



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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e-mail us: markpeters@kaiming.co.uk



PASSION - Strong emotion, strong enthusiasm

These two definitions of Passion are taken from the OXFORD DICTIONARY.

Of course, there are others, but these are the ones we feel best fit our values and meaning.

“MAKE YOUR 2022 RESOLUTION: TO PRACTICE TAI-CHI WITH PASSION AND COMMITMENT”.

Unlike other martial arts and sports, it is not limited by age or disabilities. It is only limited by your own motivations; if you lose the passion, you lose the motivation.

For me personally the word itself immediately evokes emotions.

Like many others if I really want something, the drive I put into it soon becomes a 'passion'. It's mad to realise that it's been two years (March 2020) since COVID-19 hit the world and closed it down... The stop-starts, isolation, loss of friends and family members for some, had killed the drive and passion for life for many. Now is the time to relight that fire and invigorate that passion for the arts we love so much.

We realise students may come to Tai-Chi not really knowing much about it and just 'want to have a go'.

We do get the odd one who arrives 'fired up' who has been looking for a class all their life it would seem.

Generally, these are the words we dread! Usually, it means after a couple of sessions we never see them again!

The reality of the actual 'doing' is just too much.... Tai-Chi is not easy!

This is where PASSION comes in, without it your Tai-Chi will be enjoyable but lacking in substance, and that's fine if you are happy with that.

Steak pie is very nice but adding the kidney is where the flavour really kicks in; add passion to your Tai-Chi and experience a "banquet"! (Veggie alternatives available)

I feel qualified to speak about the difference it can make because I have LIVED with it ever since Mark began his search for what he believed was 'the real art'

It was not an easy task; there were lots of simple 'steak pies' out there.

He had to remove several 'crusts' to examine their content before he found the one with the 'kidney'

But it was worth it.

He has developed as a person, along with his Tai-Chi.

The 'passion' is consuming once you have it you want it all.

Fortunately for the Association we have over the years acquired students who feel the same way, some of whom have progressed to instructors and are encouraging more to develop that passion.

Tai-Chi is a never-ending journey for Mark, but a journey he is enjoying so much, and which has enriched his life immeasurably.

I find it hard to remember life without it.

I close with a remark from one of our newly graded instructors.

At the Christmas meal on receiving his certificate he told us that it meant more to him than any other scholastic achievement he had received. It meant we trusted him as a person and his knowledge of the art itself, to allow him to be graded by the club to teach others.

An honour he was overcome with and thanked us for.

It really had nothing to do with us. He has the **PASSION**, and we thank him for wanting to pass it on to others.

By Jenny Peters



Alice In Wonderland and Tai Chi

There are many paths that lead to enlightenment and sometimes we are led to them in strange ways.

One day I was clearing out my bookcase in readiness to move it to another room.

Amongst the books I have collected over the years are many children's classics.

They are a mixed bag of Enid Blyton famous five adventure stories, right up to favourites from my daughter's childhood like Paula Danzinger's "The Cat Ate My Gymslip"!

I was barely noticing what was there, as over the years they have become just part of the scenery awaiting the arrival of grandchildren to relive the magic of the stories contained within the ageing pages.

Suddenly my eyes were drawn to the title of a little blue book "ALICE IN WONDERLAND"

Strangely I cannot remember if I ever read the actual book or indeed if it was ever read to me, but I do remember having surreal dreams that were quite frightening at the time, that involved some of the situations and characters Alice became involved in during the story.

We all know or have heard of this classic "children's story" by Lewis Carroll but thinking back to when I had bought it originally it was with the intention of reading it as an adult.

This may sound a strange thing to do, but as I have said sometimes our actions are guided for a reason. Never ignore an instinctive action.

With this in mind, over the last few days I have snatched some time to do just this, and my gut feelings have now justified themselves.

The edition I have has the reproduction of the original illustrations and I realised how nightmarish some of them were, but the actual story is lovely and the characters absurd, funny, and magically surreal all at once.

Now we come to the point of this article (is that a sigh of relief I hear).

Have you ever heard of the CAUCUS-RACE?



One chapter in the book is about Alice's adventures when she has been reduced in size.

She and a mixture of birds and animals fall accidentally into one of her tears that she cried when she had been a 9ft giant, so as you can imagine it is like a sea and they all swim for their lives!

When they eventually get on dry land the creatures discuss how they can get dry quickly.

The dodo who seems to be the wisest amongst them suggests A CAUCUS-RACE!

Even Alice had no idea what this was, so the dodo began to explain and demonstrate thus—

First, he marked out a racecourse, in a sort of circle, (doesn't have to be exact)

Then all the wet participants were placed here and there around the course.

There was no 1 2 3 go! They could begin running when they liked, and stop when they liked, so that it was not easy to know when the race was over.

However, when they had been going round for about ½ an hour and seemed dry again, the dodo suddenly called out "The race is over!"

They crowded round all eager to know who had won, in the hope of receiving a prize and admiration.

The dodo thought long and hard before he announced diplomatically "Everybody has won!" and all must have prizes.

It seemed to me when I read this, that it correlated very well with how we practice Tai Chi.

We all start at different points in our life along the Tai Chi path, and so other students in the class may be ahead of us in their knowledge of the art, but like the Caucus-Race there is no need to compete really, it is our own Ego's that want the prize, ethos, praise, attention whatever you choose to call it

Really... also like the race we are ALL WINNER'S!

