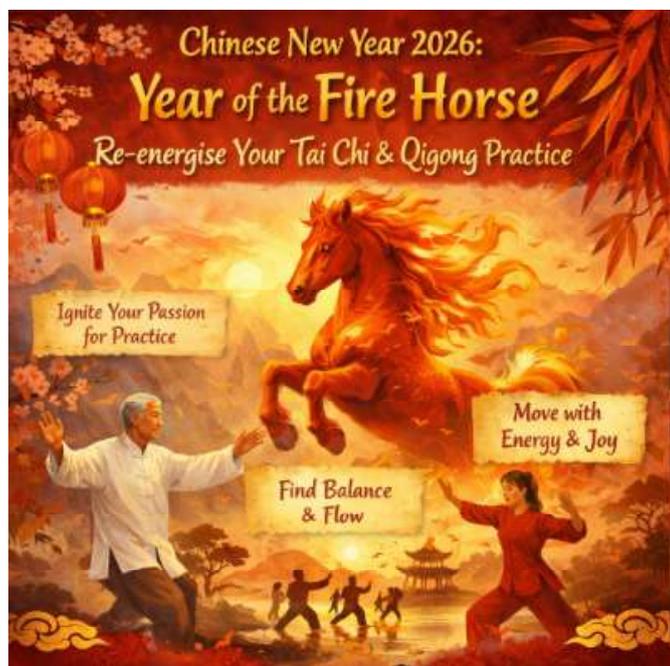


## Kai Ming Association Newsletter

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### Chinese New Year and the Fire Horse: Re-energising Your Tai Chi and Qigong Practice

Chinese New Year is always a natural pause point – a moment to take stock, set intentions, and gently realign ourselves for the year ahead. In 2026 we welcome the **Year of the Fire Horse**, (17<sup>th</sup> Feb), a combination traditionally associated with vitality, enthusiasm, forward movement and a strong sense of purpose. For those of us practising Tai Chi and Qigong, it offers a timely invitation to refresh both our commitment and our enjoyment of training.

The Horse, in Chinese culture, symbolises movement and freedom. It is not an animal that stands still for long. Fire adds warmth, brightness and motivation. Together, Fire Horse energy is said to favour action over hesitation and experience over theory. That does not mean rushing or forcing – something Tai Chi constantly teaches us to avoid – but it does encourage us to engage fully rather than practise on autopilot.

Many students start the year with good intentions: *I'll practise more regularly, I'll finally learn that form properly, I'll do my Qigong every morning.* By February, reality often intrudes. The Fire Horse year is an opportunity to revisit those intentions, not with self-criticism, but with curiosity and enjoyment.

Instead of asking, “Am I doing enough?”, try asking, “How can I make my practice feel more alive?”

Tai Chi and Qigong already balance fire and water qualities beautifully. Where Fire Horse energy brings drive and passion, our training offers grounding, structure and refinement. You might choose to lean into the Horse's love of movement by focusing on flow: smoother transitions, clearer weight shifts, or simply enjoying the feeling of continuous motion. In Qigong, this could mean practising outdoors when possible, allowing the breath and body to feel more expansive.

Join our ‘**Tai Chi in the Park**’ sessions if you don't already attend.

Fire also relates to the Heart in traditional Chinese medicine – joy, connection and presence. This is a good year to notice *why* you practise. Is it for health, calm, balance, social connection, or quiet challenge? Reconnecting with that deeper reason often strengthens commitment far more effectively than discipline alone. Training becomes something you *want* to do, not something you feel you *should* do.

The Horse is also associated with independence. If you usually rely on classes alone, this might be the year to gently build a personal home practice, even if it is just ten minutes a day. Conversely, if you practise alone a lot, you might rediscover enjoyment through group sessions, workshops or shared practice in the park. Fire Horse energy favours engagement – with the art, with others, and with yourself.

As Chinese New Year reminds us, progress in Tai Chi and Qigong is cyclical, not linear. Some years are quieter and more inward; others are more expressive and dynamic. The Year of the Fire Horse invites us to step forward with confidence, curiosity and a sense of play.

So as the new lunar year begins, in February, take a moment. Stand, breathe, soften, and move. Let your practice feel warm rather than forced, purposeful rather than pressured. If you can do that, the Fire Horse will serve you well – not by pushing harder, but by helping you enjoy the journey a little more.



