

Bonsai Tai Chi

The Blog

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Learn to love your chi-gung

There is nothing really difficult about developing your chi, you just need to do chi gung, mostly, and the form.

We all have energy – chi – it is what makes us alive, our life force. What we train to do is develop it and learn to control it at will. Controlling your chi is key to the martial aspects of tai chi chuan.

I don't think it is entirely an oriental thing. Sportsmen train to make what they do effortless. However in the west we do not recognise the concept of internal energy so the training has a different focus. But if you watch a golfer or a batsman they will despatch a ball using total body control with apparently no effort at all. In my teens I was a great cricket fan. I have been privileged to watch some of the old-time greats – Colin Cowdrey, the Bedders, Dennis Compton, Don Bradman. To watch Cowdrey despatch a ball travelling at close to 100mph was little short of watching a miracle. He could not have seen it, certainly not for the last few feet and yet it would be sent on its way with a flick of the wrist.

It is the lack of effort that reminds me of tai chi. A cricketers training is quite different to ours but many principals are the same: using the hips diverting the opponent's (the ball's) energy to send it on its way and, of course, being totally relaxed.

The principles are much the same; being aware, linking to your opponent *before* he touches you and sending him on his way without effort. We aim to use chi – directed by yi – but have you noticed how much better it is when you don't actually think about it and just let your instinct take over?

However hard you train and however sensitive you become developing that instinct is the thing students all struggle with. Sifu constantly tells us that the second someone touches you they should be repelled. In fact if they touch you it is already too late.

When we test postures it seems only polite to let your partner take up position, to take hold of you, before you start the process. The result is often failure – you start to relax, to sink, to shift your weight – oh, and don't forget your qua – already we are thinking too much, making it mechanical. The process has to be one whole move.

Testing postures we have no excuse, we know our partner is going to push us. So why let them get comfortable? If you have ever tested with Sifu you know that the minute he touches you are gone. Link to your partner before they actually touch you, have your yi revved up and aimed at the far wall. Then, by the time they make contact you are already sinking into your qua and they will fly off like a cricket ball leaving Colin Cowdrey's bat. 🇪🇺