

T'ai Chi and Qi Gong Classes



Welcome and thank you for asking me to help you to experience the benefits of T'ai Chi and Qi Gong.

Practiced by over 300 million people world wide, T'ai Chi Chuen is an ancient Chinese "soft" or "internal" martial art, designed to create a deep sense of unity of body, mind and soul and also healing. Its coordinated body movements and breathing focus on the cultivation of internal energy known as 'Qi' or 'Chi' pronounced "chee". These movements (or Form) appear rhythmical, effortless and in continuous flow, and bring a deep sense of richness and unity of life to those who practice them. Translated "T'ai Chi" means "Supreme of the Ultimate", "Chuen" means "Fist" or powerful martial art/health exercise.

Qi Gong is a series of simple repetitive exercises with coordinated breathing, translated, "Gong" means "Exercise", often used as a precursor to the T'ai Chi Forms. Over 1300 exercises have been recorded, and have been documented as beneficial for health for over 3000 years promoting the cultivation and control of Qi, and improving posture, breathing, blood flow and concentration.

T'ai Chi is a unique art, that uses the principles of Qi Gong to introduce definitive controlled action movement, and one that brings benefits in many areas. It will harmonise the mind, body and spirit, by promoting both mental and physical well-being through softness and relaxation. Unlike most forms of exercise and sport, T'ai Chi does not rely on strength, force and speed, making it ideal for people of both sexes, young and old alike whether strong or weak - *Meditation on Motion*.

T'ai Chi is NOT an easy cure-all, a guaranteed stress-reliever or universal panacea for all ills. It requires a certain amount of dedication, concentration and discipline to perfect and to optimise the benefits. Superficial effects will be felt after the first lesson, however even the simplest short form will take at least 10 weeks of daily practice to learn the movements and to start to realise the full deeper meaning.

T'ai Chi WILL however reward tenfold any effort put into its practice. Because of its mind/body control it is especially good for effective relaxation and stress relief. You're never too old or infirm to start T'ai Chi practice and once "hooked" it will become a lifetime experience

About Your Classes

Your first lessons will introduce you to safe basic T'ai Chi posture, movement and concepts, and teach you some basic QiGong and simple T'ai Chi form. A "form" is a short sequence of co-ordinated movements that join together to produce the gentle synchronised series that has become the perception of T'ai Chi. The first lessons will also introduce you to the concept of Qi and controlled breathing as you practice Qigong and the movements of the form. This will hopefully allow you to realise the soothing and healing effects of the internal aspects of the art of T'ai Chi.

Subsequent lessons will continue with basic Qigong exercises and the practice of any previously learned forms, progressively extending the number and sequence of form movement and the depth of understanding. This way, over the weeks and months your movement will develop a controlled relaxed flow and a complete sequence will be learnt.

Practice is essential, ideally daily for at least 15 minutes if possible. This will help you to master the movements and maximise the benefits. When alone practice the parts you remember and don't worry about those you are hazy about - developing a flow is more important. You will revise the parts you are unsure of with the group. Similarly if you miss a week's lesson, don't worry, all the movements will be recapped often and you will find that as long as you continue to practice you will quickly be able to follow the remainder of the class and pick up.

The classes are there to help you to relax and improve your well-being. Initially you may feel self-conscious, embarrassed or inelegant. You may think that you are not progressing as well as others. DON'T WORRY – it is the level of your personal achievement that matters. You are not in a competition or being examined. Nobody will criticise you and everyone will help each other. I guarantee that if you apply the principles of T'ai Chi, no matter what your perception is of how you are progressing, your Qi will start to flow better and, providing you dismiss your misgivings, you can only benefit. I have seen T'ai Chi practiced by world-class masters and also by people with little or no movement and confined to wheelchairs, and all were achieving and benefiting. You will find that the Qi from the group will radiate to those who are having difficulty and the class will gradually tune itself into a one consolidated body.

Whilst learning and even while practicing at home, you will probably not always feel completely relaxed, as the efforts to master the movements can be themselves stress inducing if you let them. That is why we intersperse the learning phases with simple Qi Gong and breathing exercises, and constantly repeat the parts that we have mastered. During the class it is beneficial if you periodically (at least for each new lesson) move to a different position. This will provide a different perspective as you follow and synchronise with a different person, and also help unify the movements of the group. If you are asked to move to a new position, this will be because we feel that you will benefit from following someone else, or that someone else can benefit from you.

Although the movements are very simple and appear to use no external energy, they are maximising internal energy and gently exercising every part of the body, often parts that have not been used for years! If you are not a fit person you probably will feel muscle ache and discomfort during and/or after the practice. This will disappear as you progress, but please remember, NEVER over-exert yourself and don't be embarrassed to rest. Moving to the side and practicing a little Qi Gong breathing works wonders. You can also gain great benefit from carrying out the movements mentally. Also, if you cannot physically carry some of the movements, we will help you adapt them to your constraints. ENJOY YOUR T'AI CHI.

