



Tai Chi Newsletter

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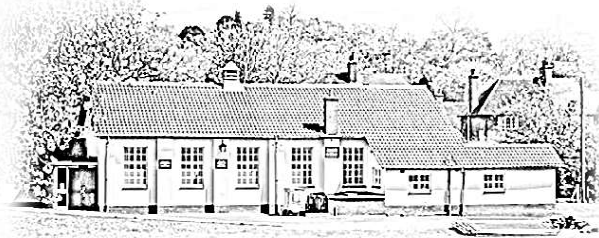


Community Based Tai Chi & Chi-Kung for everyone

Improvement cannot always be measured, it is something you feel

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Tai Chi Weekend September 2024

Each year we have a focus for the weekend camp and this year's is the 30th Anniversary of Kai Ming Association for Tai Chi Chuan.

Saturday 7th – The day will cover the 18 lower hand tai chi form taught in Malaysia as an extension to the Cheng Man Ching 37 form.

Sunday 8th - You will be learning qigong (chi-kung). We will focus on the three refinements of mind, body, and breath.

Cost

The cost per day will be £40 per person (Kai-Ming members) £60 (non-members)

More details at <https://shorturl.at/3qV01>

Venue:

Weoley Hill Village Hall, Bournville. B29 4AR.

Tai Chi: A Gentle Remedy for Arthritis

Arthritis, a broad term encompassing over 100 diverse types of joint inflammation and degenerative conditions, affects millions of people worldwide. The most common types include osteoarthritis (OA), rheumatoid arthritis (RA), psoriatic arthritis (PsA), and palindromic rheumatism (PR). These conditions can cause pain, stiffness, swelling, and decreased range of motion in the joints. While medical treatments and lifestyle changes are essential for managing arthritis, complementary therapies like Tai Chi have gained recognition for their potential benefits in alleviating arthritis symptoms and improving quality of life.

Understanding Arthritis

- 1. Osteoarthritis (OA):** Osteoarthritis is the most prevalent form of arthritis, primarily affecting older adults. It is characterised by the gradual breakdown of cartilage—the cushion between bones—leading to pain, swelling,

and reduced joint mobility. OA commonly affects the knees, hips, hands, and spine.

- 2. Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA):** Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune disorder where the immune system mistakenly attacks the synovium, the lining of the membranes that surround the joints. This leads to inflammation, pain, and eventually joint damage. RA can affect multiple joints and is often symmetrical, meaning it occurs in the same joints on both sides of the body.
- 3. Psoriatic Arthritis (PsA):** Psoriatic arthritis affects some people who have psoriasis, a condition characterised by red patches of skin topped with silvery scales. PsA can cause joint pain, stiffness, and swelling, and can affect any part of the body, including the fingertips and spine.
- 4. Palindromic rheumatism (PR)** is a form of inflammatory arthritis. It causes attacks or flare-ups of joint pain and inflammation that come and go. The joints look and feel normal between attacks. It is sometimes known as palindromic arthritis.

Tai Chi and Its Principles

Tai Chi, an ancient Chinese martial art, is a mind-body practice that combines slow, deliberate movements, meditation, and deep breathing. Often described as “meditation in motion,” Tai Chi is practised worldwide for its numerous health benefits, including improving balance, flexibility, and mental well-being. The principles of Tai Chi emphasise relaxation, balance, and harmony, making it an ideal exercise for individuals with arthritis.

How Tai Chi Helps with Arthritis

- 1. Reduces Pain and Stiffness:** Regular practice of Tai Chi has been shown to reduce pain and stiffness associated with arthritis. The slow, controlled movements help increase joint mobility and flexibility, while the gentle nature of the exercises minimises the risk of injury. A study published in the *Journal of Rheumatology* found that participants with knee osteoarthritis who practised Tai Chi experienced significant reductions in pain and improvements in physical function compared to those who did not practice Tai Chi.
- 2. Improves Balance and Prevents Falls:** Arthritis can significantly impact balance, leading to an increased risk of falls, especially in older adults. Tai Chi emphasises weight shifting, coordination, and postural control, which can help improve balance and stability. Improved balance

not only reduces the risk of falls but also enhances overall mobility and confidence.

