



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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THOUGHTS FOR THE BEGINNER

When new students attend their first class, many have no real thoughts of what to expect.

Most people have some idea about what Karate, Aikido, Taekwondo, Judo etc will bring to them, as these Martial Arts have higher exposure in the Media as a general rule.

Probably like me they have seen footage of Chinese practitioners slowly performing lovely flowing movements, and the accompanying commentary has explained its great health benefits.

It was so impressive that we thought “I think I’ll have some of that!”

Well 20 years on the Tai Chi path has confirmed to me that it was very good decision.

However it has not always been a smooth ride, there have been times when I felt like walking away.

Times of frustration.

Times of lack of faith in my own abilities when I just thought, “I’ll never remember all these moves”.

Times when I have thought is the “Pot of Gold” at the end worth the journey!

Now I can answer this YES IT IS!

But for the beginner the task may seem too much, far too long and it would be easier to walk away than persevere.

Some people seem in search of what you might call ‘a spiritual supermarket’ hoping to pick from the shelves what they fancy but not knowing what they really want. Maybe a clearer shopping list would have been helpful so informed decisions could be made. If you want to discover what tai chi really has to offer you need to give it time and commit to it, to keep drilling.

There is an old saying “In a really dry place you have a better chance of finding water by drilling one hole 200 feet deep than 10 holes at 20 feet deep”. You must stick with it

The few points below may help the novice student become the advanced practitioner and realise that where there is the will there is a way.

Not many of us are as self-disciplined as we would like, and this may create a problem, as the best way to retain information is repetition. Being able to retain the movements of the Tai Chi form is dependant on regular practice; even if ten minutes a day is all you can fit in, plus your weekly class, it will go a long way to help.

Focus on the basic principles of the form, understand why you are moving this way, don’t let the movements be just “copycat”.

Never be afraid to ask questions, a good teacher will welcome them and can put right in a few minutes something you may have been struggling with for a while.

After all Tai Chi should alleviate stress, not create it.

Remember this—the student next to you in the beginner’s class who seems to have a grasp of what they are doing and looks so good when you are struggling, is probably thinking the same thing about you!!!!!!!!!!!!!!



Children learn from adults; but can adults learn from children?

During one of my slightly less busy mornings at work I was carrying out a social and language observation on a group of children playing a game outside. Rather than noticing what the children were doing or saying I began paying more attention to the way they moved. It was then that a realisation suddenly dawned on me. The Pre-School children I look after are better at Tai Chi than I am!

It is all down to the way that they use their bodies and the ease at which their movement comes. The more I watched, the more curious I became, so I continued to observe for the rest of the day here is what I noticed.

Whether in work, rest or play children are permanently relaxed. There is never any trace of force or large amount of effort involved in any of their movements. When moving their weight is either on one foot or the other never on both, unless standing still. Their balance is perfect with their centre of gravity being low and stable. Children stand tall and upright, they rarely slouch. When walking or running legs, hips and arms are all inline and connected, nothing moves unless the hips lead the way. Each movement they make is light and flows continuously from one to the next. Children never over reach, rather they reach out and follow with their head and body the way the form teaches us. If they come into contact with something or someone for example through a fall they simply bounce off it due to their permanently relaxed state of mind and body. If a child does lose his balance and fall, he simply collapses from the ankles upwards. The only reason why he falls

forwards is because of the momentum from the previous movement continuing. Why or even how can they do this? Its because they have very little awareness of danger, therefore their actions have no limitations caused by fear.

If these children do this naturally then I can only assume that we all moved like this ourselves when we were this age. Then due to the any number of bad habits, learnt fears adapting to social stereotypes has caused use to lose this. As an adult, when was the last time you can remember running round a park with no fear of falling over? Or next time you are pushing a trolley round the supermarket check to see if you are holding your stomach in, or throwing your chest out to impress the men or ladies around you. See what I mean?

by Mariane Washbrook
Student, Selly Oak class

The Mindfulness of Tai Chi Chuan

Mindfulness is the miracle which calls back in a flash our dispersed mind and restores it to wholeness so that we can live each moment of life.

