

Moving in The Nectar

Silence and stillness make the best usage of time. In the Silence, the nectar concentrates, then radiates, with no effort. This is the purest joy. But if the mind won't stop working when the body is still, we have no choice but to begin moving. Movement of the body is preferable to *forcing* the body to be still. And movement is also preferable to analyzing the situation, which will just further dissociate the being.

There are many physical exercises, perfected throughout the ages by wise masters, the purpose of which is to least disturb the beauty of our Oneness, and, if It eludes us, to return us to It as expeditiously as possible.

Any moment of mind-searching-for-happiness in the outer world is a wasted moment.

Comfortable yoga asanas with easy pranayama are good. They can be relaxed into and held for a fairly long time. As long as the position allows you to remain in the state of the Empty Mind, continue to relax into the posture. Remember, the purpose is not to tone the muscles, but to find again the state of mind of the true yogi. So when a position becomes uncomfortable enough to distract you, gently move into another. A short series of maybe six or eight well-rehearsed postures may do the trick. Keep the breathing easy and natural.

Another option is T'ai Chi Ch'uan. This page will introduce in words the nectar of this art. (Note: There are also discussions of T'ai Chi in the book *Why The Mind Works*). However, words are not enough. You will need to find a teacher who embodies the essence of this practice. Once you encounter this person, you must follow him or her until you can stay in the Empty Mind during the movements when practicing alone. You will miss by a mile if you try to teach yourself using a video or book. It is very frustrating to try to correct oneself. And once errors are installed in memory, they are difficult to reverse. So the conscientious teacher is the first step.

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What is T'ai Chi Ch'uan?

Newcomers to the ancient Chinese exercise called T'ai Chi Ch'uan usually have heard of it as a method of self-defense. Following our common definition of 'self-defense,' they naturally assume that it involves fighting and the use of force to protect the body from injury or death in the event of an attack. But T'ai Chi Ch'uan is not an 'external' martial art, it is 'internal'.

Those who have been exposed to external martial arts know how the training is done: the student endures hard physical conditioning, and employs predetermined fighting movements and postures against another student posing as an opponent. He mobilizes his energy to attack or defend, using muscular force. One pretends that he is the attacker, while the other practices techniques of counterattack. The students also act out hypothetical threatening situations against an imagined enemy, and movements and combinations of movements are executed and perfected.

For example, in such training, a frequent question is: "What would you do if someone grabs your arm?" (or tries to strangle you, or to kick you in the ribs, etc.) The energy mobilized to react (ch'i, ki, prana) comes directly from the fear of being humiliated, injured, or killed. This fear expresses itself in the form of hardening of the muscles, and produces violent movements. The fear causes an anger which the student carries within himself.

For one who does not want to admit and resolve this fear, if his only goal is to learn how to fight and intimidate, the techniques of some external school would be superior to those of T'ai Chi. But we can learn an important lesson from the life of the great external martial artist Bruce Lee. He died in his thirties of a brain embolism. And in his book *The Wisdom of Bruce Lee* he wrote that he regretted that he did not study T'ai Chi Ch'uan, and learn to slow down.

So the training in T'ai Chi Ch'uan employs other methods. Typically, we do not rehearse hypothetical situations of threat, or pretend that a fellow student is an enemy, or rely upon subconscious fear or anger to mobilize the ch'i. It is more a matter of learning to be aware of what is occurring inside oneself in the here and now, and allowing this to circulate internally. It is a matter of bringing to consciousness thoughts, feelings, judgments, impulses, and tensions, which block the free flow of the vital energy called 'ch'i'. And without force.

Civilized people suffer from internal blockages such that the ch'i is not permitted to flow smoothly and naturally. It then accumulates and begins to pressurize. Then, when it becomes too uncomfortable to contain, it explodes in the form of compulsive habits, family disputes, health problems, false sentiments, obsessions, and the urge to do harm – even to kill. To be sure, one feels relief when the ch'i finally flows in these ways. But right away it begins to accumulate again. The person finds himself, once again, at its mercy. And there is no way to fight this cycle; you can't fight your own life energy!