- 3. Enhances Muscle Strength and Endurance:** Although Tai Chi is a low-impact exercise, it involves weight-bearing movements that can strengthen muscles around the affected joints. Stronger muscles provide better support to the joints, reducing the strain and pain associated with arthritis. This is particularly beneficial for individuals with osteoarthritis in weight-bearing joints like the knees and hips.
- 4. Promotes Relaxation and Stress Reduction:** Chronic pain and limited mobility can lead to stress and anxiety, which can exacerbate arthritis symptoms. Tai Chi incorporates deep breathing and mindfulness techniques that promote relaxation and reduce stress levels. Lower stress levels can, in turn, help reduce inflammation and pain associated with arthritis.
- 5. Improves Overall Quality of Life:** The holistic approach of Tai Chi, addressing both physical and mental aspects, can significantly enhance the overall quality of life for individuals with arthritis. Improved physical function, reduced pain, and better mental well-being contribute to a more active and fulfilling life.

Scientific Evidence Supporting Tai Chi for Arthritis

Research studies have provided substantial evidence supporting the benefits of Tai Chi for arthritis. For instance, a review published in *Arthritis Care & Research* analysed multiple studies and concluded that Tai Chi is effective in reducing pain and improving physical function in individuals with osteoarthritis. Another study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* highlighted the positive effects of Tai Chi on pain, physical function, and mental health in patients with fibromyalgia, a condition often associated with arthritis.

Getting Started with Tai Chi

I am sure many readers can attest to the benefits of tai chi and its impact on their arthritis. Please remember it is essential to start slowly and consult with a healthcare provider, especially if you have severe arthritis or other medical conditions. Maybe share this article with friends and encourage them to come and join you.

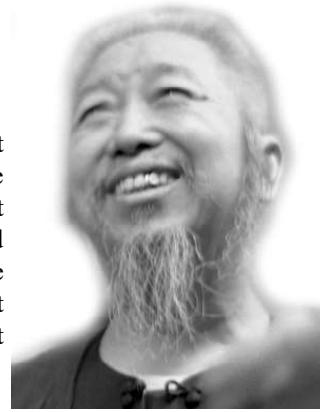
Conclusion

Tai Chi offers a gentle, effective way to manage the symptoms of arthritis and improve overall well-being. Its focus on slow, controlled movements, balance, and relaxation makes it particularly suitable for individuals with various forms of arthritis. By making Tai Chi a regular exercise routine, individuals with arthritis can experience reduced pain, improved joint function, and a better quality of life.



The “Constant Bear”

The exercise named “Constant Bear” was developed from the Five Animal Frolics, a Taoist exercise said to cure diseases and strengthen the body, whose postures range from abstract animal representations to exact replications of them.



Professor Cheng Man-Ch'ing tried to redefine the Five Animals exercise, by correlating various postures in tai chi with their corresponding animal images. In the “constant Bear”, Cheng defines the single animal upon which all the others are based.

There is an interesting story concerning the Constant Bear; Professor Cheng once invited Mr. Liu Hsi-heng to his home near Taipei. When Mr. Liu arrived, he could see Cheng through the front door doing the Bear while editing one of his manuscripts. Cheng continued the Bear and Liu was certain he had noticed his approach. Finally, Cheng looked up and said, “This one single move is tai chi - there is nothing more than this.”

Thus, the importance of this move should not be underestimated. It is the single move that connects and permeates every posture, the string upon which all are strung. Only through the practice of this constant principle can the myriad of transformations occur.

Cheng himself said of it, “The Constant Bear combines the Five Animal frolics and Tai Chi into one single move”. Seek it and you will receive it; neglect it and you will lose it.

There are three main points to concentrate on when practising the Constant Bear. They are:

First, the exercise features the constant swinging of the waist to and from left and right. It should be done about thirty minutes after your morning and evening meal. Those with weak bodies should start with two to three hundred swings; every five to seven days, add on about five to ten swings. Always increase, never decrease, the numbers. Strive for gradual progress. Increase the movements until the total time spent is between ten and fifteen minutes and remain in a pleasant mood.

