



Tai Chi Newsletter

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Community Based Tai Chi & Chi-Kung for everyone

Improvement cannot always be measured, it is something you feel



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Silk Reeling Energy

We can always learn from different views and different styles of tai chi. Silk reeling is from Chen Style. The development of silk reeling energy (chan ssu jing) is the basic method of practising Tai Chi Chuan and essential to its practice for health and for effective use as a martial art, according to Chen Xia-wang, 19th generation successor to the Chen style. As a basic method of practice, the function of silk reeling energy is to unify the body and connect the energy through the body with the dantien so that it can reinforce movements of all parts of the body. Training in Tai Chi, regardless of style, has its function in the connection of silk reeling energy through the body making it strong, fluid and accessible. Silk reeling energy is the application of the idea of silk reeling to obtain power and energy. The physical action of the body is similar to the action of ringing water from a towel. However, the action is not just squeezing the towel with the hands, but a coordinated movement of the body that involves hands, arms, shoulders, waist, hips and knees, all together. It is as if the body itself was squeezing itself as if it were a towel. The spiralling of the waist creates spiral-ling of the whole body.

This combines the whole body as one functioning unit. The classics say, "When one-part moves, all must move". Most people, if they do not train silk reeling, can only use 40 or 50% of their body to do any movement. But if you are well trained in silk reeling concepts then movement will involve the total body and you will be

able to use 95% plus of your body's functional potential. The functional benefits of using whole body power speak for themselves, be it to strike with your maximum potential or teach your body to function efficiently in everyday life. The mechanics of doing silk reeling exercises involves using the mind as well as the waist, dantien and chi; the mind must initiate the movement of the waist, and so on in a chain reaction. The dantien is the focal pivot point; even if the hands move, this must be connected back to the dantien and therefore cause a spi-ral effect through the whole body. The difficulty is that Silk reeling is a principle and as you already know, principles are hard to explain, they must be realised. No one does it correctly the first time; practice is the key, along with patience. Silk reeling energy is common to all styles and those who are proficient in whatever style they practice are using the same principle. The first thing to understand is that Tai Chi is a science and that it is also an art that everyone, no matter how strong or weak, large or small, can benefit from.

Although the postures seem to be taught very exactly at first, you have to look to yourself to see your own body structure, strength and range of motion. From there you can determine the size of your stance, how low to sit and what posture is right for you. The movements must not be forced, they must be natural; only if they are natural can the breath and chi flow lieely. Although some postures may seem a little awkward at first, you will find that by asking your instructor and looking at the mechanics, only slight adjustments are needed to make those postures your own. Your instructor will mention the dantien from time to time, and it is important to maintain awareness of this area as it the local point for your movements; this is now your centre. From the start, you must be able to preserve the centre when-ever you move your arms, whether you are pushing or striking. If you can pre-serve and grasp the energy from your dantien when you are pushing then you will not lose (well that is the theory).

Standing post exercises are another key to training dantien awareness. These exercises, apart from making the legs ache; teach the practitioner postural alignment, relaxed whole-body peng and awareness of self. By relaxing into the hips, natural abdominal breathing is promoted and through visualisation, a focus and connection is formed. A springy power is developed in the whole body using tendons rather than muscular strength alone. This power allows you to feel as if you are supporting your whole body gently against gravity, similar to the idea of a boat bobbing/floating on water, rather than pushing yourself to a low stance and forcing a stretch. Chen Xia-wang cautioned that some people try to do silk reeling exercises too hard to push it along; this is wrong, the principle is to be natural.

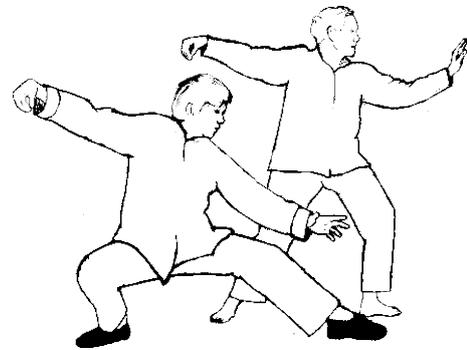
When a person is able to move as one unit, they are better able to concentrate force at a given point than they faking whether it is a push, pull or strike. In addition to this when a person is pushed or punched by an opponent they are able to reposition and never be hit on their centre. This can only be achieved if the body stays loose and the spiral can happen naturally. How often have you been pushed and tightened up because the force is too great? As you practice and become more familiar with silk reeling energy, you will blend with and redirect any incoming forces thereby maintaining your balance and taking theirs.