## Kai Ming Instructor Grading November 2025

Each year instructors and trainee instructors train hard, plus attend the advanced Sunday sessions. In November 2025 the group below committed themselves to taking that next step on their instructor journey and achieved their well-deserved grades.

Heather Lomas and Neil Rankine supported them all as needed.



*Perry Bennett - Instructor*



*Lynette Wood - Instructor*



*Paul Meacham - Instructor*



*Rob Hawkesford - Senior Instructor*



*Alyson Ashmore - Instructor*



*David Moore - Instructor*



*Caroline Gibson - Instructor*



*Kath Payne - Instructor*



*Linda Barrett - Instructor*



*Sarah Taylor - Senior Instructor*

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### Thoughts on the Tao by Mark Stevenson

While there are a plethora of tai chi related books out there to choose from, there is one that I come back to again and again: Tao Te Ching, roughly translated as The Book of the Way, a classic of Taoism and a pillar of Chinese philosophy.

My favoured translation (by Stephen Mitchell) begins, "The Tao (way) that can be named, is not the eternal Tao".

It sets the scene early for an often head-scratching journey we are taken on by Lao Tzu, the 6th century philosopher and writer said to have written the 81 verses.

Scratch beneath the surface and ponder the depth of Lao Tzu's words and a wonderful philosophy emerges, by which we can live in harmony with the natural world around us.

Several of the verses tend to stick in my mind when I relate them to my practice of tai chi, but here are the top 3:

### 1. “The journey of 1000 miles begins with a single step”

Often attributed to Confucius, this phrase features within verse 64 of Tao Te Ching. It resonates with me because tai chi can often feel like a long journey! There can often be years between starting a form and completing it – and even once you have learnt all of the moves, it takes many more years to master them (in fact, that journey never ends).

For me, the verse is a call-to-action – to get started on whatever is in front of me, no matter how hard it is to take the first step. This can be applied to so many things in life, whether it's a tai chi form, a task at work, a new health regime, dealing with a difficult decision in life, or anything else that involves a marathon rather than a sprint.

On another level, this phrase also reminds me that the journey is to be enjoyed and savoured. How often do we feel a sense of anti-climax when we complete a huge job or task, and realise in retrospect that the weeks, months or even years of action (our journey), were the most rewarding part of the process?

### 2. “Nothing is more soft and yielding than water, Yet for attacking the solid and strong, nothing is better ... The weak overcome the strong, The supple overcome the stiff”

This statement is VERY tai chi. The movements in tai chi are (mostly) soft, relaxed and yielding – but this should not be mistaken for being weak! Like water, there is a quiet, yet tremendous power within the practice of tai chi.

Water does not meet force with force, neither does a tai chi practitioner. It moves around objects and, over time, can erode even the highest of peaks. From this we can learn to overcome our greatest challenges and obstacles.

### 3. “He who conquers others is strong, He who conquers himself is mighty”

Tai chi is a martial art, but in reality (and thankfully), we generally do not need to defend ourselves against attackers. So, self defence becomes protection against modern day, more personal ‘enemies’, including sedentary lifestyles, anxiety, chronic health conditions, insomnia, bad nutrition and pollution. I view training as the best life insurance policy I can take out. We do not need to conquer others, imposing our dominance and will over them. But I believe it is vitally important that we take charge of our own health and wellbeing, conquer our weaknesses, and be our best, mightiest selves. This is an ethos we passionately promote.



### How Long Is A Piece Of String?

I recently had a long telephone conversation with a nice man who rang to try and get some information on the martial elements of Tai Chi and if it would give him the ability to defend himself.

The call had been instigated by him watching a kung fu movie, where the male actor playing the starring role had been supposedly using Tai Chi in the fight scenes.

He said he was very confused by what he saw as there was so much leaping about, high kicks, the blocks seemed to be very stiff, and the use of strength was evident. All of this was the opposite of what he believed was Tai Chi.

We discussed at length the differences between internal and external, which he did understand as he had practised several other martial arts.

He was now interested in Tai Chi as now being in his 50s he felt it was a more realistic art for him.

He also seemed to feel that much of the martial strategies he had learnt from the other Kung Fu he had tried would not be effective for him personally, but was not sure he would be able to relax enough to make Tai Chi work for him either!

He felt he would like to come to our classes but wondered how long it would be before he could leave the beginners class and all the “slow stuff” and begin to feel confident that he could defend himself if attacked!