Second, when you practice the Bear, don't let your head hang down as a real bear does, but combine the swing with the form called the Looking Owl (i.e. keep the head -suspended from above) where you look straight ahead. Your head should not move independently but moves aligned with the navel. In tai chi this is called ·The light-sensitive energy rising to the top of your head and keeping the Wei-lu centred and straight (i.e. the hips tucked under) so that the spirit rises to the top of the head.

Third, as in tai chi, distinguish clearly between full and empty, as expressed in the statement “Heavy as a mountain, light as a feather”. When you turn left, your weight should be fully on your left leg, making it as heavy as a mountain. Do the same when you swing onto your right leg.

If you do these things, your Golden Cock stands on one leg

will be stable; your Repulse Monkey will not be snatched away by the movement of a Sensitive Ape; your Embrace Tiger and Return to Mountain will be as decisive as a tiger's roar; your Diagonal Flying Posture will be faster than the Deer. The Constant Bear combines both the Five Animals and tai chi into a single move. When you practice be sure to keep your mind and Chi in the Tan Tien, about 1.3 inches below the navel. Also, take care that the soles of your feet are fully on the ground.



The Benefits of Tai Chi on Strength and Balance

Tai Chi, an ancient Chinese martial art, has gained widespread popularity as a low-impact exercise renowned for its health benefits, particularly in improving strength and balance. This practice, characterised by slow, deliberate movements and deep breathing, is more than just a form of physical exercise; it is a holistic approach to wellness that integrates mind, body, and spirit.

Improving Strength through Tai Chi

One of the key benefits of Tai Chi is its ability to enhance muscular strength. Unlike traditional strength training exercises that involve lifting weights or high-intensity workouts, Tai Chi focuses on controlled movements that require sustained muscle engagement. Each posture in Tai Chi demands the activation of multiple muscle groups simultaneously. For instance, holding a single-leg stance while performing arm movements engages the core, legs, and upper body muscles, fostering muscle endurance and strength.



Moreover, Tai Chi routines often involve shifting weight from one leg to another, which increases lower body strength. These movements mimic functional activities such as walking, standing up, and climbing stairs, thereby making everyday tasks easier and safer. Research has shown that regular practice of Tai Chi can lead to significant improvements in lower body strength, comparable to those achieved through more conventional forms of resistance training.

Enhancing Balance through Tai Chi

Balance is another critical area where Tai Chi excels. The practice emphasises proper body alignment and mindful movement, which are essential for maintaining balance. Each movement in Tai Chi is slow and deliberate, requiring practitioners to focus on their centre of gravity and the alignment of their spine. This heightened body awareness and proprioception (the sense of self-movement and body position) are crucial for improving balance.

The dynamic nature of Tai Chi, which involves continuous shifting of weight and changes in direction, helps train the body's balance mechanisms. This is particularly beneficial for older adults, who are at a higher risk of falls due to decreased balance and strength. Studies have indicated that Tai Chi can significantly reduce the risk of falls in older adults by improving their balance and functional mobility.

Mind-Body Connection and Coordination

Tai Chi's benefits are not limited to physical strength and balance; the practice also fosters a strong mind-body connection. The meditative aspect of Tai Chi requires mental focus and concentration, which enhances cognitive function and coordination. This integration of mental and physical exercises helps improve overall coordination, making movements more fluid and reducing the likelihood of injury.

Holistic Approach to Health

Tai Chi is often described as a moving meditation due to its calming effects on the mind and body. This holistic approach to health not only boosts physical fitness but also reduces stress, anxiety, and depression. The deep breathing techniques used in Tai Chi increase oxygen flow to the brain, promoting mental clarity and emotional well-being. A calm mind contributes to better balance and coordination, as stress and anxiety can negatively impact these functions.

Tai Chi offers a unique blend of physical and mental benefits that improve strength and balance. Its low-impact, slow-paced movements make it accessible to people of all ages and fitness levels. By integrating physical postures, breathing techniques, and mental focus, Tai Chi provides a comprehensive approach to enhancing overall health and well-being. Whether practised for its physical benefits, mental clarity, or as a form of meditation, Tai Chi stands out as a valuable exercise for promoting strength, balance, and a harmonious mind-body connection.