The effectiveness of Chi Na is increased using the principle of silk reeling; the coiling power generated using whole body coordination will overcome the strength of any man's arm alone. Initially Chi Na will only affect the area being touched or held, but through practice and the extension of Silk reeling energy, an opponent's balance can be easily affected with little if any pain at the point of contact. A very useful bi-product is the ability to remove tight lids from jars as a turning power generated by the waist and coordinated through the whole body is FAR greater than that generated by your shoulder alone; now you can eat as many pickled onions as like.



Learn Tai Chi and Enjoy the Trip

Some years ago, a landmark study was published in an American Journal of the Medical Association that showed Tai Chi Chuan to be twice as effective as other exercises in the prevention of falls among the elderly.



This preventative power was thought to be due to the development of better balance. There is a lot of effort in the form spent standing on one leg and shifting weight slowly and purposefully back and forth from one leg to the other.

There are five elements we believe that are contributing factors in balance, these are: eye-sight, (or vision), the vestibular system (or balance organs) within the ear that send messages to the brain about changes in the position of the head, leg strength, awareness of the body's centre of gravity, and proprioception.

All of these elements are included in Tai Chi practice in one form or another but it was found you do not need to have all five working perfectly to improve balance using Tai Chi.

So what was the factor found during the study that was thought to influence improvement the most? It was Proprioception. This is the ability of proprioceptors, special receptor cells found in the joints and tendons, muscles and skin, that process information about the body's orientation as it moves through space. Simply put, proprioception is muscle sense.

Dr Oliver Sacks wrote a book entitled "The Man who mistook his Wife for a Hat"; in one essay within the book, he described a patient who had totally lost her sense of proprioception. She had no idea of where her body was. If she closed her eyes, she would fall down. She was able to move her arms and legs only by vigorous use of her eyes, compensating for her loss. Even then, she did not "feel" her body. Maybe this is why Tai Chi can be so effective for balance because it develops this sense of proprioception.

In the 1890's C. S. Sherrington called it our sixth, but hidden or secret sense. Hidden because "that continuous but unconscious sensory flow from the movable parts of our body (muscles, tendons, and joints), by which their position and tone and motion are continually monitored and adjusted, but in a way which is hidden from us because it is automatic and unconscious".

We had a student who was referred to tai chi for peripheral neuropathy. The damage to his nerves meant he had no sensation in his feet, which in turn caused him to fall a great deal. He was referred to help with his relaxation and to hopefully improve his balance. There were two aspects to his problem (1) reduced proprioception (2) the belief that as he could not feel the ground as he thought he should he was anxious about falling. This may seem obvious but have you ever worried about slipping on ice, tensed up when walking and caused yourself to fall? We helped with the relaxation quickly so the next and most interesting part was developing muscle sense (feedback) when the feedback system was damaged. My first question was "are you floating off the ground" to which he replied, "of course not", "so how do you know?" He thought for a moment and came to the realisation that he sensed it elsewhere in his body so our job was to refine that feedback (proprioception). Within just a few short weeks his confidence grew and his balance improved, in fact his aims shifted from balance to being able to drive his car again and going back to work as a sales rep. Once he had a greater sense of what feedback was through sensory calibration exercises that are an integral part of tai chi – mindful walking, form, push-hands etc. – his tai chi and general well-being improved at an amazing rate, and as this refinement moved from conscious effort to the unconscious automatic process it is designed to be he no longer needed to notice. Tai Chi became is tool for refined practice.

An aspect of falls prevention that seems to be regularly overlooked is that falling (due to gravity) is how we actually are able to move; lean forwards, shift your body weight to start movement and catch yourself by getting your leg there in time. Not getting your leg there in time is called tripping or 'falling over something'. Tai Chi works by stepping out first and sensing the group before releasing your weight into it rather than releasing your weight and hoping your leg will get there in time to catch you. Both form and push-hands involves moving into balance. Prof Cheng is often quoted as saying, "We all have an excellent root you just have to stop resisting gravity".

