

## Tai Chi - A Journey of Discovery

Most of us when 'beginners' will have experienced feeling totally useless! Thoughts of "I'll never be able to remember these moves", "How come other people do it so easily?" "Will it take a long time to get this tai chi thing?", "Relax - what does that mean?" and even "I can't do it", all come to the surface. But, as we practise and stick at it, the form begins to get a little easier and at least we get to know which move comes next and which direction we're going in. When we start to realise and 'know' all the moves, the learning and understanding really begins. This realisation is a pretty big one, because we know it really can be a life-long learning, and there is no way we can do classes for a couple of terms, and having completed the moves of the form say "Tai chi, I've done that!"

If we decide to keep going we have to start looking at our 'blocks' in order to move forward. We start to question why certain parts of our bodies don't relax as easily as other parts, and realise that this is how we carry ourselves in day to day life. Why are our shoulders so tense, our chests tight, our backs stiff and inflexible, our knees aching?, etc, etc. How do we react when our teacher pulls us up on our form? Do we react positively or negatively? Do we have the humility to take the 'criticism' as a positive way forward in our learning, or do we become stubborn and refuse to admit that yes, we can do better?

Although the form itself shows us 'where we are', partner-work and especially pushing hands magnify it rather quickly! Many people do not like pushing-hands exercises at first, largely due to having to make physical contact with another person, which can and does bring up many issues. Basically, we find it difficult to allow anyone into our 'space'; it causes us to feel threatened, tense and uncomfortable. The pushing-hands exercises immediately mirror these feelings as our shoulders lock, our chests tighten and the chi rises! We also become very defensive and all our tai chi principles go out of the window! But if we wish to get past this predicament we can, with practise and understanding, bring back the tai chi into our pushing-hands.

'Letting go' has to be one of the biggest problems, for if we let our partner's energy flow through and be directed back out without tensing up or being aggressive, then we can really begin to see the deeper learning of tai chi. It is very empowering to be able to direct energy outwards in a positive way (i.e. non-aggressive and non-ego-based), and it has positive effects not just physically, but on all levels also. If we are really developing in our tai chi, then we should see a change in all aspects of our life, not just in our physical health.

For those who think they've 'got this tai chi thing' in its physical package, look around at the other aspects of your life and see if tai chi is in there too!

For those who feel things aren't moving quickly enough or progress is slow, just take a moment to look at how much work you are putting into it and whether you are willing to change in order to move forward.

Like the saying "Be still as a mountain, move as a great river" the river is forever flowing and changing in order to reach its destination.

Happy journey everyone!

By Anne Whitehead, tai chi student, Zhong Ding Tai Chi, Bacup.