

# Bonsai Tai Chi

## The Blog



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In *There are no secrets*, Wolf Lowenthal's book about Chen Mann-Ching, Lowenthal tells how Chen treated his western and Chinese students differently. The Chinese were quite happy to practice a move until they got it right – for weeks, perhaps for months or even longer. The Americans wanted to learn rapidly and were impatient to move on.

It's a cultural thing. In the west we are brought up on ultimate goals: the GCSE, the degree, the gold medal. We can't help wanting to achieve; it is how we are brought up, how we are educated.

I remember when I was a kid going on holiday. Faced with a long journey my mother would tell me and my sister to "think of the journey as part of the holiday". Perhaps she was wiser than I knew. Sometimes it is about the journey not the goal. Certainly this is true of tai chi. You could say that, in fact, there is no goal. Tai chi is about learning. You may start with the form – and as a new student you may be impatient to learn it – but once you have 'achieved' that what next? Surprise! You go back to the beginning and start again. After the third time you begin to realise that it is all about refinement and detail. Learning, re-learning and discovering things that you did not know, perhaps never thought possible.

I have to say that some, many in fact, fall by the wayside. They say 'it takes 1,000 to start for one to finish'. It is also true that students who have dropped out sometimes come back, years later, to start all over again. You have to pick the right time for you.

Many martial arts have grades but any goals that there are in tai chi are yours. I have found that, quite often, I have discovered something which I regard as an achievement without ever having set out to do so: a retrospective goal. It may be that you feel more confident, more relaxed, more able to cope with the world – your world. There is a line in *Karate Kid* which I like: Daniel asks Myaki what belt he holds. Myaki replies that the only thing he needs a belt for is to keep up his trousers.

For Myaki it was just about his art – karate. For us it should be just about our art – tai chi. It is a journey: the real danger lies in thinking that you have arrived. ☯