



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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Our 2022 desk calendar is now available and any profit goes to a local charity. The calendars are A5 and a mix of humour and thoughtful quotes. They are £8 desk calendar or £10 A4 wall calendars. The image above is the front cover. Please ask your instructor or email markpeters@kaiming.co.uk



POST COVID/LOCKDOWN IMPROVING YOUR RESPIRATORY FUNCTION

I was reading in a health forum how respiratory problems have increased because of the lockdowns we have had. Lack of fresh air, exercise, and also an increase in allergies because of this, have caused problems for many people who are vulnerable with chronic illnesses but also many who have previously not suffered with their chest or throats.

So I thought I would see what the average person could have easy access to, so that would help "Clear the Lungs" be gentle on the throat, and generally get you back in the game. (Apart from Tai Chi and qigong of course)

1. Get an air purifier and remember to change/clean the filters regularly.
2. Avoid artificial scents around the house. Some can be very irritating to the lungs develop allergies; this has happened with some vapes too.
3. Get plenty of outdoor time.
4. Breath exercises (maybe Tai Chi or extra Qigong)
5. Change/adjust your diet to include more anti-inflammatory foods.
6. Aerobic Exercise
7. Diaphragmatic breathing (as in Tai Chi also)
8. Pursed Lip breathing. may be Recommended in Asthma/COPD, helps to control pace of breathing. (Also included in some Qigong sets)

HEALTHY FACTS TO AID RESPIRATORY FUNCTION- ANTI_INFLAMMATORY FOODS AND DRINKS

In a Korean study of Green Tea, a cup twice a day reduces risk of COPD in people 40 years or older.

Carbohydrates produce the most carbon dioxide for the amount of oxygen used, and fat produces the least.

Blueberries, blackberries, raspberries, and strawberries when available (or frozen when not).

Avocado is excellent but you need to balance against carbohydrate content.

Omega 3 in found in oily fish, Salmon is one of the best, or Omega 3 capsules (NOT Omega 6).



HELP TO CLEAR MUCUS/CATARRH FROM THROAT AND UPPER CHEST

Hot tea with Lemon

Sugar free sour lemon drops

Honey, Cinnamon, also boost immune system

Lemon juice from half a lemon in a glass of warm water plus 1 Teaspoon of honey.

Old remedy of Warm steam inhalation.

Keep hydrated which helps to thin secretions, so easier to cough up and clear chest and throat.

Try to notice if certain scents, household sprays etc. cause dry throat, irritation, more mucus in nose or throat, itchy skin etc. as you may be developed allergies.

Try to use natural products for cleaning around the house and non-bio sensitive washing powder, and washing up liquid or even better eco products.

And finally more Tai Chi, Qigong and relaxation equals less stress.



Training The Mind's Eye

The “mind’s eye” is the way we perceive the outside world in relation to ourselves.

When you practice Tai Chi you may change the way others perceive “normal”, by the way your practice develops.

By feeling the movement and practicing with intent and focus when performing the sets, we will all develop our own personal internal division of time based on the flow of the movement.

Eventually your movements can be much faster if needed, and you will still retain this internal division of time, because it was set previously at a slower pace and is “wired” in.

Movements performed quickly will still appear to have the slow-motion quality when seen through the internal “mind’s eye” therefore you will function faster while retaining perception.

The brain receives messages very rapidly to perform physiological tasks, and equally sends messages back to create muscle movement from stimuli to our consciousness.

This is done so fast that the movement seems to be linked to the conscious thought e.g. reaching to pick something up, or open a door for instance, but the impulse was sent to and from the brain at the speed of light, so it appeared subconscious.

However, in times of high anxiety, and other major distraction, the mind may become overwhelmed by the “noise” within.

The thought process may be scattered for a split second affecting our ability to perceive real time.

Martial artists must therefore realise the importance of developing a clear, calm mind.

Within our practice of Tai Chi, we should always work towards calm, sinking, and relaxation to reduce tension and the discomfort that the fear of loss may bring. Only then will we see what is before us more clearly and be able to deal effectively with fearful situations, either physically or psychologically.



Learn to Walk Before You Run

Maybe you remember the old proverb which points to the importance of taking your time to understand something sufficiently before doing it. Here I’d like to work with this concept both metaphorically and literally by exploring the process of correct walking.

Next time you are out on a busy street, look around you and notice the people walking past going about their daily business. But stop for a moment to really watch; hunched

over, shoulders tense, arms stiff and unmoving. The simple act of movement seems a struggle for many because they are not walking correctly.

I admit it sounds ludicrous – starting to walk is a milestone most of us pass shortly after our eighth month of life, usually with the help of our parents plus a little self-taught fine-tuning. As adults, a life spent sitting at a desk, struggling around with heavy bags and wearing unforgiving footwear takes its toll on our posture. Just as we often sit incorrectly, we also walk incorrectly.

The knock-on effect? An epidemic of joint pain – in particular bad backs – affecting millions of us. About eight in ten of us have one of more bouts of lower-back pain at some time in our lives.



One Department of Health survey suggested that 15% of adults are in continuous pain from back problems. Sports Scientist Joanna Hall even developed a program which states *‘walking daily will help you shed up to 10lbs in less than a month’*. Her method is based on the theory of correct alignment of the fascia, the connective tissue in the body.

I fully agree that by aligning the body properly, posture is corrected and movement becomes fluid while discomfort, such as back pain, can lessen.

The body benefits from correct postural alignment in three ways:

- **Functionally:** back, knee, hip and neck discomfort are alleviated as joints are correctly aligned.
- **Posturally:** by targeting the fascia, body shape is streamlined and movement more free flowing.
- **Cosmetically:** as movement quality increases, you look more agile, stand taller and look younger.