What do I wear?

The general rule is that participants should wear loose comfortable clothes and flat, thin-soled shoes suitable for exercise. For the T'ai Chi forms, "feeling" contact with the ground is essential and therefore heavy trainers etc. are not really suitable as they will hinder this and also cause imbalance. Some people prefer to practice in bare or stockinged feet, however this would be a personal choice and is not recommended by us. If requested I can obtain shoes designed for TC at a discounted price.

Where Do I Practice?

T'ai Chi & Qi Gong can be practiced ANYWHERE & ANYTIME - indoors or outside. Some Qi Gong can be practiced sitting down or at a desk.

In a perfect world, find a quiet level spot, preferably outdoors away from traffic fumes, and ideally choose early morning (just after sunrise) or just before sunset. If the environment is not ideal or indoors, try accompanying the form with a background of music specially developed for T'ai Chi.

My favourite spot is on a quiet beach, just after dawn with the sound of birds and the waves to supplement the form.

Medical Considerations

T'ai Chi is inherently safe and if practiced correctly will not cause injury. I have however to disclaim any liability for any consequential injury or existing conditions apparently worsened by T'ai Chi practice.

As with all exercise programs, if you have a previous medical condition you should gain approval from your Doctor, Specialist or Physiotherapist before starting the class. People with unstable angina or congestive cardiac conditions SHOULD NOT join the general classes. If anyone has had a joint replacement, they should let the instructor know before the class, as certain traditional movements may conflict with the range of movement of the artificial joints. This will not however stop you from practicing and enjoying the benefits of T'ai Chi /Qi Gong.

I must also emphasise that I am NOT a medically qualified person and any views and advice expressed by me are based on personal experiences and research.

Books, Videos & Further information

There are a plethora of books, videos and websites available on T'ai Chi and Qi Gong. As with any subject, they range from the simplistic to the very good and informative, progressing through the inaccurate and irrelevant to the serious and theoretical. There are several major Forms of Tai Chi and many variants. Most books concentrate on the style and forms used by the author and may confuse the beginner, as they will differ, often significantly with the forms being learnt. The same applies to videos. The worst from a beginner's point of view, will be a short demonstration (often badly filmed) with no instructional content whatsoever. I do not advise purchase of books or videos until after you have had several lessons.

Books: There are hundreds of TC books available, aimed at all levels of practice and I have read and studied from several. However, when asked to recommend any that are informative and generalised enough to encourage the beginner, I suggest:

My own book: **Simplifying T'ai Chi**

An explanation for beginners and covering everything that I say in my sessions.

The Complete Idiots Guide to T'ai Chi & Qi Gong by Bill Douglas ISBN 0-02-862909-4

Light, easy reading, yet loaded with information and general tips.

Overcoming Arthritis by Dr Paul Lam & Judith Horstman ISBN 0-7513-3979-2-4 (DK books)

A holistic plan to relieve pain and restore mobility. Half of the book is devoted to part one of Dr Paul's T'ai Chi form that I teach for beginners and arthritis sufferers, with lots of diagrams and explanation.

Videos /Dvds: If I am asked to recommend videos/Dvds I have no hesitation in recommending any of the many produced by Dr Paul Lam. Each is comprehensive and value for money. In my opinion his teaching style is unique and encourages both beginners and experienced practitioners. These videos are all listed with full cost on his web site www.taichiproductions.com

Further information: If you have access to the web, my own website www.crystaltaichi.co.uk contains lots of basic information with several links and video clips. For health aspects Dr Paul Lam's website www.taichiforhealthinstitute.org has a comprehensive overview of the subject with many informative articles and links.

I will gladly try to answer any of your questions either before or after a class (providing it does not delay the start of the current or the following class) and can be contacted by telephone on **01452830000** or email on enquiries@crystaltaichi.co.uk

About myself

My name is Trevor Reynaert and I am an electronics engineer who spent over 30 years travelling all over the world as a technical trainer. It was during my many visits to China, Hong Kong and Taiwan that I was introduced to the benefits of T'ai Chi.

I started around 30 years ago practicing Yang style, and found it beneficial to alleviate my own symptoms of spinal deterioration, however I had noticed that in the classes in which I had participated, although intended as a general level and not aimed at traditional martial arts, there was a high drop out rate in the first few weeks. This was due to a large proportion of people who were drawn to T'ai Chi with great expectations, but soon discovered that even a simple basic form appeared too severe for them. To improve my own technique I "discovered" Dr Paul Lam's programs, in particular one developed in conjunction with the Arthritis Council of Australia, to help people of all ages and levels of disability to enjoy the benefits of T'ai Chi. This program is based on Sun style T'ai Chi specially modified to the needs of arthritis sufferers, but it can also be tailored to the requirements of those people who are older and may not wish to learn the more difficult forms or their martial art aspects.

