



Tai Chi Explained

By Bjørn Darboe Nissen

More and more people practice the gracious art of Tai Chi Chuan in parks, gardens and indoors. Tai Chi Chuan is a sophisticated training combining self-defense, meditation and energy-medicine. Regular training activates ones selfhealing forces, strengthens the immune defence thus acting as preventive medicine.

It's an early and sparkling summer morning and quiet amongst the trees in the park. The sunlight glitters on the lake and is reflected in the green leaves on the trees. In an corner under a huge oak two persons are moving slowly and synchronous, gracious and vigorous. Even though other morning joggers passes by, the two under the oak doesn't seem to pay any attention to anything but their own movements - carried out with a relaxed concentration. They practice Tai Chi Chuan.

But what is this all about then? To us westerners Tai Chi Chuan (in the West often just called Tai Chi) looks like some rather slow, exotic and graceful movement. How can these exercises stimulate any healing process for the individual? And how can these soft, round and circular movements function as a martial art at all?

Well, Tai Chi is really a synthesis of martial art, a kind of walking yoga, healing and meditation. In its supreme expression, Tai Chi turns into a way of reaching enlightenment. Thus it becomes a spiritual body culture. Tai Chi is an art which cultivates and promotes both physical, emotional and mental development. As it melts together certain specified principles of body movement with esoteric knowledge about the energy structure of the human body, Tai Chi is on the mark with Yoga from India and Eurythmy from Europe.

The inner background of Tai Chi

Today, we're all acquainted with the phenomenon of Acupuncture. The healing art where thin, fine needles are introduced into the body through certain points on the skin, thus adjusting an unbalance,



Tai Chi on an early morning in the park.

which may have already manifested itself as an illness. These so-called acupuncture-points are placed like pearls on a string on certain Meridians, which have been mapped in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). These meridians mainly run in through all fingers and toes - deep into the inner organs. The human body is connected with its etheric body via these meridians - actually you could regard the meridians as the "lower" part of the etheric body. The science of the spirit (Theosophy, Antroposophy etc.) has always been aware of this aspect of the human being. The existence of the etheric body may also be recognised by the current scientific mind, maybe through a further investigation into the famous Kirlian-photographs.

Tai Chi Chuan is a martial art. The movements in Tai Chi Chuan have been constructed around the knowledge about the meridians, which TCM has accumulated. The movements are done following certain principles, which contain the core of Tai Chi Chuan. If you train along these guidelines, it's possible to slowly open up the flow of Qi in the meridians. This will gradually make energy flow from higher bodies into the physical body. Through



In the Tai Chi Choreography the whole body moves as one unit and according to certain principles. Basically the impulse comes from below, as it is rooted in the feet, released by the legs, conducted by the waist and manifest itself into arms and hands.

this alchemical process, the physical body is refined - it's energetic level is lifted. The meridians are usually blocked to some degree in most people. Ten years on a school bench - and the body, especially the back, is rather inhibited.

The human body is very sensitive and beautiful - to a degree we normally do not take into consideration. Or to put it differently: we can expand our awareness into physical, emotional, mental and spiritual areas, which are normally completely unknown to our common, daily consciousness. In fact we're some completely incomprehensible, shining creatures - present in a mysterious world. The mysteries in our selves and in the world are only to be discovered on the premise of the mysteries themselves - they are so much bigger than us. All meditation, all true science, any kind of grail-quest, comprehension, aims at an amplification and expansion of our consciousness, purification of our bodies and strengthening the sensitivity of our awareness. This alternated state of mind can give us a personal experience and recognition of the spiritual nature of the universe, that created us. This consciousness will, when correctly understood, also permit a living use of the gained knowledge.

Practicing Tai Chi Chuan endows you with a wonderful openness from where you can choose to act or not act from greater awareness. You have a broader scope in any situation - socially and personally. A state, where you are better equipped to say yes or no - because you see more clearly what the heck is going on, here and now. The more or less hidden manipulations and motives of the surroundings are unveiled, and thus your own moves become

much more qualified. You gain a stillness inside, which enables you to "do the right thing" - better.

In China Tai Chi Chuan is also described as Shadowboxing. During practise you fight your own shadow, your health unbalances, physical, emotional and mentally. At the same time your potentials unfold naturally. This art aims at turning you into A Shadowless Boxer. This takes a long time!

