

Bonsai Tai Chi

The Blog



February Have your say: email theblog@bonsaitaichi.eu

We really do not pay enough attention to the warm-up exercises.

At a typical session everyone wants to get to the form. 'Chi gung – pain – hate it – let it be over. Warm ups – ho-hum – boring – I could have gone to a gym for this. The form - ah, this is what tai chi is about.'

In fact the warm-ups are chi gung exercises in their own right and have a lot to teach us about the techniques we need to do the form correctly.

1/. 'Cycling backwards' can be just an empty movement but if we lift our leg from the hip and extend it something is going on. It becomes dynamic, energy spirals down our leg as it reaches its full extent before we pull back into our hip.

2/. Swinging from right-to-left and back should be an exercise in weight shifting as well as turning. Again, if we just spin the waist and remain double weighted or shift by leaning over the exercise is meaningless. As you move to one side you must keep you back upright, empty your rear leg and as you turn, shift your weight over the front leg and tuck into your kua. Don't just turn you waist. It is a full turn of you hips and don't forget, your hips and shoulders should be aligned at all times.

3/. Phoenix rising: I see many people treating this like a toe-touch, bending from the waist. To do it properly you sink straight down into your kuas, (breathing out), swivel you pelvis down and under to reach back between your legs. Then reverse the process expanding upwards from your base, filling you lungs with air, stretching upwards and over behind you, stretching your spine. Then sink down again, emptying your body like collapsing a paper bag full of air.

4/. Dragon plays with pearl is an exercise everyone finds hard to get at first. It is again all about weight shifting and waist turning. It also has an interesting martial application. with your weight on your left you reach around behind to your right. Imagine that you are dealing with an attack from, perhaps, a spear. You seize it and turn your waist to the front, shifting your weight across to your right. Using your kuas you have huge leverage and your opponent will be dragged round. You lift the spear over your head to uproot your opponent and take control.

5/. Still standing at one-and-a-half shoulder widths with your knees flexed, turn your hips, waist and shoulders as one, sinking into your right kua and keeping you spine up-right. Leaning over reduces the impact of this exercise. Once again all of your weight goes over your forward leg and the rear leg empties.

Continues....

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6/. One-two-three: another exercise that causes students huge problems at first. You bounce on one leg, kick the other and move your extended arms up and down as if bouncing a ball. It is partly an exercise in coordination but its biggest lesson is about shifting your weight and emptying your opposite leg. Most people have problems because they are double weighted and tend to fall over. The key is to shift your weight into the standing leg so that the other leg is empty and can be kicked independent of your weighting.

7/ - 8/. Leg raises to the front and the side: The real thing to say about these is that they are not kicks. Like the first exercise you need to lift from your hip and extend your leg - straight this time - as high as you can. Keep your back up-right and your standing leg straight as well.

The rest are mainly about loosening up your joints and a bit of stretching. Overall if you master these and learn to relax the parts of your body that you are not using your form will improve and in addition they will contribute to your fitness and overall well being. 🧘