



Tai Chi Newsletter

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Embracing the Year of the Wood Snake 2025: A Tai Chi Perspective

As we welcome the Chinese Year of the Wood Snake in 2025, it is an auspicious time to reflect on how the unique energies of this year can enhance our Tai Chi practice. In Chinese astrology, the Wood Snake symbolises wisdom, transformation, adaptability, and grounded growth - qualities that harmonise beautifully with the principles of Tai Chi. People born in the Year of the Snake are said to be wise, intuitive, and charming, and to have a deep understanding of people and situations.



The Snake, an enigmatic creature, is revered for its ability to shed its skin, signifying renewal, and transformation. This trait mirrors the Tai Chi practitioner's journey of self-improvement and continuous learning. Adding the Wood element emphasises growth, creativity, and flexibility, encouraging us to deepen our understanding of Tai Chi while finding new ways to enrich our practice.

Aligning with the Energy of the Wood Snake

The energy of the Wood Snake is steady yet adaptable, much like the flowing movements of Tai Chi. Here's how this year's qualities can inspire and guide us:

- 1. Adaptability:** Just as a snake adjusts to its environment, Tai Chi teaches us to flow with life's challenges. Whether navigating a difficult balance sequence or adapting to unexpected events off the mat, the Year of the Wood Snake encourages us to embrace change with poise.
- 2. Wisdom through Awareness:** Snakes are keenly aware of their surroundings, moving with deliberate grace. In Tai Chi, cultivating mindfulness in every movement deepens our connection to the present moment. Let this year be an opportunity to heighten your sensitivity to internal and external energies.
- 3. Renewal and Transformation:** The Snake's shedding skin signifies releasing the old to make way for the new. In Tai Chi, this might translate to unlearning ingrained habits and relearning foundational postures to enhance fluidity and precision.

- 4. Rooted Growth:** The Wood element emphasises grounded strength and upward expansion, akin to a tree's growth. Integrating this principle can help strengthen our stances, deepen our breathing, and foster a stronger connection between the mind and body.

Practical Tips for Tai Chi Practice in 2025

Here are some actionable ways to align your Tai Chi training with the energies of the Wood Snake:

- **Deepen Your Foundation:** Spend extra time refining core movements like grounding, shifting weight, and maintaining alignment. Strengthening the basics lays a solid foundation for more advanced practices.
- **Explore Creativity:** Try incorporating variations in your sequences or practicing different forms. The creative energy of the Wood element can inspire innovation within your routine.
- **Connect with Nature:** Practicing Tai Chi outdoors, especially in wooded or natural settings, aligns your energy with the Earth and the nurturing essence of the Wood Snake. Attend our 'Tai Chi in the Park' classes if you don't already do so.
- **Set Clear Intentions:** Snakes move with precision and purpose. Before each session, set an intention, whether it is improving balance, cultivating mindfulness, or enhancing your flow.

Closing Thoughts

The Year of the Wood Snake invites us to blend wisdom with creativity, transformation with growth. Tai Chi practitioners can draw inspiration from this year's energies to deepen their connection to the art and their inner selves. Let the Wood Snake guide you toward a year of harmony, balance, and enlightenment.

Happy New Year and may your Tai Chi practice flourish in 2025!





Moving from Karate to Tai Chi

I started tai chi approximately 15 months ago, prior to this I practised karate, but I wanted something less aggressive or vigorous now that I'm retired.

From my personal perspective when I practice tai chi, the breathing techniques allow me to relax, clear my mind and focus more while reducing stress. Dave Moore particularly, advised and helped with me developing the correct breathing technique. The techniques used have helped me significantly to aid sleep.. Tai chi is the perfect exercise as my body movement is less rigid and more fluid. The exercise has helped reduce stress, and improve my balance, coordination and general flexibility. I also practice at home and this helps me find inner peace and calmness. All of the instructors are knowledgeable, supportive and informative. They also provide clear demonstrations supporting us as a group or individually.

I look forward to lessons every week, and while I may arrive at a lesson somewhat stressed, tired and lethargic, however when I leave I am relaxed, chilled and happy.

Throughout my Tai Chi training, I work with excellent teachers, attempting to learn at least one thing from each of them.

Andrew Starkey - Tamworth



Donations

As many of you may know, each year at Christmas Kai Ming donates to several charities.

This year we decided to donate to local charities in Birmingham, Litchfield, and Tamworth, and make donations to two other nominated international animal charities.

IMPORTANT POINTS

Many times, I say in class *“You only have one really important thing to do in Taiji, and that is to not fall over...”*

What I mean by this is you should learn to ‘fall through’ your body and connect to the earth, not fall over your body or float with no real connection to the earth. Uprooting is simply removing your connection to the ground and projecting you in a chosen direct. Because few pay attention to their connection, it is a very simple ‘effortless’ process to uproot them. Taiji practice is to relax, not resist, and develop a natural connection and natural balance; form postures are a means of testing and developing this relaxation. Relaxed muscles will naturally support the load rather than just hold it up

through muscular tension. If you find standing post exercises too difficult then try them seated; they are not just to develop leg strength but relaxed muscular awareness....

Try an awareness exercise - this can be done with a partner or a reasonably weighted object - you aim is to effortlessly move this item.

