

History of Tai

The history of Tai Chi is unclear since it is often difficult to clearly sort out fact from legend. Generally it is agreed that the roots of Tai Chi can be traced back to the 2nd millennium BC and the practices of yoga in India. In China, yoga was developed into what became known as "Shaolin Chuan", or internal boxing. In the 13th century a.d., a Taoist monk called Chang Sang Feng developed what became known as Tai Chi. Subsequently Tai Chi came to be associated with different families in China. These family names came to designate the different styles of Tai Chi. The family or style that all other styles developed from was the Chen family.

There are many theories of how Tai Chi was developed, none of which can be definitively proved. One story is that an enlightened monk had a dream that depicted all the poses. Another is that Tai Chi developed from copying the graceful, fluid movements of a stork and an eagle fighting. A third explanation is that Tai Chi was developed as a means of secretly practicing fighting stances and moves. This one seems plausible since each movement, although very slow and graceful, has an application to strikes and blocks and to the delicate interplay of attack and deflect or withdraw. It has also been proposed that while the ancient monks were very dedicated to the meditative postures and trancelike states to achieve higher levels of consciousness, they eventually realized that the involvement of the body was also required in order to fully unite and engage the spirit and reach an enlightened state. Thus Tai Chi was developed as a form of total physical exercise to be done in a meditative state and used to calm and free the mind while also stretching and strengthening the physical body. Tai Chi was a method that could be easily taught to lay people as a means of unifying mind, body and spirit and developing a deeper sense of self and calmness.

Relevance of Tai Chi to Energy Psychology

Tai Chi has been shown to be very effective at improving the circulation in the body, lowering blood pressure, strengthening & stretching muscles, improving the flexibility of joints and tendons, as well as calming and focusing the mind. It has also been demonstrated that Tai Chi dramatically improves the flow of "Chi" or vital life force throughout the body. In energy psychology we deal with balancing the body's energy system to reduce or eliminate the effects of either past or present emotional stress, trauma, fears and phobias.

In every way, Tai Chi works with, and affects, the energy surrounding the body (the bio-field or aura), the energy flow within the body itself (meridians), and the storing of vital life force, Chi, in the body's energy centres (Chakras). Tai Chi has been said to be a "Moving Meditation", and as such it is a complete system that can be used by both therapists, who want to remain in a state of energy balance while working with clients, and by clients as a way to be eternally vigilant in the clearing and maintenance of a well balanced energy system.

Fred Gallo, Ph.D., in his development of energy psychology has discussed the importance of reaching an elevated state of consciousness in order to enter into a realm of awareness with the client that goes far beyond the basic "intellectual knowing". If we can attain such a state of awareness or consciousness there will be clarity to our thoughts, and emotions that used to seem so upsetting will no longer affect us.

Sidney Banks in his books, *The Missing Link* and *The Enlightened Gardener*, discusses how we all have the gifts of Universal Mind, Universal Consciousness, and Universal Thought. If we can stop the chattering Personal Mind, and just experience what is, without the interpretation and filtering that goes on because of all our past experiences and future expectations, then we can experience this direct link to Universal Mind, Consciousness and Thought. These 3 gifts are neutral. It is what one does with them as a "Thinker" that is important.

Eckhart Tolle, in his book *The Power of Now*, also stresses the importance of remaining in the Now. In order to truly be aware of what "is", we need to focus only on the present moment, the Now. This is a difficult thing for most people to do because we are constantly believing we are separate from the Now and determining a separate existence with our minds. We think, and we assume that our thoughts are real and that they reflect what really "is".

It would seem that if we can quiet the "personal mind" and achieve a state of "no thought", or "mushin", as the term is used in Tai Chi, then we would truly and more directly experience the Now that Tolle writes about. Thoughts directly affect our energy system and Energy Psychology has documented this fact well. If we can stop or still the thoughts and just "Be", in a state of "no thought", there would be no disruption to the connection with the energy that permeates all. We would again experience a sense of oneness and clarity. In such a state we would have achieved the higher consciousness that Dr. Gallo describes in his work on energy consciousness therapy (ECT).

Tai Chi provides a method of achieving such a state. As such, it is a useful tool that can be incorporated into a comprehensive treatment approach within energy psychology.

