



# 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*

call: 0121 251 6172

<https://www.taichinewsletters.co.uk/>

e-mail us: [markpeters@kaiming.co.uk](mailto:markpeters@kaiming.co.uk)



### COVID lockdown easing

The government has announced its plans for lockdown easing in England from **Monday 17<sup>th</sup> May**, and details can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-spring-2021/covid-19-response-spring-2021-summary>

This means we can open indoor tai chi and qigong classes from **Monday 17<sup>th</sup> May**, which is great news. We will continue to run Tai Chi in the Park classes, and up to date details can be found at:

<https://www.paintingtherainbow.co.uk/park-tai-chi-classes.php>

Please remember to always check local rules and follow the COVID safety rules.



### Tai Chi Chuan

#### The Martial Art of Disorientation & Confusion

Think back to when you were a child, when your Mom swung you round and round, set you down and let go of

you; remember the feeling you had before you fell over!! Or what about being on a roundabout in the park, someone would stop it to get on and then perhaps start it going again but in the opposite direction; remember the giddy disorientated way your head felt, the nausea that rose in your throat and how you staggered when you got off. This is how you hope to make your attacker feel when you use your skills of Tai Chi Chuan properly.

Our bodies are able to remain upright and balanced by a combination of our senses and skeletal structure working together. All muscles and tendons must pull in coordination to keep the bones and joints aligned. This however would be of little use if our eyes were shut and we could not focus on our surroundings. Try going down some steps or practising your form/kata with closed eyes. (on second thoughts forget about the steps, we may lose a few students this way!) We all probably know someone who's had dizzy spells (vertigo) because of too much wax in their ears thus preventing the small fluid filled 'canals' in the inner ear from working properly; this fluid works similar to a spirit level and helps you to keep your balance. To maintain our balance in our waking hours our brain needs to be able to keep rapid messages reaching various areas to make subtle adjustments.

If you are walking or running in one direction and then decide to change, a message is sent informing the receptors in the muscles involved of your intention to take this action.; the muscles react, the body turns, the eyes adjust their focus and the balance changes - the brain is in control.

But what if your direction is suddenly changed, without prior warning to your senses; no adjustment can be made, the messages are scrambled and the brain is confused. When balance is lost, fear and panic abound, as the higher centres struggle to get the body re-aligned. No easy task

when you may be flying forward or backwards at a rate on knots. This is what happens when Tai Chi is used in the proper manner against an attack. Look for the weakness in your foe, look for the gaps, his strength will be of no advantage if he is disorientated.

One of the main differences in Tai Chi as a martial art, as against external styles, is they try to break bones, we try to break the balance whether it be body or mind.

By Jenny Peters



"IF I CAN HAVE SOMEONE ELSE I'LL SHOW YOU THAT AGAIN!"

## Tai Chi Chuan, Principles Over Techniques

*There is no real excellence in this world  
which can be separated from right living  
- David Starr Jordan*

I have been meaning to write this for a long time, but never seemed to get started. I think it was a combination of Jenny nagging me and recently reading a book by Stephen Covey called "The seven habits of highly effective people". I expect you have realised from the title that this isn't a book about martial arts at all, but one of a myriad of 'power management' books that seem to endlessly flood the market. I borrowed this book from my managing director initially in an attempt to find out what made him tick (he's got shelves full of this stuff) but after dipping into a few pages, I soon realised it put in words what Tai Chi Chuan aims to put into action.

Whether people come to Tai Chi for health and relaxation or to learn a self-defence they invariably want a series of quick fix techniques for a fast result. Although techniques are easily learnt, they are just as easily forgotten. To be

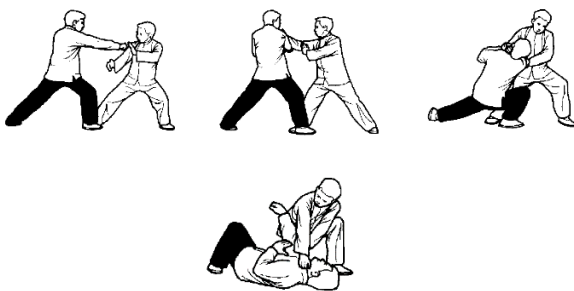
effective in the long term they have to become natural and instinctive, but by their sheer nature techniques are static, it is the underlying principles that give them life. Virtually everybody knows to bend your knees not your back when lifting a heavy package, and we all say it makes common sense. This is not just a technique but a principle of proper body mechanics.

