



# 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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New ... For Senior Travel



With the holiday season fast approaching I thought I would share this with you. It was sent to me by Clive Bennett (senior student and assistant instructor). I love it...!



### TAI CHI

#### BEGINNER'S FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Tai Chi intrigued me ever since the day I saw on television a group of Chinese people of all ages practising it gracefully among the trees in a corner of a Beijing park. But it is only recently that a friend introduced me to it, assuring me it would be the answer to my pains and aches. Till then, walking, the best exercise, set my stiff neck into an unmovable position. Despair drove me to this first evening of Tai Chi practice, and I haven't looked back since.

How can such gentle exercise revive you so completely after one session, how can such slow movements tune up your muscles and improve your whole being? But that is exactly what Tai Chi does, and if such beneficial results are achieved in a short time, the improvements over years of practice must be tremendous. In fact it is recognised that Tai Chi increases longevity.

As a beginner everything about Tai Chi seems veiled in mystery and there is a whole world to discover. Plenty of books and video films are available for information, but nothing can replace the fun of doing it. The 'others' will look perfect, graceful, accomplished. There

they go, in slow movements, as if floating on air, swirling, gliding, flying like birds, dancing, meeting with a partner, separating and coming together again, effortlessly, swiftly, assuredly. But where am I, trying to master the first elements of 'the form'? I thought I got the hang of it: "Hold the ball", "Brush the peacock's tail", "Double twist", "White crane", "Play the guitar", "Brush the knee", "Shoulder". The terms flow swift and easy throughout the evening teaching, but while practising at home, suddenly the ball gets mixed up with the double twist, the peacock's tail with playing the guitar.

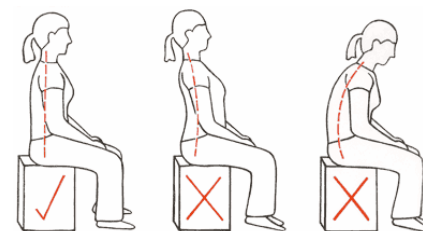
Shall I ever learn, shall I ever remember? It's impossible. But the others are comforting. "It took me three years to master it", says one participant. "You'll get there; I was just as muddled up". So there is hope, just persevere and have fun, relax and enjoy it.

The warming up exercises are fun too, and easy, and they loosen the body gently. Tai Chi Chi-kung (shibashi) is a set of repetitive exercises which keep the blood and energies flowing till you are warm and relaxed, ready to start 'the form'. Bend your legs, but not too much, if the knees come over the toes, that's when the kneecaps start aching. The instructors never seem to tire repeating the same things over and over again. With the patience of saints, they start again, correct, pause, watch, encourage, hint and praise. They explain the interaction of Yin and Yang, they show how the softest thing will overcome the hardest. And one believes every word, following the demonstrations and looking at the proof under one's very eyes.

The energies flow through the body. After the warming down exercises,

warmth reaches to the tip of the fingers and down to the toes. Is it Yin or is it Yang? It is still a mystery to me, but it doesn't matter. I've become a convert. Tai Chi is for me.

By Claire Bradshaw – Student



### POOR SITTING POSTURE

it's consequences

- Inhibits blood flow to and from the heart
- Stifles breathing and diaphragm function
- Shortens muscles in front of the body
- Stresses the lower back
- Hyper-extends back muscles
- Closes off throat and windpipe, Constricts the voice
- Habituates bending forward
- Adds pressure to kidneys, adrenal glands, colon and stomach
- Inhibits cerebrospinal fluid flow
- Inhibits learning (less oxygen to the brain)
- Invites osteoporosis
- Impedes nerve force from the spine
- Restricts solar plexus muscles.
- All this from sitting badly !!!!!
- Taken from Physiotherapist notes

Poor posture invites distorted, restricted, shallow breathing and a host of other problems.

It can cause discomfort, pain, and even disability. Some symptoms of bad posture are felt almost immediately and some after a long time.

The only solution is to sit relaxed, erect, and balanced. You need to practice this on daily basis, not only sitting at the table, or desk etc; but also when sitting on a settee or in a chair to read, watch TV or talk with friends.

There are many muscle strengthening exercises of which tai chi is an excellent example. It encourages abdominal breathing, improves postural alignment, strengthens core muscles and instils relaxation without compromise.