A body unbound from unnecessary tension is at liberty to respond to gravity with 'free' support from the ground upwards; to effortlessly 'inflate' in all directions with fluid stability and elastic movement potential

How to start your qigong journey

If you're reading this, then you're most likely attending a tai chi class and qigong (pronounced chee gung) has probably already come onto your radar. You may want to start trying it NOW. Read on before leaping into action!



For avoidance of doubt, the simplest translation of qigong is energy work or breathworks. A more helpful 'translation' might be Chinese exercise for health. It's less known than the more popular Tai Chi Chuan (a martial art) but qigong is something that you could consider if your primary interest is in health, mental or physical.

Many come to qigong via Tai Chi, liking the repetitive exercises and meditations that are typical of qigong they have found embedded in their Tai Chi class. Others pick up on the scant media coverage: qigong recently featured – briefly – on Countryfile

Or perhaps it has been recommended by your acupuncturist or an enlightened health professional often to help you manage the stress of a chronic condition.

However you come to qigong, please be assured that you will be welcomed and that a good instructor will be able to teach you within your health limitations. Much qigong can be done seated, completely without compromise. I have seen students with Dementia and Downs syndrome embraced in classes.

So how do you start your qigong journey?

First, be clear on what you want.

- Classes for your own benefit
- Classes that lead to a qualification, possibly to teaching

Second, where do you wish to learn

- Online
- Locally
- Or might you be prepared to be 'geographically and financially inconvenienced' as Leonard Cohen said!

Third, what type of person are you?

- I'll be happy with just a basic understanding, following along in a class will be fine
- I'll probably want to know a bit more
- I'm willing to train independently
- I'm interested in exploring the meditation and deeper energetic work
- I really want to study with the best teacher in this country/ in the world

I know students of all these types, and each has their own character and life situation that drives their journey. Most students fall into the first and second categories.

It is only worth considering how to find a suitable teacher, in my opinion, if you have clarity on the above 3 questions. There is a quote from the Dao De Jing 'A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step'. Here are a few pointers to help you with that first step:

- Qigong teaching is not regulated so you need to use your own judgement or follow a recommendation
- You will not be 'taught' by free online videos.
- Find out whether there is a local school or teacher
- You will probably need to try a class, online or in person, to see if it is right for you
- We all had to start once so there is no need to feel uncomfortable or inadequate.
- Instead, focus on absorbing the atmosphere and protocol observed in the class. There may, for example, be no opportunity to ask questions – and yet somehow, they will be answered.

Qigong is a challenging subject which will provide you with a lifelong interest so good luck with finding a school and teacher that is right for you!

By Sue Dunham



**Become a Painting the Rainbow
Tai Chi Qigong Instructor**

Have you ever thought you'd like to help out at your tai chi class? Have you ever wondered what is needed to start the journey of becoming an instructor? Would you like to help other people, maybe even have your own class?

Maybe 2022/3 is your time to get involved... We're always looking for keen personable people as there are so many people out there that can benefit from attending classes but we need more people to make that possible.

If you are interested, please contact Jenny or Mark on 0121 251 6172 or maybe speak to your instructor as they will have a list of the requirements.

Qigong Practice

PLAYING IN THE WAVES



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

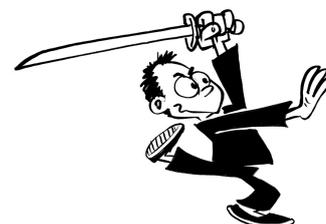
Advanced monthly training sessions.

Sessions are held each month for 3 hours at Weoley Hill Village Hall, Bournville, to enable instructors time for their own training and for more advanced students to gain the time to develop a deeper understanding of the application of tai chi.

Sessions are Sunday's 9.30-12.30 at £30 per person.

2022 dates

- Oct 9th
- Nov. 20th
- Dec. 4th



*We must learn to be still in the midst of activity
and to be vibrantly alive in repose.
Indira Gandhi*