Where Tai Chi differs from external muscular based martial arts is not just due to its focus on the mystical energy called CHI but due to its awareness of the principles of proper body mechanics. A large proportion of those first attending Tai Chi are suffering from stress, poor circulation, joint damage, cardio-vascular problems etc. The art has become renowned for its health giving qualities more so than its martial prowess; why is this?..... It is because of its core focus on correct body function. The principles that underlie Tai Chi Chuan are the principles by which our mental and physical systems are designed to operate efficiently. That which is natural happens without effort, that which is forced has its limitations.

Through correct body alignment strain is taken from the joints and the load is placed in the muscles and tendons, providing the function they were designed for. The knee is one of the most frequently damaged joints, whether by martial training or bad luck, but this one joint is supported by a series of muscles and tendons that are designed to articulate it and absorb any shock. Use this joint correctly and it will give you a lifetime of trouble free use; abuse it by not adhering to the principles of proper function and see what happens. The Tai Chi classics are like a rule book for proper body function, follow their principles closely and you will not only stave off injury but improve the body's efficiency. One principle Professor Cheng Man Ching put great store in was "Make your spine upright". Apart from the effect it has on your skeletal structure and organ alignment, it also aids the effect of 'rotating like a wheel', with your spine aiding the creation of an axis. This is explored in great depth in Cheng Tzu's 13 Treatises on Tai Chi Chuan. My intention here is only to reinforce the need for proper body alignment and function, as we have covered this issue before, so keep this in the back of your mind when we consider the importance of principle over technique.

Jan Diepersloot said, **“external martial arts are based on the energy of movement, whereas internal martial arts are based on the movement of energy”**. We can consider this in terms of the effort taken (both mental and physical) to apply techniques compared to free flow when applying correct principles. I am constantly asked by students for applications for Tai Chi Chuan forms; these are usually ex-students of external arts who are used to drilling applications. Here comes the difficulty; learning applications to the form helps you have an intent when practising, helps you remember the postures, allows you to check body alignment etc., what they are not is wholly practical.

The core concept is ‘from Wuji to Taiji’ or more clearly, from non-action to action. This means that an input is required to create a reaction thereby making Tai Chi a defensive (or better still reactive) art rather than an offensive one (unless of course you swear at your attacker as well!!!). Reacting doesn’t allow for time delay while deciding which technique to choose nor does it allow time to switch to a backup if the first fails. Unfortunately, techniques are quicker to learn and seemingly easier to grasp than principles; how do you convince a student that it is better to blend with an attack than to block it, to allow the body to ‘stand like a balance and rotate like a wheel’ thereby receiving and redirecting the energy instead of just smashing it out of the way. This is what Professor Cheng called ‘Investing in loss’.



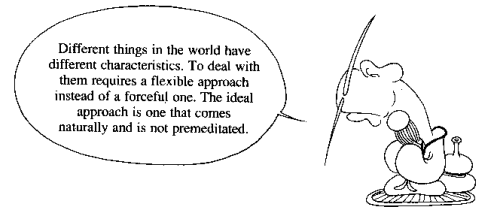
Self-defence is not just about physical attack, it is about mental attack as well; the stresses and strains of everyday life: traffic queues, over-baring bosses, missing Coronation Street, being late for my class. In terms of personal interaction, referring back to Covey, he named these two areas personality and character ethic. He stated that Character ethics included integrity, humility, patience, simplicity and modesty which were the basic principles for effective living, whereas personality ethics included public

image, skills and techniques designed to lubricate the process of human interaction i.e. being manipulative and even deceptive. He believed that our Character ethics are in our nature and only need to be nurtured whereas personality ethics are only superficial tricks to gain a ‘quick fix’ and would soon fail or be found out. We have all at some time or other seen both ethics in action but it has only been more recently that I have considered them in terms of martial development. Principles for proper living and principles for effective fighting are invariably the same; they are non-confrontational and follow the Tao.