Using Tai Chi to Balance & Restore Vital Life Energy

Tai Chi arises out of 2 important philosophical texts in China, the Tao Te Ching, and the I Ching. In both of these texts the term "Chi" is historically used to denote a form of energy also referred to as the "breath of life" and "spirit". According to the philosophy of Tai Chi, this energy flows throughout the body and can become blocked. Illness results when the energy is blocked. The Chinese recognized many means of freeing up this vital energy and the most common of these are acupuncture and Tai Chi.

Tai Chi is known to many as the slow and graceful series of movements that comprise the form. As such it appears to be physical exercise. However, Tai Chi is really about 90% internal. It is considered part of the "softer side" of the martial arts, or the "internal arts". Tai Chi has been shown to be good for: keeping joints flexible; toning, strengthening and lengthening muscles; lowering blood pressure and heart rate; focusing and calming the mind; and general overall health and wellness. Tai Chi was practiced amongst the masses in China as a way of maintaining health and dealing with stress and tension.

As in all the martial arts, Tai Chi teaches and requires: a focused calm mind; a deep awareness of the body, its centre and balance; and an opening or connection to a greater energy source outside and beyond the body. It is held that this external source of energy can be tapped and utilized to rejuvenate or regenerate the body, its energy system and its ability to heal. A system that is balanced will heal and operate to its greatest efficiency.

As well as its physical benefits, Tai Chi is known to also have psychological benefits. Tai Chi involves deep meditative aspects and in fact is often referred to as "a moving meditation", or "meditation in motion". One main goal of Tai Chi is to become more aware of the Self, to understand the Self better and thus enable one to deal with others more effectively and overcome inner distress.

Developments in the field of energy psychology have well documented the fact that stresses to our system, be they mental, physical or emotional, leave their mark on our energy system. These have been conceptualized in several ways such as "perturbations" (Callahan), "elaters" (Diepold), energy blocks, clogged chakras etc.

Many different treatment approaches have been developed to clear these energy disruptions (e.g. TFT, EFT, EDxTM, TAT, CHART, HBLU to name but a few) and powerful diagnostic tools have been developed to precisely identify meridian involvement and treatment points (Gallo, 2000).

Prior to my introduction to energy psychology, I had been learning, practicing and teaching Tai Chi for almost 20 years. I was also a traditionally trained psychotherapist. At that point these two worlds seemed far apart. Then I learned about energy psychology, and it provided a bridge for me. It gave me a way to treat and heal emotional and psychological distress by working with the body's own energy system.

I would like to present Tai Chi to you today as a mode of energy psychology, and to share with you and let you experience how Tai Chi is a method of:

- balancing the body's energy system
- removing blocks within the vital energy of the body
- clearing and focussing the mind
- relaxing, calming and opening up the body
- reconnecting with the energy both within and beyond our bodies
- grounding and re-centering
- reaching a higher state of consciousness and awareness
- increasing vitality

Using Tai Chi to Reduce or Eliminate Emotional/Psychological Distress

It has been well established and generally accepted within the field of energy psychology that:

1. We are energy beings
2. We are part of a greater source of energy that exists beyond our physical bodies

This "greater source of energy" is the basis of many spiritual and healing practices that have existed for 1000's of years and are enjoying a resurgence these days.

To attain and maintain a healthy balanced self and life, we must reconnect to this source of vital life energy and clear away any debris in our own energy system that prevents the free flow of this energy or Chi.

We all collect "baggage" as we move through our lives, and if a flow is not maintained, this debris (psychological or physical) builds up like logs in the river and the resulting stagnation eventually leads to discontentment and illness.

An old Chinese proverb states that:

"When we are young we take in more energy than we give out or use.

When we reach our middle years we take in about the same amount of energy as we use.

When we are old we take in much less energy than we use."

If we do not develop and maintain an effective method of taking in energy and revitalizing our system, we will gradually settle into an ever declining state.

Sydney Banks (Clearing out the Clutter, 1995, in Handbook for the Soul) describes 2 modes of thinking

1. Analytical Thinking
2. Soul Thinking

He states that: "the soul is the only true source of spiritual nourishment. There are many ways to connect with the soul, but the most effective way is to rid yourself of the obstacles that come between you and your purity of thought. When our channel to the soul is open, we live in a more harmonious reality". (pg 74)

We live much of our time in analytical thinking mode, which is necessary to operate in our everyday activities. However, we can tend to get caught up or stuck in negative thought patterns or fears, and we begin to take these far too seriously and think that this is who we really are. Banks further states that: "Soul thinking is always present when we aren't engaged in other types of thinking. Often our negative thinking gets in the way, and we are pulled away from this pure state of thought."