T'ai Chi Ch'uan has been handed down through the centuries to help people to relax. For only when you deeply relax the muscles and the breathing -- and the mind -- can you feel and become reacquainted with all that is moving within yourself, *before* it accumulates and takes control of the entire personality. The student learns how to allow the ch'i to circulate throughout the mind/body however it may. By remaining aware of whatever is circulating, one gives himself time to examine it and to figure out what it is. Each thing that he accepts relieves a little of the pressure. One feels lighter. One feels more relaxed, more at ease in the world. He no longer needs to control, to fight, to suppress fear or anger or desire, or to engage in debasing compulsive habits, since he has already raised the energy which is behind these to a higher level -- the level of consciousness.

When you experience this freedom, you enter a state of mind called 'T'ai Chi.' And so, this art is not only the graceful and beautiful execution of movements and postures; that is not what it is about. The Chinese character 'T'ai' signifies 'supreme,' and the character 'Chi' signifies 'ultimate.' Thus, these words together refer to the highest experience that it is possible to attain. In some sports, this experience is known as 'the zone.' The term 'T'ai Chi' refers to the state of mind of the natural and spontaneous play of the ch'i energy, effortlessly, between the two opposite polarities of yin and yang. [Note: the word 'Chi' (ultimate) is not the same as the word 'ch'i' (life energy). Also, the definitions of the terms 'yin' and 'yang' require careful and extensive discussion, and will not be treated here.]

When a person is in 'the zone,' he does not feel fear because he has already opened himself up to, and accepted, all the possible conditions of yin and yang within himself. He does not harbor any secrets about himself from himself! He has allowed his consciousness to extend into all parts of his body -- and his psyche. A 'normal' person is not able to do this because he fears some part of himself. This fear prevents the natural flow of the ever-changing yin and yang. In fact, it is his blocks which make up what is called 'his personality,' his ego, his self-image. He identifies himself with this particular pattern of blocks. Thus, until this so-called 'normal' person can let go of his personality, he is stuck with his energy blocks..

But the one who has mastered T'ai Chi Ch'uan transcends his own personality, has no fear of losing it, and so need not mobilize tension to protect it. His ch'i is free in an endless circle without obstruction in any yin or yang condition. This master is not trapped in any inclination, is perfectly balanced without extremes, and energy flows everywhere throughout his being. We say that the yin and yang sides of life "mutually change, exchange, and interchange." This T'ai Chi state of mind and body is represented in the familiar yin-yang symbol, which has been widely misinterpreted and misused for unscrupulous motives. In fact, the true name of this symbol is 'the T'ai Chi.' And the experience of it is felt not only in the body but also in the space surrounding the body. You experience the body as not separate from its world, but as a partner in a dance of pure energy exchange.

You need do nothing! Simply watch it all happen. There is no tension, nor is there anxiety, need, intention, or goal. Life flows effortlessly. Indeed, anytime that someone finds himself totally submerged in something he loves, he momentarily encounters the zone of T'ai Chi -- the supreme ultimate. Truly, the experience of love is a consequence of relaxing into this zone. Some athletes train many years to reach this

total submersion in the zone for a few moments, but it lasts only for those few moments. And, really, all that was needed was to relax, consciously, totally! It is not necessary to torture the poor body to the point of exhaustion! If you can learn to sustain the total relaxation of both mind and body, the big and little things in life will not frustrate and exasperate you, the body will be more healthy, and you will have a renewed sense of well-being, as you experience the vital energy flowing smoothly from the bone marrow to the organs. (T'ai Chi Ch'uan works by first gathering the ch'i and then moving it from the bone marrow to the organs and ligaments rather than just the muscles. Thus we say that "it heals from the inside out".)

The character 'Ch'uan' signifies 'fist' or 'boxing.' So what is the 'supreme ultimate fist'? According to T'ai Chi philosophy, it is the soft fist, the empty fist, the one which never has to strike an opponent. Who is the 'supreme ultimate boxer'? He is the one who has attuned his energy so perfectly to the world around him that there is no conflict. He has fought against the obstacles to his own inner harmony and overcome them. He no longer has to harbor anything within. He is clear.

To the extent that T'ai Chi makes one more comfortable with himself, he will feel less needy and demanding. To the extent that he is more aware of the kind of energy he is harboring or expressing, he transforms himself into a person more sensitive to others, more responsive, and thus less likely to attract attack from others. This is how this art functions as a method of 'self-defense' at the physical level.

