

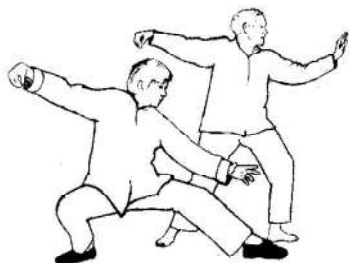


Kai Ming Association Newsletter

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"We practice Tai chi Chuan slowly in order to achieve tranquillity. Tranquillity leads to contemplation. Contemplation leads to clarity. Clarity leads to comprehension. Comprehension enables us to dissolve all doubts."

When Yin Meets Yang, P. 2
by David Chen



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 in 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 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 Ch Chuan*, Dorset: Element Books, p.3

Article by David McLoughlin



Attack and defence happen at the count of one. It is not a conscious act, rather it is an awareness that transcends all desire.

When you feel that you have not done anything and yet succeeds, then you have achieved something.

This is called Wu Wei

This year's Christmas party was at Flavourz and we had a private room so it felt more like just our restaurant. It was a great opportunity for Kai Ming and PtR students (even park classes) to meet up.

I gave out a few dedicated students' awards to those students to whom tai chi had made a marked difference in their lives and who had made a real commitment to attend classes, even when it was truly difficult for health reasons etc.

I have always felt that our club is more than just a group of classes but actually a growing family who share in the love of tai chi and chi-kung. Kai Ming has been established for 25+ years and PtR for 10+ and I'm sure we have many more years in us yet...

Happy New Year
Loading
2019

News for 2019

Some of you may be aware but others not so I thought its worth sharing a few things.

I (Mark Peters) and now a Director of the Tai Chi Union for Great Britain and an Honorary President. We have been featured in 'Trust me I'm a Doctor' where we were involved in a clinical trial comparing tai chi to Zumba as an exercise; the trial showed some surprising results in support of tai chi.

This year will be the first year where the tai chi training I run for patient rehabilitation will become CIMSPA accredited (Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity). This will enable it to spread

more widely across the NHS and specialist organisation. We will be involved with a number of clinical trials this year looking at tai chi in such areas as frail elderly, Alzheimer's, falls-prevention, stroke recovery and mental health.

If you use social media, our sites are:

Twitter:

<https://twitter.com/kaimingtaichi>

Facebook:

www.facebook.com/KaiMingTaiChi
and park classes

www.facebook.com/groups/parktaichi

We have relaunched the trainee instructor program, which starts 10th February. Please see back of newsletter for more details.

More news to come in future issues of our newsletter, so we'd love to hear from you and for you to share your experience and stories.



My view from the back of the Class!

I heard of Tai Chi years ago when a friend of mine began to practice in London's China town. But then I moved, and have only recently re-settled back in the U.K. During the long years away karate or judo were the only martial arts on offer. All that chopping and rolling was definitely not my cup of tea, imagine my joy when I discovered a flier in my local library advertising Tai Chi, and local to boot! I joined up and soon got into the swing of things.

The teacher was quite receptive to my questions at first, but after a while my curiosity began to annoy him. He once said to me that when he had asked questions of his master, his master would hide what it was he was looking for and this had made him look more carefully and thoughtfully. I wondered how he could talk to me in such a way as if I didn't know what I was looking for how on earth could I find it with out help and guidance? This was where we parted company. This style was not for me. It was around this time there was an article on Tai Chi in the telegraph which I read, and at the end of

the article there was a phone number. A couple of phone calls later I was organised in Mark and Jenny Peters class in Selly Oak. The Kai Ming (open minded) style of the club was completely different to that of the previous teacher and the class atmosphere open and warm.

Being a Nurse/Midwife I have a bad back as a result of lifting! I was looking for something which would not aggravate this old injury but would give me some physical benefits (I was banned from yoga years ago!). I was also looking for something Marshal after a particularly threatening incident on the streets during my Community midwifery allocation, and most of all I was wondering about the breathing and how I could perhaps apply this to my work.