I have been teaching T'ai Chi for Health since attending Dr Lam's first UK Tai Chi for Arthritis instructor training workshop in 2001, and since then under his tuition have become an Authorised Instructor for his other modified Tai Chi programs for Falls Prevention, Back Pain, Osteoporosis, Diabetes and his latest "Energy" form. I have attended several of his week-long workshops in the US, and in recent years I have assisted him to train leaders at UK workshops and have given several formal presentations on the benefits of TC. Assistant Joan Towell is also fully trained as a Dr Lam TCA, TCO, and TCE instructor.

In addition to Dr Lam's programs I am also a fully assessed and registered Professional Sun Style Instructor with the lineaged Deyin Taijiquan Institute (UK and China), and an Affiliated Master Instructor with the Ability Martial Arts Association. In addition to traditional Sun style I am also trained in and teach Yang, Sword & Fan forms, but please note I do NOT teach offensive or defensive Martial Arts.

The goals of T'ai Chi used for health exercise

T'ai Chi is a total body, mind and spirit exercise, normally performed very slowly as if the practitioner were moving through very thick air or water. Moving slowly allows one to breathe deeply and permits the mind to become deeply concentrated. From the deep breathing and concentrated mind one becomes calm and tranquil. In learning T'ai Chi, one studies a series of movements. This series of movements and postures (forms) teach proper body alignment, relaxation, vitality, naturalness, fluidity, rooting and balance. Mindfulness and stillness within movement are the fundamental maxims. One goes through the movements of T'ai Chi, passing from posture to posture without any break in flow.

Regular T'ai Chi practice done correctly, enhances health by activating the mind, by calming the nervous system and by keeping the joints flexible, the muscles toned, and the internal organs invigorated. The slow, graceful movements of T'ai Chi help neutralize stress and release the tensions, which tend to accrue in daily life.

T'ai Chi can be practiced by people of all ages, abilities and temperaments. The T'ai Chi person strives towards having a positive spirit and towards letting go of negativity. T'ai Chi people seek to know themselves, and to cherish life. The T'ai Chi attitude chooses care and mindfulness, not speed and insensitivity and reaches into our everyday actions. It is a profound exercise reaching deep inside the practitioner, and inside their life, unifying the two.

What do you mean by.....?

When you start your T'ai Chi, you will hear many new words. A few of the common key words and phrases that crop up regularly and that you will meet early on in your journey are listed below. A deeper understanding of their meaning should start to become apparent as start your practice. Others terms you may meet will be explained as you progress. However as in-depth and philosophical descriptions tend to confuse and often put off the beginner trying T'ai Chi for health purposes, the deeper detail will be left until they can be appreciated more easily.

T'ai Chi (Taiji)

Taken literally T'ai (Tai) approximately translates as grand, big, etc. Unfortunately a confusion arises with the word Chi (Ji). In our own language we are aware that there are several words that can have different meanings yet share the same spelling (examples include words such flat, book, kind, etc.). Chinese translation is no different and in this case the word Chi is one of them. As described a little further on we normally associated the word Chi with energy and the control and movement of it in our practice. However in the case of the term T'ai Chi an alternative meaning of "Ultimate" applies. This gives us a definition of T'ai Chi as "Grand or Supreme Ultimate".

Ultimate what? When associated with the additional word "Chuan (Quan)" meaning hand or fist, it is a symbolic reference to the power of the art. At this stage though simply think of T'ai Chi as the practice of total body movement and meditation that encompasses all the concepts inspired by the depth and richness of the Yin and Yang symbol (This will be explained to you by your teacher.

Chi (Qi)

This is integral with the practice of T'ai Chi. Forgetting for a moment the alternative translation described above, the term is more commonly translated as vital (healing) energy or life force derived from air and breathing.

It is essential that the concept of Qi is considered by all who practice the art of T'ai Chi, whether in its martial form or as a health exercise. Belief in its power is not essential, but a general understanding and appreciation of its effects from either a western medical standpoint or a Chinese philosophical one is.

Chi Kung (Qi Gong)

In general terms this refers to a gamut of meditative movement and breathing exercises. Qi Gong normally translates as energy cultivation or breathing exercises. (Qi is energy or breath. Gong is work, practice, training or skill). Verbally passed down and documented for over three millennia Qigong has powerful self-healing properties when practiced correctly.

