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# 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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The UK National lockdown is from Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> November to 2<sup>nd</sup> December.

Hopefully you are able to take part in classes on zoom etc. in the meantime.

I ran an extra class in Cotteridge Park on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> November so we could have a last share outdoors for a while.



### Chance connections.

In all honesty Tai Chi is an art form that I would never have considered as part of my lifestyle. Perhaps after being influenced as a child by the traditional martial arts movies I had tried Judo and Karate as a young man. I enjoyed judo but found Karate focused too much on aggression. Anyway as a nurse my shift pattern did not allow regular exercise of any kind. Long hours of work, study and lifting heavy patients took its toll. However, I enjoyed the work and after qualifying as an Adult Nurse I went on to qualify both in Children's Nursing and Midwifery. Externally I served as an Officer in the reserve forces and

enjoyed a wide variety of adventure training including parachuting, sailing etc.

However, as the years went on I started to suffer from the traditional nurses' occupational illness – the dreaded bad back. I had injured myself as a student and progressively it got worse. It began to affect the things I did outside work. I had two unsuccessful epidurals and modified the type of work I did in order to avoid heavy lifting. I gave up delivering babies and went to work in a children's hospice.

I got married in 1994 and my wife invited a friend to the wedding. Her husband turned out to be the senior instructor of the Kai Ming Tai Chi Association.

He had suggested taking up the discipline but it was to be another five years before I started to learn the form and the breathing exercises associated with Tai Chi.

Working in a hospice is often a difficult task when you know that the children you are working with have not been given the advantages in life that most of us have. However, the hospice tries to be a happy place and benefits from beautiful landscaped gardens. Although stressful at times working in the area is a great privilege and I have learned two important lessons in life from the children. Firstly, have no

regrets. Follow whatever dreams you have-even if they don't work out. At least you will know you have tried. Secondly try and do something each day that reminds you, you are alive

and not just someone stuck in the rat race going through the motions.

That is how I started to take up Tai Chi. I am far from being an expert. Shift work is still a problem and it has taken me a very long time to learn what I have. I can't attend classes on a regular basis as I also have to study but I have been fortunate that my instructor takes time to help me out with a little personal tuition.

The result has been I have not had a back pain related sick day in two years. It is not a problem anymore. Frankly being trained in the art of western medical science I am at a loss to explain it. However more important than that I enjoy the form. I have practiced in the rain, a snowstorm and one during thunder and lightning. Perhaps that is a bit extreme but on a normal day in the garden I notice birds and plants and hear sounds that would be in the background un-noticed. Last month I parachuted for the first time in seven years. It's nice to be alive!





One moment of patience may ward  
off great disaster.

One moment of impatience may  
ruin a whole life.

Patience is quiet hope and trust that  
things will turn out right. You wait  
without complaining. You are  
tolerant and accepting of difficulties  
and mistakes.

You picture the end in the beginning  
and persevere to meet your goals.

Patience is a commitment to the  
future.

This character contains the ideas for  
both patience, perseverance and  
endurance. This single character can  
be a bit ambiguous or flexible as it  
can also mean to endure, to bear, to  
put up with.



### 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 avoid 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', it's 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 them 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 be aware 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.



Jenny Peters practicing Tai Chi at home

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.

By Jenny Peters



### Only Connect - A Reflection

Referring above to the notion of keeping connected, reminded me of when I once read 'Howards End' by EM Forster. 'Only connect' is a running theme in the book so I revisited it to remind me of its relevance to the situation at present.

***"Only connect! That was her whole sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer".***  
EM Forster 1910 'Howards End'

Writing at the turn of the twentieth century, E. M. Forster was uncannily aware of our future dependence on technology. In parts of *Howards End*, Forster explores the notion that technological advance is at the expense of authentic human connection. In a little over 100 years, technology has made our world unrecognisable. But has it, as Forster foresaw, made us isolated and individual, rather than rather interconnected?

