

Bonsai Tai Chi



The Blog

January Have your say: email theblog@bonsaitaichi.eu

A happy new year. 2010 is the year of the Tiger in the Chinese calendar so if you were born in the years: 1926, 1938, 1950, 1962 1974, 1986, or 1998 then this is your year.

Anyone who has never practised tai chi probably has an image of slow, elegant movements. Probably arm movements. They may have heard it referred to as 'moving meditation' or heard about its healing abilities. So what is it and what can it do for you?

Tai chi is old. It has been practised in its present form for over 200 years. There are legends which say it was devised thousands of years ago but I am happy to go with the history. We can account for a couple of hundred years, the rest is fun but I wouldn't bet on it.

It is, at the top level, a fearsome martial art. As a self-defence technique, with the right training it can be deadly. Forget the kung fu fighters you have seen in the movies, as my tai chi Master says: "With tai chi it is just finished – quickly."

To achieve that level takes a lot of training over many years. Meanwhile we can use that training for fitness, to improve our concentration, our general well-being, yes, even our health. Moreover, because the movements are slow, soft and gentle it doesn't matter how old we are or what our level of fitness is, we can even practise with injuries as long as we take them into account. In fact, the reason I started practising tai chi was because of a knee injury sustained through running on pavements for too many years.

Tai chi is a mind-body practice. It develops our inner strength and teaches us to use the energy in our dan-tien, our core, rather than just muscle strength. It is centred around a 'form' – the sequence of movements I referred to earlier though, in fact, there is very little arm movement. The key is the movements of our body, shifting weight from one leg to another, turning not just our waists but our hips and whole torso while keeping our spine straight and our muscles soft.

And breathing.

In tai chi the in-out breath is natural and relaxed but we breathe into our abdomens not just into our chest. The mere fact of learning to breathe in a deeply but relaxed way will relax you. You will feel your shoulders sink, the tension leave.

With regular practise you feel changed, more relaxed, more confident. You find that you approach problems in a more relaxed way. You become more flexible too and in spite of the gentle movements you find your body becomes toned and even your aerobic fitness improves.

I always tell my students that while all of these things come from tai chi there is a problem: to benefit from them you have to practise! ☯