- (1) make relaxed contact and close your eyes.
- (2) FEEL the weight or resistance of this person/item fall though you and connect to the ground, do not resist.
- (3) try to relax between this item and the ground, feeling all tensions and resistance let go until your whole body falls naturally into place to effortlessly support this item.
- (4) now release to move or lift this item.... If you have it right, then it will move with seemingly no real effort on your part; if not just relax and try again....

Once you feel this free power you will never want to strain again, and you are on a wondrous journey.



Subtle skills of tai chi

I am frequently asked about the subtle skills of Taiji and the use of strength etc., so I have chosen to briefly outline the 5 main energies:

1. Adhering/sticking
2. Listening
3. Interpreting
4. Neutralizing
5. Issuing



1. Sticking or Adhering.

This is the first energy and involves sticking to and blending with your partner or attacker. This allows you to follow the force without affecting it, to stay light and sensitive, making it difficult for the other person to advance or retreat without you being there. Think of catching a cricket ball, off reaching out to it and following it back with it lightly held in your hands.

2. Listening

Now you have stuck to your partner, you have to listen through your newly developed sensitive touch. Relaxation allows us to be more sensitively to touch, the environment around us and the actions of the other person. How often have you tried to have a conversation with another person who does not listen only talks; they are generally unaware and insensitive to your input. This is the same (and more so) to the skill of listening through touch. IF WE CAN NOT FEEL THEM THEN WE ARE DEAF AND BLIND TO THEM.

3. Interpreting

How can we interpret without listening? How can we be sensitive to and decipher our partners intentions without our listening skills? Now we can listen we can interpret; are they advancing, retreating, off-balance, overextending. We can interpret their intentions and know their centre. Everything appears to slow down and you have time to respond rather than react blindly; you KNOW what is expected to happen and can now deal with it.

4. Neutralizing

This is like catching the cricket ball and feeling its direction; this allows you to catch it smoothly and neutralise its force. If you have connected with, listen to and understood an incoming intention then neutralising it is only a natural response. This subtle adjustment allows you to gain the advantaged position and put the opponent off-balance both mentally and physically. Wherever they move, whatever they do will only serve to disadvantage them more...

5. Issuing

Ahhh... At last I hear you say (OK I said it). Too many rush too quickly to this one... Without the previous four occurring correctly, issuing is more likely to be brute force than effortless power (intrinsic power). No tension can be allowed to manifest itself, all should remain relaxed and the issue should feel like an unresistable energy. This energy can feel like being swept along on a great wave or short and sharp like an electric shock, both have their uses but neither have any tension.

Many books describe these in greater detail; I hope this brief outline helps. Above all notice there is an order to learn and use them in. Do not jump stages or rush ahead to quickly. You may have some success, but this can just as easily be down to unskilled partners than to your own development. Never be fooled into thinking you are better than you are, look what happened to the gunslingers of the old West... Practice diligently and the skills will develop naturally...



Getting it right

Recently at a class somebody made a comment about getting the level of instruction correct for the people in the group and it made me consider what is it that draws people to learning tai chi and what is it that makes a good teacher?

You may think on the face of it that a good tai chi teacher has to have an in-depth knowledge of the art, an ability to answer virtually all questions without hesitation, to be able to spot the errors and quickly make corrections, to be beyond reproach in the quality of their own tai chi and so on...

From my perspective, I have not found this to be true; for me a good teacher: inspires you to want to learn, they don't teach answer but lead a student to discover their own answers, they identify expectations in both the student and themselves, and understands that it can be those expectations that hold us back. If you are a teacher, for a moment ask yourself what are you teaching by your actions? Compliance, art-by-rote, that learning is difficult or are you teaching constant curiosity, learning can be fun, for what purpose the learning? As a student what is your inner teacher (you) teaching you, as the same rules apply.

I love the term 'pacing expectations' as for me it means 'getting in step with' the expectations of myself and whoever I am working with. I always ask myself "For what purpose?" this ensures the training has an intention even if the intention is HAVE FUN.



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 chuan.

Sessions are Sunday's 9.30-12.30 at **£35 per person from**

Training sessions in 2025

March 16th
April 13th
May 11th
June 8th
July 6th
Aug 10th
Sept 7th – 9.30am to 4pm – Just the Sunday this year
Oct 12th
Nov 16th

This month Perry Bennett, one of our instructors, has created a tai chi & qigong crossword.

Across

- 1 Good for the liver and kidneys
- 2 Double —
- 3 Principle of — resistance
- 4 Do or —
- 5 Don't — backwards
- 6 Like a balloon
- 7 Look to the right to do this three times
- 8 — thread
- 9 We stay this at all times
- 10 Tailbone
- 11 — at sea bottom
- 12 External

Down

- 1 — From above
- 2 Japanese for Chi
- 3 Calligrapher
- 4 There are eight of them
- 5 If you look closely it's not this
- 6 To colour your belts and Gi
- 7 A style
- 8 — Burning bright
- 9 Not walnut — but — —
- 10 Push
- 11 Mind (focused attention)
- 12 Fair — works at shuttles
- 13 Top of head
- 14 Sword
- 15 Palms facing, hands to the left and to the right sides