Where do you sit on the technology fence? Do you think it is a positive development? Is it an invaluable tool for connecting with your loved ones during the last few months?

I had never heard of 'Zoom' earlier in the year and I am sure I am not the only one! Yet it has along with FaceTime (other internet platforms are also available), enabled some of us to still feel connected to some extent. It may not replace the innate need we all have for human touch but we are all having to learn to compromise and appreciate any opportunities to see friends and family.

Having seen so many programs on the television where guests are interviewed on Zoom now, I do hope this will continue as I love having a nose at all the books that are often on display behind them. I am sure some of them visit their local charity shop just to stock up their shelves!

Not everyone however has access or may not be able to use a computer or wishes to hence why alternatives must be considered. My daughter is at university in Liverpool so like many in the same situation, I am not sure when I will be able to see her next. I heard on the radio someone discussing the benefits of writing and receiving letters so once a month I get my pack of notelets out and put pen to paper. It is so interesting to see how this form of communication differs to texting or Zooming. I realise that there is more time to consider what to write about. Texting is usually rushed and tends to be short and to the point where as you can convey your personality and feelings more through considered writing.

Maybe Forster was right—prose and the passion can help us see human love at its height and if ever there was a need for this it is now. If you would like to share your thoughts on this topic, please get in touch using any means - we would love to hear them.

by Caroline Gibson

**Live Your Life with the Least Resistance**

Punch a head

Punch a wall

Force meets force – the result – pain...

External Meets external

Punch the air

Punch a sheet of silk

Force meets nothing – the result – force is confused

External meets internal



LOW PUNCH

**A spicy winter recipe to warm you up  
SPICED YOGURT CHICKEN**

Serves 4

- 8 Chicken thighs, bone in, skin removed (or Quorn)
- 1tbsp rapeseed or sunflower oil
- 1 small onion, halved and thinly sliced
- Flaked almonds, lightly toasted, to finish
- Coriander leaves, to finish
- (optional)
- Basmati rice, to serve
  
- For the Marinade
- 1 shallot, finely chopped
- 1 thumb-sized piece of ginger, peeled and grated

- 3 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 tbsp garam masala
- 1 tbsp ground turmeric
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 300g natural whole milk yoghurt
- Juice of 1 lemon
- Adjust amounts if less portions wanted
- Note. contains nuts. omit if necessary, it will still be flavoursome.

First make the marinade. Either pound the shallot, ginger, and spices together with a good pinch of salt using a pestle and mortar, or whiz them to a rough paste in a food processor.

Scrape the paste into a bowl (big enough to hold the chicken) and whisk in the yoghurt, lemon juice and some black pepper. Add the chicken thighs and turn them over to coat with marinade.

Cover the bowl with cling film and leave to marinate in the fridge for at least 4 hours, or overnight if you can.

Remove the chicken from the fridge 30 minutes before you bake it.

Preheat oven to 200/ 180 fan/ gas 6.

Heat the oil in a small frying pan over a medium heat and sauté the onion till soft and just starting to turn golden, for about 8 minutes. Arrange the chicken in an ovenproof dish in one layer and spoon the yoghurt marinade over the top.

Scatter over the onion. Bake for 30-35 minutes, until the chicken is cooked through and the juices run clear (not pink) when the thickest part of the thigh is pierced with a small, sharp knife.

Scatter with toasted almonds (optional), and coriander leaves if you have some to hand.

Serve with basmati rice.



**\*\*\* The Quiet Corner \*\*\***

**Open Mind (Kai Ming)**

The mind is like a parachute - it works best when it is open.

How quickly we make assumptions, jump to conclusions and close our mind. How easily we form and hold fast to our opinions and then close our mind. How fast do we make a judgement, slap on a label and then close our mind.

A closed mind never knows the delight of playing with possibilities, being enlightened by others point of view or enjoying the diversity of human life.

An open and understanding mind never assumes, doesn't jump to conclusions and won't hold fast to any opinion.

Perhaps it is no wonder a closed mind is not a very relaxed mind.