Some of our first lessons were spent walking! We walked up and down our hall forwards and backwards. We did exercises to learn about balance and changing weight. The focus of all the exercises and the lessons was the form. Mark said that while it may seem odd learning walking and breathing etc. (after all don't we do this naturally!) we would see gradual changes and sure enough I did. One incident happened when I was holding a baby for a mother. The baby was crying. I went into auto pilot rocking the little soul into sleep then I realised I had been doing one of the warm up rocking exercises. Another occasion I was removing furniture and found my self walking backwards the Tai Chi way transferring weight etc. etc.! The list goes on.

The one thing that eluded me for some time though, was the breathing. To have a better understanding of what this was all about I signed up for a Qigong workshop. Suddenly things seemed to fall into place, the diaphragm breathing to the dantien focus and relaxation was something I had been teaching in my childbirth classes but whereas tai chi remains with this pattern, the breathing style I had been teaching changes with progress in labour. I have come to feel that the original style I was teaching may not be as beneficial and I have changed the style of breathing and relaxation as a

result of my tai chi experience. In my own private life I use the breathing when in situations of extreme stress such as, driving down the wrong motorway in the wrong direction when the kids are waiting to be picked up! Being catapulted up into the bright blue yonder as part of a gliding experience! First day at work and soforth. The qigong calms me down, enables me to focus, relax and so get through what ever stress I perceive at the time. I don't think I can say I'm a truly calm person, or have found that inner self that goes with calm! but qigong enables me to keep some kind of equilibrium.

With the passage of time I have discovered the muscles in my knees which sometimes ache after tai chi. Jenny and Maria have both noticed my knees turning or rather collapsing in. This is a major area of work for me as it is for many others. However I have found that overall, my posture is better, my back aches less. Moving through as much form as I know loosens me up and enables me to face the challenges of the day.

The thing I like about the classes and why I keep going back for more! is questions are always welcomed, nothing is hidden. Martial applications are explained and demonstrated which is helpful to understand what it is I am doing. Not just a graceful move to keep my joints and bones well oiled but a punch and kick or some such other move which may be useful some day. I have joined other full day workshops which has enabled me to concentrate on different areas of Tai Chi that there is no time for in a normal class. I find these days are especially boosting though each time I realise how little I know and how much I still have to learn.

Something I have not mentioned till now but is no less important is the social aspect of the Tai chi club. Over the year I have been going to Selly Oak and the workshop days I have met many people from different walks of life who all practice Tai Chi, all at different levels all willing to help me when I am stuck or can not remember, all friendly warm and accepting. All these elements add up to a very satisfying and complete experience,

and I like to think that I have taken the first step towards long term improved health.

By Claire de Jonge-Vors - student



Tai Chi Waves

Over the years of assisting and teaching with my husband at his Tai Chi classes one of the most often asked questions by the students of this art has been "So what should I be feeling when I practise the form?"

Most are at the stage where they have been training for a while and are now able to perform the whole form smoothly, and without having to stop at some point having forgotten the next move.

By the time students reach this point, they want to be able shift the focus of practice from "Oh dear that move didn't feel quite right", and maybe feel the benefits of improved postures and free flowing movements

Until a few weeks ago my standard reply after thinking initially about my own experiences within the years of my practice, was to tell them "There is no right answer to this, what you feel from one week to another may change."

Most people comment on the relaxation and "feel good factor" the form work gives them, and is the reason most seek out a Tai Chi class in the first place.

Some are happy to accept this new oasis of calm their practice gives them.

Others as they progress on the Tai Chi journey want or hope to experience many things more

Now all thought it has taken me 15 years of living and breathing the art (being the partner of a Principle instructor is not

always a perk) I think I can answer the afor said enquiry in a perhaps more informed way, having what many call “A breakthrough” or some less kindly perhaps comment “ What took you so long!”

Having learnt the form myself (after some traumatic episodes where I really thought I would never remember the postures,) I have always enjoyed the graceful moves and the feeling of achievement that I get when I perform the closing posture.

There where times over the years when I really thought this time would elude me. If I am honest I felt that this was enough. Many students don’t even get through the first 10 weeks of training.