The accepted guidelines are we should ideally walk 10,000 steps a day but on average we only walk 4,000 steps a day. It takes around 10 minutes to walk 1,500 steps and before you ask, pressing the accelerator pedal doesn’t count. Walking shouldn’t be rushed as that is what caused the problem in the first place; the pace should be steady with the

focus on technique. Please remember it has taken a lifetime of unconscious effort to create the bad habits you have developed, so please start to pay conscious attention to correct this.

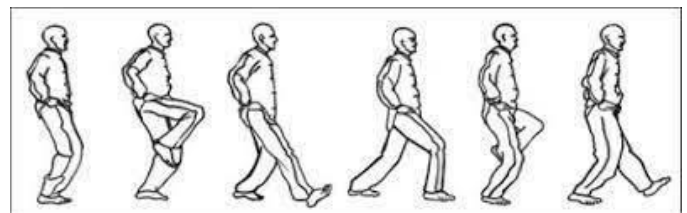
If you want to give it a nice name, how about ‘mindful walking’.

OK, you’ve guessed it... You know this is leading into tai chi being the solution.

When I first started my tai chi journey as part of the training we used to practice tai chi running, unfortunately my first teacher, John Higginson, missed the market opportunity as some years later Danny Dreyer combined his expertise as a professional runner with tai chi and marketed chi-running followed by chi-walking.

The thread that connects both Joanna’s and Danny’s approach is the natural application of human design that lies at the core of tai chi:

- Move as if suspended from above – neck long, spine released, hips free.
- Joints free – William Chen said “I don’t move my hands, my body moves my hands”. Make use of the shoulder girdle (shoulder blade etc.) rather than just the ball-and-socket shoulder joint.
- Connect to the ground – don’t “plonk” your feet, sense the ground as you step and release your foot from it as you move forwards as if you’re peeling Velcro.
- Connect breath and movement – breath and movement find their natural pace in any situation; tension and stress disrupt this flow.
- Relax (Sung) - enable natural compression to propel you. I missed out on a space-hopper as child so play with the idea now.



Tai Chi is a martial art, a sort of self-defence against life. I don’t mind if you use it to defend yourself against an external aggressor or the one that actually causes you harm on a daily basis, the one who attacks you when you are unaware...

Yes you guessed it... it's YOU...!! maybe you'd like to call it self-defence against wear and tear. Rooting isn't sinking into the ground it is connecting to the ground.

I have been asked many times how often I practice tai chi and the answer actually has two parts

(1) the forms and techniques associated with the art

(2) the principles associated with the art.

I practice forms rarely these day but I practice the principles constantly in all areas of my life as to quote Deepak Chopra **"I am a human being not a human doing"** and I strive to be present in mindful movement of which walking is an essential part.

I plan to explore the concept of mindful walking a great deal more.

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"Song – Tai Chi's Greatest Value"

Cheng Man-ch'ing (Zheng Manqing) 郑曼青 (1902 – 1975)

Translated by James Chan, Ph.D. (July 31st, 2021)

Tai Chi is not only the best exercise in China but also in the world today. No other forms of exercise or martial art can compare with it. Why? There exists in Tai Chi a most exquisite philosophy. First and foremost, Tai Chi focuses on *song*. I have been practicing Tai Chi for 50 years and, not until two years ago, did I fully realize the essence of *song*.

What is it about this ability to be *song* that makes it so immensely useful? I learned and preached relentlessly for decades about the importance of achieving *song* in practicing Tai Chi. But what did *song* mean? How does one get to be perfectly *song*? I found it extremely difficult to explain it to people.

It wasn't until two years ago that I had my eureka moment. I recalled what my teacher, Master Yang Cheng-fu, used to say to me. Master Yang was not much into talking. He could

sit there all day and not speak a word. Unless I said something to him, he would not bother to talk. On the other hand, when it came to the concept of *song*, he would repeat and repeat himself ad infinitum even if my ears were full. Not only that, but he also said something quite odd: "I must repeat myself about the importance of *song*. Otherwise, you'll never get it even if you could live three times as long." I doubted what he had said. I wondered why such a concept should be so hard to grasp.

Now it is clear to me. Frankly, I might not have understood *song* even if my life were six times as long. I hope that once I put it in the following manner, you'll find it easier to grasp its meaning and essence.

Imagine visiting a Buddhist temple. In the first hall, you see a Maitreya Buddha with a large paunch and wearing a big smile. The Buddha holds a cloth bag. Above the statue are the words: "I carry the sack when I sit, and I carry it when I walk. It feels so good to be able to put the sack down." What does this metaphor mean? It means that we humans are loaded with sacks. We carry all kinds of sacks all the time – our children, our spouses, success, fame, fortune, and power. Every one of these sacks is baggage. And the hardest baggage to release is the baggage called *me*.

People talk about how difficult it is to achieve enlightenment in Buddhist practice (like achieving *song* in Tai Chi). They refer to ethereal moments of revelations such as "I put down my weapon and became a Buddha" or "I suddenly became a *bodhisattva* [a *bodhisattva* is one who became enlightened]" Both mental pictures point to the difficulty in realizing an abrupt mental breakthrough after years of training – a willingness to let go of one's preconceptions. Achieving *song* is indeed easier said than done.

Tai Chi is hard to learn. The difficulty resides in our inability to let go of preconceptions. If I cannot advance in my Taijiquan training, it is probably because I cannot let go of my own preconceptions. Transcending our own mental barriers is key to achieving *song*.

SONG Translation: no tension, relax, loose, let go, not hard or tight.

Pine trees 松樹 (*song shu*) are a symbol of longevity in the Chinese culture. Image of an old pine tree in a wind-swept or desolate landscape evokes a natural, relaxed (*song*) demeanour.