Tibetan Hand Cymbals (or Ting-Sha)

Recently at a car boot, I bought a set of Ting-Sha that came with a little book. When I got home, I had a go at using them (guided by the book) and was amazed at their soothing reverberating sound. I decided I needed to find out more about their ancient use of them so here goes:

The ring of the small Tibetan hand cymbals known as Ting-sha instantly strikes a resonance within the human heart. Their purpose is to summon. They call us to awareness, to mindfully remember who we are, and to recognize our priorities in this often turbulent and changeable world.

You can use the ting-sha for your own spiritual purposes, whatever your tradition or religion. What is important is the knowledge that real spiritual transformation is taking place in your daily life. The Tibetans are fun-loving people who have encountered a wide spectrum of metaphysical concepts during their years of exile.

Within the many and varied Tibetan Buddhist rituals and meditation practices, the ting-sha are actually employed in only a few specific rituals. Their principal use is to summon or call forth, with their high-pitched reverberation penetrating into ethereal realms that extend beyond the senses of mortal man.

These rituals are often performed as solitary practices by many Tibetan monks, some of whom have chosen to perform them every day of their lives, or as a cycle of a hundred thousand offerings. Such dedicated practitioners would never sound their ting-sha without also presenting an offering of burned food or water for the 'honoured guests' or wandering spirits.

I am not suggesting you need this dedication but if you just want a relaxing meditation here is how to use your ting-sha.

Ting-sha are easy to play. They can be picked up and struck immediately. No musical training or tuning ability is needed. Your cymbals are pitched in approximately the key of E major. The audible duration of their ring is around 12 seconds. Their harmonic frequency creates a diminuendo, or dying away, of oscillating vibrations or sound waves.

There are three principal techniques for striking the ting-sha to create a sustained ring. These are all performed in front of the player's heart. The leather thong is held between fingers and thumb just above the centre of each cymbal.

For chanting, mantra recitation and dance rhythms, the ting-sha may be repetitively clashed together in the 'face- to- face' manner of conventional hand cymbals.

Here their sustained open ring may be replaced by a dampened closed tone by pressing the fingertips onto the upper surfaces of the ting-sha. These methods are used for playing the small brass Indian hand cymbals or Talam, which are rhythmically employed in dance performances and devotional singing.

As hanging chimes, the ting-sha may be suspended by their leather thong from two hooks and struck with a wooden striker. The paired ting-sha may also be separated to create two individual cymbals, with a striker attached to each end of the divided leather thong. The individual ting-sha was commonly employed in Tibet.

At the end of every meditation session, it is customary to dedicate the merit of one's spiritual practice and insight for the benefit of others.

This dedication can be beautifully expressed through the striking of the ting-sha in front of your heart.

Each ring of the cymbals acts as a vehicle for the radiation of the 'immeasurable harmony' of your love, compassion, joy and equanimity towards all beings.

I realise that for some, this concept may seem a "bit too full on", but the way the world is at the moment maybe it is a refreshing way of thinking and can only give us hope.

I am not someone who practises meditation but I have to say just the ringing of the ting-sha creates a very calming soul touching moment.

The little book that came with the cymbals also gave an insight into an aspect of Buddhist's beliefs that I had no previous knowledge of.

So the trip to the car boot was in a way a journey to my further "enlightenment" that I felt you would not mind my sharing with you.

By Jenny Peters

Membership Update News

We have been making a number of cost savings in recent months and are pleased to update everyone on membership fees etc.

It will remain at £15 for all new first-year memberships and still include a FREE red club T-shirt. Renewals will be reduced to £10 from April 2024 and we're still able to keep T-shirt prices at £10 and hoodies at £25 for members.

Plus, the annual weekend camp in September will still be £20 cheaper for members at only £40 per day.

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 £30 per person.

What3words locatoin <https://w3w.co/pits.level.cake>

Training in 2024 starts with

7th July
11th August
6th October
10th November

Weekend camp – 9.30am to 4pm 7th & 8th September