The CHEN MAN CHING form we practice is simplified, not simple (a quote from that great master) and many in this frantic world we live in find that if instant results cannot be achieved, it is easier to leave than persevere.

What happened to the phrase “Anything worth having takes patience and time to acquire?”

I can understand their feelings.

Maybe if Mark had not bribed me with sums of money amounting to figures I am unwilling to disclose to help in the class each week, I may have gone the same way.

Anyway as I said until a few weeks ago I was satisfied with where I was.

I have heard my husband speak in class about letting the feeling of a wave flow through your body when running through the form.

I had never really thought about this too much, but one evening at one of the regular classes we run I commenced Lift Hands (one of the opening moves) and thought lets give this “Wave” a go!

There is a saying in Tai Chi “where the mind goes the Chi goes” which I define as where the mind goes the focus goes, so I thought the best place to start the “wave” was at the fingertips.

With each posture I focused on my hand, and as my shoulders relaxed, then my elbows I had a feeling of a wave of relaxation going through my muscles and spreading through out my body.

As I moved slowly through the form this pleasant experience continued.

So that is what he’s been talking about I thought as I finished.

Now I try to achieve this each time

Although my husband assures me I don’t look like an octopus! I sometimes liken the feeling I get to how the tentacles move. Almost as if something is travelling along them smoothly and silently. Cutting effortlessly through the water. Ahh if only!

I can just about cope with co-ordinating 4 limbs let alone 8!

Before I began Tai Chi, as a nurse I very often suffered high levels of stress and at one point tried listening to relaxation tapes.

Problem was if you have ever tried this you will know that by the time you have taken the phone off the hook, put a do not disturb notice on the front door, shut the dog in the kitchen, turned off your mobile phone, set the tape up to run and managed to get that lumpy cushion in a comfortable area of your back the LAST thing you can do is relax your mind enough to listen to the flipping tape.

You are thinking about all the important phone calls you might be missing, the dog is scratching the door to get to you, to the point that he’s left half of his nails in it, and the woman next door is trying to peer through the curtains to see if you are in fact in and alright and what’s going on that you don’t want to be disturbed from!!!!!!!

I only once achieved my goal.

This was done by closing the curtains downstairs, putting the tape on remote handset, and shutting the dog in the utility and giving him something to occupy his mind i.e. a piece of chocolate in plain site but too high for him to reach by jumping. I then sat in my recliner and as I felt the warmth that true relaxation brings spreading through my body I fell asleep and missed the important bits!!!!!!!

Unfortunately I was soon bought back to reality by the dog (by now suffering from chocolate deprivation mania) taking one last desperate leap for the prize and sending the free standing vegetable rack

crashing into the table and knocking the bottle of milk off it, on to the floor where it promptly broke.!

Now that I have discovered Tai Chi and the “Wave” I can get the relaxation, the warmth, the feel good factor, and more importantly the dog no longer needs his Therapist!

All this is available to anyone who starts their own Tai Chi journey. I cannot say how long it will take, or if they will ever get to the end, but the truth is doesn’t matter just enjoy the ride!

Article by Jenny Peters

PLEASE NOTE:

Please send your Newsletter contributions for future issues to markpeters@kaiming.co.uk

Advanced classes / instructor training

There is an old saying “the teacher is the taught” which really means to truly understand a skill you should look to teach it to others. I mentioned at the beginning of the newsletter that 2019 could be the year that you train to be an instructor or even just to help your instructor in class.

Following on from our Sunday morning advanced training sessions 9.30-12.30, we will be running instructor training sessions from 1-3pm and each session will focus on how to teach aspects and approaches to tai chi and chi-kung (qigong). You are welcome to attend either or both session so please check with your instructor if you are unsure.

Call Mark on 0121 251 6172 to discuss. The sooner you start the better. Training program starts February 10th 2019 so register your interest.

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

Sunday: 9.30-12.30 advanced classes (£30), 1-3pm trainee classes (£10)

Dates for 1st half of 2019

Jan. 13th
Feb. 10th
March 10th
April 14th
May 19th
June 30th