I tried to explain that everyone has the ability to attain this, but it really did depend as much on how long it took for them to develop as a person with the confidence that Tai Chi WOULD work for them, as their ability to learn techniques and forms.

However, he kept pushing for a time scale 6 months, 1 year, 2 years, sometime, never.

I had to be very honest with this man, because I feel that it is the right way to be.

Trust is essential and to betray the trust of potential students just to “snare” them for your class is not acceptable, and will only lead to their disappointment of you as a person and of the Association.

I told him it would be easy to placate him by giving him a timescale that was very competitive with other arts, but the truth of it was that I had no idea how long his journey would be before he felt confident that he had attained the level of physical and mental ability he sought. It could be never!

He was silent for a while, and then said “I am glad you said that, I would not have believed you if you had have given me an off the cuff answer, as other people I have spoken to have”

Train and be truthful.....

By Jenny Peters





### Donations

As many of you may know, each year at Christmas, Kai Ming donates to several charities. The money comes from Mark & Jenny Peters donating their time to run the club, create the newsletters, manage the websites etc.

This year we decided to donate to:

- Changes Tamworth – Mental Health charity
- Happy Fields Animal Sanctuary – Birmingham
- Linjoy Wildlife Sanctuary and Rescue – Burton/Tamworth
- Humane World for Animals
- Salvation Army
- Brooke Donkey Sanctuary
- Four Paws
- National Fox Welfare

### Smooth, Soft, Relaxed – it has to come from inside

One of the students at a class said to me after I demonstrated the Form – “that looked so smooth, why doesn’t mine look like that”.

Coming home that night, it struck me that it may have looked smooth to her, but it did not feel smooth to me. So after 10 years of Tai Chi’ing and people saying be relaxed/soft/etc. here was a different angle for me to focus on and refine.

I pondered over this for a few days and then realized the feeling, the smoothness, the relaxation, (whatever you like to call it) has to come from “inside”. You cannot be externally soft until you are internally soft.

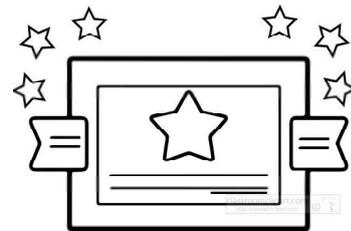
I then pondered on what “internally soft” meant, and how to get it.

In the meantime when doing my Qigong or Form exercises I tried to feel where were the internal hard angles, hard points, sudden movements, stuck bits. This over time has helped me to focus on those areas and to try to soften them; to work on why they felt hard. This often led me to doing the move but doing less – even more less. And to feel more the balance, posture, transition – and not just “do the move”. It helped me focus on the bad habits I had developed.

My thoughts brought me to realize that mental softness is what makes internal softness, which in turn allows external softness. The mind and thoughts affect everything – and have to be balanced, relaxed and aware – leading to softness. The sharp

(or rather the not so smooth) edges of your mental feelings have to be managed, worked on, focused on, and “let go” so you can be more and more soft inside and then externally. We all know it is very hard to always do this in daily life. However, as we know, Tai Chi is not just applied in the class or when Tai Chi’ing, it extends in all ways to your daily life. How you move, how you feel, how you touch, how you interact.

So hopefully slowly, slowly, more of that mental (internal) smoothness, softness, relaxedness can and will become more and more a part of everything you do and feel. Hopefully that will extend out to all those you meet and with whom you interact –leading to a better life for you and for them.



### Dedicated Student Award

In the May 2023 newsletter, we mentioned the sad loss of Andrew McAuley (Mac) who was a long-term student. Before he died, he asked if we could start a Dedicated Student award as tai chi had given him so much in his life. The feedback from students and instructors has been excellent and the awards in ’23 and ’24 well deserved.

#### Awards for 2025 are:

- Denise Waldron - Kai Ming, Tamworth.
- Mandy Scott - Kai Ming, Tamworth.
- Andrew Starkey - Kai Ming, Tamworth.
- Adrian Rees – Little Aston, Sutton Coldfield.
- Paul Harrison – PtR, Lichfield.
- Susan Lines – PtR, Lichfield.
- Barbara Webb – Kai Ming, Lichfield.
- Norma Stamps – Kai Ming, Lichfield.

### 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

#### For your diary, 2026 Sunday session dates:

- March 15th
- April 12th
- May 10th
- June 7th
- July 5th
- Aug 9th
- September 13th – 9.30am to 4pm
- Oct 11th
- Nov 15th