Techniques covering locking, throwing and striking are taught to understand their function but they are limited by what ifs. To properly apply any methods, the underlying principles are what makes them real. People don’t attack in the same way with a nice clean straight punch or a grab to your right wrist. Sitting loosely into your hips so that the body feels buoyant and allowing the waist to move freely, strictly adheres to the principles of this wondrous art. An input of energy will cause a natural reaction in the Tai-Chi’ist, subduing or throwing out the attacker. No techniques are considered only the principles of adhering, redirecting and releasing. As soon as a forced technique is applied, the attacker has something to resist against thereby giving them an opportunity to counter. Principles are simple and therefore know no bounds, techniques are just that and limited by their nature. When students ask what would you do if I hit you, I have to **reply “I have no idea but it is likely to hurt”**. Apart from the obvious intended discouragement (well I don’t really want them to hit me!!), this statement is true because without the energy input of an attack I cannot move from Wuji to taiji. Consider the principle of borrowing your opponent’s strength; If we look at the body as a seesaw in balance (Zhong Ding) and the fulcrum as our centre (Dan Tien) then an input to one side (a strike) will cause an equal and opposite output (counter-attack) on the other side. A technique would be a strike and counter whereas the function of the seesaw allows this principle to be used against any input and more importantly, the greater the input the greater the output; this is the only martial art where attackers beat themselves up!! Another example which may be clearer to other martial artists is the intercepting fist. This is applied by punching across the attackers striking arm, directly at their

centre; it intercepts their strike rather than blocking it and allows you strike to land. The technique is called intercepting fist but the underlying principle allows you to strike, brake the limb, throw etc. [see photo's]. If too much force is used the attacker will have a chance to counter; using Professor Cheng's theory of 'never put more than four ounces on them and never let them put more than four ounces on you', (as an extension of deflect 1000 pounds with four ounces) allows you to move your body to a better position if the attackers strike is too powerful. The shortest distance between two points is not always the straightest; technique alone does not allow for this.

Tai Chi Chuan is famous for ROOTING but how does it work. There are many pictures of great masters absorbing a push from a whole bunch of people at once [see photo]; this is not done by just wedging themselves between the pushers and the floor because if the pushers moved, the master would fall over. The principle of seek the straight within the curve allows the force to be directed to the ground through a seemingly straight line, while the curve generated by soft (buoyant) joints allows the master to absorb and release at will. Rooting is a feeling of connection to the ground, though the whole body, and can be just as easily felt when sitting wei tso (with upright spine), standing on tip toe or moving around. The principle of go backwards to go forwards, go down to go up etc. allow you to sever your opponents root or rather their feeling of stable connection to the ground; the effortless throws of Aikido work in the same way. Rooting allows you to use the strength of the ground to defend and attack in the same instant; simply put if you punch an opponent with a feeling of connection from the ground to your hand, the ground cannot move therefore the opponent will. I always tell people the key to self-defence is to take your opponents balance while maintaining your own; balance is both mental and physical therefore by feeling rooted, balanced and calm you will eventually be able to deal with all the stresses of life and see them coming a mile away. In terms of physical attack, you can move as necessary, counter (effect their physical balance) and disorientate them putting them at the disadvantage (effect their mental balance). I hope I haven't waffled on too much in my attempt to get the point across. The best way forward is patience and a good teacher (or just pay me!!). - By Mark Peters



### Sunday advanced training returns

If everything stays on track, Sunday advanced sessions will start back in June. Plus, this year's weekend camp will be in October.

- June 13th
- September 5th
- [October 2nd & 3rd - training weekend](#)

**Venue:** Weoley Hill Village Hall, Weoley Hill, Bournville.

**Sunday:** 9.30-12.30 advanced classes (£30)

静坐

### Oh... to sit quietly

I would love to sit quietly, but the world is such a noisy place

As I still my mind the world screams "listen to me"

As I strive for peace, the world nudges me

As I try to shut it all out, the world bags on the door.

h how I wish all could be quiet so I could just sit quietly

But as I do I realise the beauty of it all

The beauty of the flow of life...

Maybe if I stopped resisting life and flowed with it

I could enjoy the peace within the noise and just sit quietly.....