As the training opens up the meridians and you begin to experience more energy and a new well-being on all levels, further horizons open up. In the beginning you may not understand it - that's only natural. You have to count on a daily practise for three years (at least), before you can count on a solid and firm foundation for your retrieved baby-body - and then the real training starts. At this point, it's necessary for most of us, to have the guidance of a true Tai Chi Chuan-master. One thing he will tell you for sure: Endurance is one of the keys, that opens the door. Perhaps the most important.

The opening of the meridians is as mentioned followed by a pouring in of energy from the higher, energetically speaking more potent bodies; the blood, the nervous-system, the glandular system and the bone-marrow are strengthened. In this way we can talk about healing the whole human body. The meridians are also bearers of consciousness of different characters - and this is really one of the thrills of doing Tai Chi Chuan. The training will develop it in you - no leaned-back sofa-philosophy is of any use here, of course. It is, though, rather easy to gain a very good strengthening result with Tai Chi Chuan in a year. Tests have shown, that the immune-systems of Tai Chi-players are considerably stronger than the average.

This art thus strengthens the etheric body, the inner organs, the Will - in fact all inner life. We can consider Tai Chi Chuan both as a healing art and as preventive medicine. You could say it's preventive in contrast to the medicine of the western world today, which actually is solely curative - and used, when illness has already occurred. That's like digging wells, when the drought is already ravaging. Isn't this a bit too late?

After practicing correctly for one year, the beginner will start to sense a warm flow of energy all the way out into the fingertips. The soft turning of the waist massages the inner organs, thus improving their state and functioning. With advanced students, the breath will sink down into the abdomen and the whole body will become relaxed. After practise you have gained new energy and are paradoxically not exhausted. This is due to the character of this method - the connection it establishes between the different human energy-bodies, combined with

the relaxation of the physical body. Serious training is the mean, recumbent sofa philosophizing is futile. It is, though, relatively ease on the health level to gain a good result within a year of training.

Tai Chi in Danmark

There are several styles in Tai Chi Chuan. Essentially they contain the same, so the difference between them is only of interest to the really dedicated practitioner. The Yang-style is the most widespread and popular, and is also said to be the one, which promotes self-healing and good health. This is mostly due to the large movements in the Yang-style. It's impossible for someone, who hasn't developed much yet, to show beginners the energy you can contact through training. Here you must be trustful or feel the joy in practicing the slow, gracious rhythmical movements of Tai Chi Chuan. Many are immediately interested simply by the sight of the lightness and agility of this art. This state is truly a fact to the skilled practitioner. But as a beginner, don't be mistaken: this soft martial art is hard - and later on, when the legs have become strong and "well-rooted", the fight moves "indoors". The personal understanding of the notion "Shadow Boxing" becomes better.

The advantage of learning the Yang-style in Denmark is, that we've had the pleasure of receiving lessons from a highly skilled Tai Chi Chuan Master, namely *Tung Kai-Ying*. He must be given great credit - as a phenomenon and educational - to the fact, that we've been able to experience Yang-style on a high level. Tung Kai-Ying has visited Europe three times a year since 1984, where he's held seminars and camps in France, Italy, Greece, Finland, Sweden and Denmark.



*Tai Chi Master Tung Kai-Ying
and the Danish Tai Chi class.*

Apart from Master Tung Kai-Ying other Tai Chi-teachers have taught in Denmark. *Patrick Kelly* from New Zealand have also given some people good insight into what Tai Chi is.

Tai Chi to the very end

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The access to a broader and clearer consciousness is also remarkable. You gain insight without reading thick, dusty books - and with daily practise, the body is kept young and healthy, even when you're well on in years. This is the reason, why Tai Chi always has been said to be "The Way of Rejuvenation". The energy you can open up to after a couple of years work, is very inspiring. Actually, you can keep on developing through Tai Chi Chuan up until the very moment you leave this world.

There is a very beautiful history about the elderly Tai Chi Chuan Master *Yang-Chian* (1839-1917). He obtained harmony between firmness and softness on a very high level. It is said he could fixate a bird in his open palm, so it could not fly away. When the bird tried to sink down to fly, he let his palm yield, so it could not prepare it's escape. It is said, that when Yang-Chian dreamt his death a few hours before it came, he had his family and friends come to say goodbye. He took a bath, changed to a new set of clothes, lied down on his bed - and passed on with a smile....

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