

Bonsai Tai Chi

The Blog



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A student asked me about chi gung. At the beginning of every lesson we perform standing chi gung for a few minutes but that was not what he meant. He was asking about the whole system, developed and practised over thousands of years for health and fitness and, they say, longevity. It is a Taoist thing. You can't go far in tai chi without coming across the Tao Te Ching, Lao Tsu's philosophy for life.

Chi gung means energy work and as a subject on its own includes meditation. There is a whole system of exercises and it is all designed to open the energy channels and to get chi moving around the body as it should. As a shorthand I frequently describe it as Chinese yoga. Yoga has the same objectives though the popular practice encompasses just one aspect of Hatha yoga.

Our chi gung is a version of 'standing like a stake' developed by Master Ding. It is specifically intended to concentrate chi in the tan tien (centre) which is situated about an inch-and-a-half below the navel and just behind.

But then, it does not stop there. The warm up exercises we do next come from chi gung as well – you can find them in any book on the subject.

(See February) They are designed to get the chi moving as well as stretch our tendons before we get to the tai chi form. On the subject of the exercise programme: it is an excellent stand alone programme which will loosen your joints, stretch your tendons, flex your spine, make you more supple and tone your muscles. It encompasses the basic moves of tai chi – shifting the weight, turning the waist, using the qua.

And, finally, the thing we are most interested in – tai chi chuan – you will also find in books on chi gung as one of the exercise methods offered by the system. The form distributes chi around the body, as an exercise system it further flexes the body, tones us and makes us more supple. And, although we may not realise it, performed correctly, with softness and precision, it prepares us to use the system for self defence. But that is a whole other story. ☯