What we need is a regular way to drop our analytical thinking and reconnect to a truer state of consciousness. We can do this by learning to live in the present moment. The very heart of Buddhist thought, Zen philosophy, and of Tai Chi, is to "accept and let go". If we can step back from our analytical mind and become the watcher, the "thinker behind the thought", we can begin to experience that deeper consciousness, that connection to the greater source of being that is not attached to the blocks in our system, to our negative thoughts and all our past fears and future worries.

Basic Principles of Tai Chi

1. Balance (mental, physical, energetic)
2. Focus (breathing, visualization, concentration, intentionality, present awareness)
3. Centering (movement from centre)
4. Relaxation (body and mind)
5. Clearing (mind, no thought)
6. Energy Flow (connect with energy beyond self and direct movement with the mind)

Beginning Posture of Tai Chi

- Assume Stance (feet shoulder width apart, weight in heels, root into the ground, knees slightly bent and "soft, spine straight and elongating, head lifting to the sky)
- Relax Body and Feel Balance (3 rotational axes, front to back, left to right, top to bottom)
- Clear the Mind (breathe abdominally and focus on breath, connect with Earth and Sky)
- Visualize and Imagine Energy Flow (Macrocosmic Orbit)
- Feel from the Centre (Tan Tien)

Opening Move

(Of all the 108 moves in the form, it has been said that this opening move is enough! It incorporates all the principles of Tai Chi.)

- Assume Beginning Posture (gaze is directed forward with "soft eyes")
- Arms are in front of body, palms down, just above thighs
- Inhale and raise arms slowly to shoulder height (hands are soft and the back of the hands lead)
- Draw energy up from the earth and let it fill the body as you raise your arms
- Exhale and imagine sending the energy out through your fingertips as you slowly lower the arms (elbows are slightly bent and they lead the movement downwards, hands are very soft and float down till they are level with the waist, palms down, elbows bent)
- As you bring the arms down, root the feet into the ground and sink the weight down (visualize energy dropping down and settling in the area just behind and below the navel, tan tien)

Cloud Hands

- Assume Beginning Posture
- Shift weight to right foot and inhale as you simultaneously move left arm across the front of the body to the right side then raise arm and circle it over head with palm moving past the forehead.
- As palm passes forehead, exhale and shift weight to the left foot while the left arm continues to circle back down in a counter-clockwise direction to the left side of the body
- Inhale and move right arm across the front of the body to the left side then raise the arm and circle it over head with palm passing forehead
- As palm passes the forehead, exhale and shift weight to the right foot while the right arm continues to circle back down in a clockwise direction to the right side of the body
- Once these movements become fluid, co-ordinate the movements so that both arms are moving simultaneously in opposite directions. Weight shifts back and forth from left to right and breath is synchronized so that as the arm is moving up you inhale and as it is moving down you exhale
- Feel the gentle rhythm and balance of the movement and enter a meditative state

Catch the Weight of the World (Prayer Wheel)

- Assume Beginning Posture
- Step forward with Left foot into a front stance
- Push hands and arms out to front away from body and exhale
- Inhale and raise arms up leading with back of hands, then turn palms towards sky and pull arms back towards chest, shifting weight to right foot
- Bring hands down in front of body to abdomen then exhale and push away again
- Arms create a circular movement alternating between pushing away (releasing) and pulling back into body (receiving) and weight shifts back and forth from left to right foot accordingly
- Switch feet and repeat with Right foot forward

Daily Energy Balancing Routine (Mini Tai Chi) ~ These will be taught at the workshop

- Opening move (3 times)
- Embrace the Tree and Stretch the Energy (3 times)
- Diagonal Flying to right then to left (3 times)
- Cloud Hands (~1 minute)
- Catch the Weight of the World (~1 minute each side)
- Carry Tiger to Mountain and Push to Sky (3 times)
- Cleanse the Bone Marrow (do for as long as feels right)
- Stroke the Tea Master's Beard
- Stand in Mountain Posture, close eyes and enjoy the calm centered feeling and sense of balance

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