The prize for us is the satisfaction of practice, when we feel our form is getting better, when we feel the focus is improving, when we feel the stress of everyday life lift as we leave the session with our fellow students.

That dodo was a wise old bird (however not wise enough to avoid extinction! But maybe as with many things MAN helped in his demise.)

By Jenny Peters

The tai chi & qigong union for Great Britain produces the "Tai Chi & Internal Arts Journal" and it is now available online at: www.taichimag.org for FREE You can also buy and/or subscribe to printed copies by following the link online

Tai Chi - A Martial Art or Not?

"I only want to do Tai-Chi for the relaxation side of the art. Do I really need to learn the self-defence?"

Personal reflection:

I came to Tai Chi because I had spent my adult life cultivating intellectual skills and certain forms of meditation as a background to a very active life of teaching. However as I became more-and more active in teaching, giving -talks, consultancy work etc. my physical health began to decline. Black-outs, angina, high blood pressure etc. I had been much impressed by an old Jesuit scholar from London whose work I had always admired. When I attended a conference in which he was speaking, I noticed that every morning he would do a set of formal exercises on the lawn outside our halls. This was Tai Chi he had learnt it China where his parents had been missionaries before the revolution. The exercises gave me insight into his customary calmness and attentive presence. Then later I had a Vietnamese student who had studied Tai Chi from Childhood with his father who was-skilled in traditional medicine. The student had the same quality of calm and attentiveness as the old scholar. I sought a teacher.

Initially then my interest was purely in terms of health and integrations of the intellectual spiritual and physical dimensions of my life which were out of synch. The first teacher I found placed a great deal of emphasis on the healing qualities of Tai Chi and implied all sorts of amazing benefits through committed practice. I found the emphasis almost magical and in the end was unimpressed. My second teacher was an old Brummie who placed all the emphasis on practice but went no further. And then I joined Mark's class in Erdington. Again the emphasis was on practice but often Mark would explain the origins of the moves in relation to mechanics and too their martial application. This made sense. There were many students in the class whose main interest was in Tai Chi as a martial art and who spoke of it as the ultimate martial art. So I began to read around.

The texts I read spoke of Tai Chi as an art combining physical exercise (although emphasising its internal value in exercising the internal systems of mind organs and energy) a form of active meditation or concentration and self-defence¹. At first, it was difficult to see even where the

physical exercise was in such slow flowing movements. Although it became apparent quickly that the reason I, at least, could not do them easily was precisely because my body was not relaxed but was always tense as though expecting to have to act quickly. Years of such tension had left its marks e.g. an enlarged heart, hard neck muscles etc. So even the relaxation side of the art was a distinct plus and took some time to begin to appreciate. But within a relatively short space of time its benefits were quite clear, better breathing, easier walking, better attitude on going into difficult or formerly stressful situations; doing the form before meditation and study would lead to better meditation and work sessions.

So I began to see the art as an integrating form rather than the simple building of particular muscle groups or certain intellectual skills. The early texts like Lau Tzu's "The Yellow Emperor's Classic" speak of this integration in terms of "bodies being united to their souls". The integration of relaxing the mind, the importance of correct breathing and this all linked to exercises based on certain animals - famously the tiger, the bear, the praying mantis etc.

The histories of the art speak of the martial applications developing in the long unstable period of early Chinese history where the ordinary people were oppressed by warlords. Villages developed methods of communal self-defence like the Chen family village where much of our accounts of early Tai Chi originate this origin with ends of self-defence is I think quite important. The origins of Tai Chi as a martial art are not aggressive. This difference to external forms of martial art leads, with practice, to a fundamentally different psychology² that is life enhancing, humorous, and spontaneous.

In practicing the form, one is already growing in an integrated form of martial art that is like no other. It already fights against those things that are most destructive of our health not so much the aggression of others but our own mistreatment of our minds and bodies. It is defensive against various forms of illness both mental (negative self-identity leading to depression etc.) and physical (the fruits of stress, bad posture, bad breathing). Practiced regularly it leads to a greater sense of physical and mental security and confidence and a more peaceful nature. This is not the picture of a victim; victim's draw violence to them. The

practitioner of Tai chi can walk away from violent situations but also face them if necessary in a non-aggressive way and so subvert the negative-energy that lies in such situations. Deflecting and deflecting. As our own self becomes more balanced and integrated we are less likely to be the target for violence and more able to deal with it when it rears its ugly head.

So the martial side of Tai Chi Chuan eventually becomes a natural extension of its initial values as an exercise in profound relaxation. And indeed the martial application enables our practice to become deeper richer and more satisfying.

There is much rubbish written about the art and its potential, which can give the impression that the average practitioner can start throwing black belt, karate masters across rooms with the greatest of ease. Serious development of the art specifically for competitive martial application takes years and serious sustained effort.

1. Breslow, A.L. (1995) Beyond the Closed-Door Chinese Culture and the Creation of Tai Chi Chuan, Jerusalem: Almond Blossom Press
2. Wong Kiew Kit, (1996) the Complete Book of Tai Chi Chuan, Dorset: Element Books, p.3

By David McLoughlin

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.

Sessions are Sunday's 9.30-12.30 at £30 per person.

2022 dates

March 6th

April 10th

May 8th

June 12th

September 3rd & 4th (weekend camp)

Oct 9th

Nov. 20th

Dec. 4th