Tai Chi and Chiropractic: what can we learn?

Humans are among the few animals that move though the world in an upright position. This position puts stresses on the spine not experienced by four-legged animals. The natural curves in our spines are thus important in providing shock absorption and structural integrity during upright, seated and standing activities. Many people are unaware that as humans we have three natural spinal curves that are formed in early childhood. We are born with one continuous C-shaped curve. As infants, when we begin to raise our heads, and later, when we push up on our hands and crawl, the concave (or lordotic) curves of the neck (the cervical spine) and low back (the lumbar spine) are formed. The convex curve of the mid-back where the ribs attach (the thoracic spine) is left over from the original C-shaped curve. Please note that some children walk before crawling and never develop the spinal curves. The person with the resulting straight spine, referred to as a 'military spine', is prone to neck and back problems as well as headaches related to structural stress.

A healthy lower back depends on good spinal structure, unrestricted joint range of motion, maintenance of the lumbar curve, and the support of sufficiently strong low-back and abdominal muscles. The practice of good posture when standing and sitting, along with daily exercise to maintain muscle tone and joint movement, will help to reduce the chance of low-back injury.

During in tai chi practice, preserving a natural and relaxed lumbar curve can enable the student to achieve greater flexibility and fluidity of movement due to the resulting freedom in hip range of motion. When we slouch we end up 'hanging' on our ligaments and our muscles have to work harder to hold us up. If we instead, take advantage of our natural spinal structure for support, and allow the opposing muscle groups to balance each other, then achieving relaxation in standing and sitting becomes possible. If we accept that tai chi is a system of musculoskeletal rehabilitation then we must accept that it would not work against correct function but rather enhance it. Prof. Cheng has been often quoted as saying "form without function is no form at all" so lets look to consider that form practice is to develop relaxed (natural) and co-ordinated movement; it is to prepare us for the stresses and strains of daily life, both physically and psychologically. Its martial function is based on the Taoist concepts of none-resistance and natural action so to apply it effectively we must harness our intrinsic strength and structure whilst taking advantage of weaknesses in our opponent. I spend much of my time, these days, teaching tai chi for patient rehabilitation. The only real difference between applying tai chi as a martial art or as a system of rehabilitation is rebalancing rather than off-balancing the person you're working with.

Here at Painting the Rainbow our aim is to make tai chi and chi-kung as accessible to everyone as possible. With this in mind Mark trains staff in tai chi for patient rehabilitation at local hospitals; patients can then be referred on to our community based classes across the city.

Class run in local churches and community centres as well as local parks, all of which can be found on the website www.paintingtherainbow.co.uk or phone 0121 251 6172



Ask me why I do Tai Chi
And I will Answer what?
A simple question you may think,
But to myself, it's not.

You could say I practice religiously
The word hell is used a lot
But when I feel like giving up,
I think, give it one more shot.
I hold the postures one by one,
The pain is at it's height.
Don't worry say's our Sifu
You'll be able to walk again, by tonight!!

The sweat begins to break out again,
It runs right down my face.
Oh blimey the class has speeded up
again,
They think they're in a race!

The focus seems to have left my hands,
It's dropped into my feet.
And if I could just shift my weight a bit,
My heaven would be complete.

My knees always seem to be out of line,
My shoulders ache like crazy.
By the time I reach the end of the form,
Directions seem quite hazy.

Why is everyone facing the other way
They must have got it wrong.
Next time we practice in this hall
I'll hide amongst the throng!

I directed my thoughts to my Dan-tien
my stomach shot out like a ball.
But before I could think of investing in
loss,
My partner threw me straight up the wall.

So when the class is over
And I've sweated ached and quivered
Ask me again why I do Tai Chi
Or you could just have the straight jacket
delivered!!!

By Jenny Peters – Instructor