Professor Cheng man-Ching (1900-1975) is the creator of a short form of the Yang style. Professor Cheng was without a doubt one of the most extraordinary men of the twentieth century – a true Renaissance man. He was a master of the 'five excellences': poetry, painting, calligraphy, medicine, and T'ai Chi Ch'uan. With the help of T'ai Chi, he cured himself of rickets and tuberculosis. Grandmaster Cheng did not consider 'the self' as either the body or the person. He said that the true self is the spirit. So, in his view, 'self-defense' in T'ai Chi is primarily the cultivation and preservation of the inner being rather than the body.

Chuang-tzu said of the perfect man: "His boat is empty". San Soo declared: "He who fights has already lost". Wisdom tells us that all conflict gives rise to another conflict; through fighting only another fight is born. When Professor Cheng was asked "If a student has time to practice only one movement, what should it be?" his reply was: "Roll back." When he was asked "What is the best way to meet an opponent's force?" he responded: "Yield." Cheng wrote: "For T'ai Chi Ch'uan I adopt as my watchword the simple phrase 'Invest in loss.'" In his book *Thirteen Chapters on T'ai Chi Ch'uan*, he ended his discussion of san shou (free fighting) with this clear statement: "Apart from chieh chin (receiving force) there is nothing else." In T'ai Chi Ch'uan the use of force is not esteemed.

As a student of this art, then, one learns relaxation and flexibility, and to yield rather than to cultivate the use of force. Tensing up, protecting oneself by becoming rigid out of fear, whether it be conscious or subconscious, and using muscular power to react, out of fear converted to anger, must be avoided in T'ai Chi Ch'uan. As you can see, it is not like any other martial art. It is not a game of moving imaginary energy, nor is it a style of fighting, nor is it athletic training or a sport according to our Western concept, although it offers great benefits in terms of health and physical fitness. The only

opponent is located within one's own self. Learning the art of T'ai Chi Ch'uan is learning to dance and play with this 'opponent' – and with all of life.

Each human being has two distinct natures which struggle within us for expression. Each of us is like a composite of a snake and a bird, one attacking and the other defending. We fight with ourselves, our yin side versus our yang side. But unlike the snake and the bird, it is not necessary that one kill the other! Our great challenge as humans is to achieve the reconciliation between our two sides -- our two 'selves.' We have the free will to accept this challenge, or not.

Most human beings do not accept this solitary – at times lonely – journey to a consciousness beyond personality, beyond ego. But to not accept it one can never be fulfilled. And one will attract enemies, one after another. We have to relax the body and the mind so that the snake and the bird within ourselves can dance with one another rather than fight. This unification of our being is a natural process. No doubt, it is not easy. It requires courage and an open mind to let go of our inner division. We lost the zone of T'ai Chi when we were children. Now, to get it back, we have to follow a road of dedication and perseverance. T'ai Chi Ch'uan is one road which can take us there.

The actual practice begins with the search for the experience of emptiness, or 'insubstantiality.' The structure, or substance of the body, is one thing; the experience of life – the energy which circulates within – is another. The student is advised: "Use the form to seek the Formless" and "Find Stillness through movement." By totally relaxing the muscles and the mind, one opens the channels, or meridians, for the energy to flow. By slowing the breathing one can move the ch'i through the meridians. The instructor of Professor Cheng, Yang Cheng-fu, repeated over and over again: "Relax, relax, and completely relax". Let go of all tension *before* beginning to move. Make relaxation your way of living.

It is very important to cultivate and nourish the breathing. In T'ai Chi it must be long, slow, quiet, and fine. A little at a time, relax and fill the body with air until you feel it reaching the tips of the fingers and toes. Then, slowly, naturally, and with relaxation, let it out until you feel empty. Constant attention to this exercise will produce an awareness of 'the energy body,' which is felt as a tingling or vibrating sensation.

Once this sensation is clear, the practitioner begins to move very slowly, in such a way that this consciousness is not lost. He continues the movements without interruption of the relaxed and calm state. Do not hurry! When you can maintain this zone of consciousness through the entire series of postures and movements, then you will be doing real T'ai Chi. You will find, no doubt, that to do this you will have to leave behind the person you have been. So the goal is profound: to find the True Self within, in a manner that is healthy and enjoyable.

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