Qi Gong forms the basis of the health elements of your T'ai Chi and takes many guises. You will see Qi Gong performed all over China and it will be introduced in many ways. These may include variants used as a basic exercise warm up or as a healing deeper meditation.

Style

A T'ai Chi Style normally refers to the series of movements created by a specific Master. Typical Styles are **Sun, Yang, Chen, Wu, Lee**, etc.). In this respect styles can be considered analogous to dance styles such as Waltz, Tango, etc. Styles also have sub-styles such as the Chen derivatives Old Frame and New Frame, or the Yang derivative Cheng Man Ching style. There are also other sub derivatives from each of these such as Hand, Sword, Fan, etc.

Form

A Form can refer to two aspects in T'ai Chi.

Its primary definition is the name given to the sequence of movements carried out in a particular style, as when we refer to Sun 13 or 38 (step) Form, or Yang 108 (step) Long Form, or Chen Short Form, or Dr Lam's T'ai Chi for Arthritis form. Confusingly for the beginner, it can also refer to the individual sub-movement within the form. For example one of the 38 movements in the Sun 38 Form, is "Waving Hands in the Clouds". This movement itself breaks down into many sub-movements which may again be collectively referred to as the Waving Hands in the Cloud (sub) Form.

Dan Tien (Tantien)

In Qi Gong this is an area at the centre of the abdomen approximately a three finger measurement both inside the abdomen and below the navel. In simple terms it is considered to be the main central store of Qi energy, and is also the physical centre of gravity of the body, and a pivot point for T'ai Chi movement. It will be referred to often by your teacher, as even for beginners not familiar with the deeper aspects of energy balance, this part of the body plays a significant role in the initial exercises to learn T'ai Chi posture and movement.

Yin & Yang

When ever you see reference to T'ai Chi you see the Yin & Yang symbol. This circular symbol, with its two expanding complementary parts each which retain a little of each other, combined with the serpentine flowing nature of their moulding together, can be considered to be representative of T'ai Chi and its movements. As T'ai Chi skills develop so will the appreciation of how this symbol relates to its practice and philosophy in so many ways.

Kua

You will find that your teacher may refer to Kua. A common misconception is that Kua is the waist. This is incorrect. Basically Kua is the hip joints. The fundamental role of the Kua is that it is the body part responsible for integration of upper and lower body. Kua plays a fundamental part in all turning and movement from one side of the body to the other. It is the pivot point for the upper torso. The better you are at using the Kua, the better your body will be safely coordinated.

As you progress with your T'ai Chi your teacher should start to expand the concept of the hip action or sinking Kua.

Five Elements

In Chinese philosophy the Five Elements (Water, Wood, Fire, Earth, and Metal) are considered to be the basic components of the Universe. Many of the facets of T'ai Chi and Qi Gong are moulded around these elements which interconnect and have major links with each other. The relationships between the elements transform themselves into many things including movement description, relation to the body's energy meridians and vital organs, emotional responses, colours, seasons, times of the day and many other aspects.

Six Harmonies

This term refers to the body harmony associated with T'ai Chi, three internal and three external. The internal harmonies refer to mental and energy states, and the external harmonies refer to balanced and correctly aligned body posture. An understanding of their relationship (harmony) is fundamental to starting to gain full understanding and benefit from T'ai Chi.

T'ai Chi Do's and Don'ts

With acknowledgement to Dr Paul Lam

- **ALWAYS** precede your main T'ai Chi forms with warm up exercises and end with cool-down exercises.
- **DO NOT** lock the knees. Keep knees aligned over your feet but slightly bent forward.
- **DO NOT** lean backwards or forwards. Keep your back upright so that the spine is balanced on the pelvis.
- **DO NOT** force any movements. Move without effort, as though gently swimming in air.
- **DO NOT** force yourself into a lower stance or bend the knees beyond your comfort zone. Stand up if you feel too much stress on the knees.
- **NEVER** over exert yourself. If you experience pain or other symptoms, STOP T'ai Chi practice and consult your Doctor or Specialist.
- **AVOID** any abrupt movements. They create tension that will put you off balance or injure muscles.
- **DO** feel free to modify movements that are uncomfortable. T'ai Chi should be pleasant and enjoyable, not an endurance contest.
- **DO** wear comfortable loose clothes and shoes that are comfortable and suitable for good balance. For people with diabetes, shoes are especially vital.
- **DO** seek advice from your instructor if you feel unbalanced or unstable during T'ai Chi. Corrections to your technique or variations to the form will be suggested.
- **DO** remain mentally alert. Be conscious of the movements that you are making.
- **DO** drink water frequently. Hydration is important.
- **DO** enjoy your T'ai Chi



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