

Bonsai Tai Chi

The Blog



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Tai chi students come to the art from all sorts of directions. Many new students I come across say they have no idea what tai chi is. They have heard something somewhere and think it might be 'interesting'. Where tai chi is offered as a class at leisure centres people arrive looking for an exercise regime, expecting it to be like yoga or Pilates where the instructor tells students to adopt this or that posture and helps new students as they go along. But while tai chi, when it is done properly, is good exercise it doesn't work like that.

There are also a few who are looking for a mystical experience; they have heard about 'moving meditation' and expect a route to enlightenment. And the worst, from my point of view, are the would-be 'martial artists'. They want to discover a short-cut to power, are always impatient and think you are holding back a great secret which, if only someone would show them, would make them make them invincible.

This is the biggest problem. When people see Sifu, and even their instructors, demonstrate tai chi skills, they have difficulty understanding what is happening and assume there is some secret training to which they are not privy. While tai chi can be all of these things – exercise, meditative and a martial system – the only real secret is to practise.

Many students think that coming along once or twice a week and practising the form is all that they need to do. And then they become frustrated when they try posture testing or pushing hands and find they cannot make it work without muscle power and even that doesn't work on their instructor.

You need to become totally immersed. Tai chi is both a lifetime and lifestyle commitment. With most sports you can train once a week and play a good game on Saturday. But you never stop doing tai chi. It becomes the way you stand and the way you walk, the way you handle relationships at work and at home, indeed, the way you deal with the world.

Within us is everything we need to become skilled at tai chi. The only difference between a student and the master is the hours and years the master has spent practising and studying the art, refining his methods and technique to the point where everything he does is second nature. And that, apart from finding a knowledgeable master who is generous with his teaching, is about all there is to it. As an instructor once said to me: "The practice of tai chi, simply needs the patience to practise tai chi." ☯