### ALICE IN WONDERLAND AND TAI CHI!

There are many paths that lead to enlightenment and sometimes we are led to them in strange ways.

One day I was clearing out my bookcase in readiness to move it to another room. Amongst the books I have collected over the years are many children's classics. They are a mixed bag of Enid Blyton famous five adventure stories, right up to favourites from my daughter's childhood like Paula Danzinger's "The Cat Ate My Gymslip"!

I was barley noticing what was there, as over the years they have become just part of the scenery awaiting the arrival of grandchildren to relive the magic of the stories contained within the ageing pages. Suddenly my eyes were drawn to the title of a little blue book "ALICE IN WONDERLAND"

Strangely I cannot remember if I ever read the actual book or indeed if it was ever read to me, but I do remember having surreal dreams that were quite frightening at the time, that involved some of the situations and characters Alice became involved in during the story.

We all know or have heard of this classic "children's story" by Lewis Carroll but thinking back to when I had bought it originally it was with the intention of reading it as an adult.

This may sound a strange thing to do, but as I have said sometimes our actions are guided for a reason. Never ignore an instinctive action.

With this in mind over the last few days I have snatched some time to do just this and my gut feelings have now justified themselves.

The edition I have has the reproduction of the original illustrations and I realised how nightmarish some of them were, but the actual story is lovely and the characters absurd, funny, and magically surreal all at once.

Now we come to the point of this article (is that a sigh of relief I hear)

Have you ever heard of the CAUCUS-RACE?

One chapter in the book is about Alice's adventures when she has been reduced in size.

She and a mixture of birds and animals fall accidentally into one of her tears that she cried when she had been a 9ft giant, so as you can imagine it is like a sea and they all swim for their lives!

When they eventually get on dry land the creatures discuss how they can get dry quickly.

The Dodo who seems to be the wisest amongst them suggests A CAUCUS-RACE!

Even Alice had no idea what this was, so the Dodo began to explain and demonstrate thus—

First he marked out a race—course, in a sort of circle, (doesn't have to be exact) Then all the wet participants were placed here and there around the course.

There was no 1 2 3 go! They could begin running when they liked, and stop when they liked, so that it was not easy to know when the race was over.

However, when they had been going round for about ½ an hour and seemed dry again, the Dodo suddenly called out "The race is over!"

They crowded round all eager to know who had won, in the hope of receiving a prize and admiration.

The Dodo thought long and hard before he announced diplomatically "Everybody has won!" and all must have prizes.

It seemed to me when I read this, that it correlated very well with how we practice Tai Chi.

We all start at different points in our life along the Tai Chi path, and so other students in the class may be ahead of us in their knowledge of the art, but like the Caucus-Race there is no need to compete really, it is our own Ego's that want the prize, ethos, praise, attention whatever you choose to call it

Really also like the race we are ALL WINNER'S!

The prize for us is the satisfaction of practice, when we feel our form is getting

better, when we feel the focus is improving, when we feel the stress of everyday life lift as we leave the session with our fellow students.

That DODO was a wise old bird (however not wise enough to avoid extinction! But maybe as with many things MAN helped in his demise.)



### World Tai Chi day April 26<sup>th</sup>

11am Victoria Square (by the fountain)  
Birmingham City Centre

We are hoping to beat out previous record of 150 people practicing tai chi together, plus launch the Active Parks 'Tai Chi in the Park' program. Please come along and bring friends and family. You might even get a FREE commemorative T-Shirt

#### A MEDITATION FOR YOU TO TRY

\*\*\* The Pebble....

While sitting still and breathing slowly, think of yourself as a pebble which is falling through a clear stream.

While sinking, there is no intention to guide your movement.

Sink toward the spot of total rest on the gentle sand of the river-bed.

Continue meditating on the pebble until your mind and body are at complete rest: A pebble resting on the sand.

Maintain this peace and relaxation for a half hour while watching your breath.

No thoughts about the past or future can pull you away from your present peace. The universe exists in this present moment.

No desire can pull you away from this present peace.

There are many many meditations, so if you have a favourite that maybe is not so well publicized let us have it and we can put it in a newsletter for the rest of the association.