for survival.

When the perceived threat/pressure diminishes, the body tries to restore order.

So often, the body is not allowed to do this. You may feel and be exhausted but you keep pushing yourself harder and then wonder why you always feel “one degree under” and seem to acquire illnesses more frequently.

Research seems to show that many people no longer know how to switch off.

The good news is even just 5 minutes a day of relaxation can make a difference to how you feel and behave.

It will help stop the flow of stress hormones and eventually strengthen the immune system.

Are your muscles relaxed or taut? How much physical tension do you have in your body?

Try this little relaxation technique to start. You can do this every day and it can be as short or as long as you want.

When you first start find a place that is relatively quiet and where you will not be interrupted.

Darken the room.

Light a candle

Get comfortable

Gaze at the flame.

If your mind wanders, bring your focus BACK to the flame.

Do this for as long as you wish

Your mind will feel calmer now and thus so will your body. It has taken its “time out”.

Initially, you may feel uncomfortable about practising relaxation. Or maybe your busy mind will not allow you sufficient time and space to relax. This is not unusual.

If you find this happening to you try pausing a few times during your day to encourage your mind to stop thinking about anything in particular-and simply slow down.

Many opportunities occur naturally throughout the day that enable you to do this, such as when you are—

Cleaning your teeth

Waiting for the kettle to boil

Waiting for your toast to cook

Waiting at traffic lights

Waiting for the train/bus

Standing in a queue

Booting up your computer.

Try and slow down the pace at which you do everything too, Eat and drink more slowly, walk more slowly feeling your feet connect with the floor, take in more of your surroundings and savour moments. Do not make your life a race



to beat self-imposed and often unachievable targets.

Start the day with a cup of lemon and ginger tea (lemon to uplift you and ginger to settle the stomach) and maybe end the day with a cup of chamomile tea to promote calm and soothe you to sleep.

Whatever age you are sometimes all you need to feel better about life is to just press that pause button once a day and take a deep breath in and a slow exhale. You know it makes sense so why not give it a go?

Oh I nearly forgot I have been told TAI CHI is a great pause button !!!!!!!!

PLEASE NOTE:

Please send your Newsletter contributions for future issues to markpeters@kaiming.co.uk

Everything in Moderation?

Think you deserve a good rest after your daily exercise?

According to new research in Canada every 30 minutes you need to get up and walk around.

The patients in the study wore activity monitors that measured how long they were active or sedentary during the day.

On average, eight hours each day were spent sedentary - either sitting or reclining. Regardless of how long the patients might have spent exercising, the researchers found that higher BMI and lower fitness levels were directly associated with the time they spent sitting.

The less time the patients spent sedentary, the better their markers of health.

Even just standing up and stretching to break up the sitting is beneficial.

Although the research was focused at Cardiac Rehab patients, it can be applied to us all especially after a busy lifestyle has become retirement (*unless like me you are busier than when you worked!!! LOL*)