



THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO TAI CHI

*What You Need to Know
to Learn and Practice Tai Chi*

BY BRUCE FRANTZIS

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Editors: Sito Negrón and Richard Taubinger

Assistant Editors: Mountain Livingston and Kaulani Pereira

Interior and Cover Design: Richard Taubinger

Photo and Illustration Editors: Mountain Livingston and Kaulani Pereira

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NOTE: *This special tai chi report is part of the launch of the **Tai Chi Mastery Program***

*Sign up for Bruce's newsletter to receive videos, articles and learn more about the **Tai Chi Mastery Program** by visiting:*

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A LETTER FROM BRUCE FRANTZIS

1 November 2012 – Ulm, Germany

Hi folks,

When it comes to exercise and fitness, you have countless choices: weight lifting, running, yoga, Pilates, biking, tennis, golf, cross-fit and other “fad” programs that come and go. With so many choices, it can be difficult to determine what is right for you.

So why learn tai chi and why take the time to really learn it right?

I believe tai chi is *the future of fitness and exercise*. Tai Chi Chuan translated into the English language literally means “the supreme ultimate.” Tai chi is what I call an *Uber-exercise* because you can do it for health, healing, martial arts and meditation.



Tai chi can totally transform your life so you feel better and more connected to your body, mind and spirit. Tai chi is one of the best practices for long-term health and longevity. Tai chi is known for helping to heal and even reverse various injuries with virtually no downsides. Tai chi releases chronic stress and builds your *qi* or energy.

Practicing tai chi literally rewires your body’s nervous system. Many find that once they learn tai chi they don’t have to *force* themselves to do exercise every day. Instead, they *want* to do tai chi every day because it makes them feel relaxed, integrated and whole. Many join tai chi practice groups and form lasting friends and community.

Another piece of good news is more research studies are being published that confirm what Eastern practitioners have known for thousands of years – you can prevent illness and also contribute to your own healing through applied practice of tai chi. This ongoing tai chi research offers scientific proof of its benefits and will help fuel its popularity.

Although tai chi is finally gaining mass popularity, in the West many of Tai Chi’s original teachings are unfortunately becoming more diluted and watered down. Even when I learned tai chi in Beijing, China, almost 30 years ago, it was becoming apparent that the overall skill level of tai chi practitioners was declining because few did it solely as their primary profession.

If you are considering learning tai chi or if you already practice tai chi, one important thing to learn and know about tai chi is what really gives it the power. This is the internal energetics or neigong that you put inside your tai chi form. This has been my focus where I teach these neigong both in qigong sets and within tai chi.

If you want your tai chi to really do what it can do, you have to go beyond just learning the physical movements. Learning how to use the mind to affect what is happening in the body is a key. Few in the West know how to teach these original energetic components. Fewer know the correct linking procedure so that the possibilities of tai chi can become a reality in your body.

In China it is widely accepted that you need about ten years to become a competent tai chi instructor. Those with previous experience in other internal arts might be able to do it in five years, but that is the exception. Part of the reason this is so is because a person has to fully embody the energetic components in his or her body. Just as an oak tree cannot grow in a day, tai chi teachers take time to mature and develop. They must rebuild and upgrade their energetic system.

As there are different forms being created and more teachers appearing on the scene, I encourage you to learn an authentic form and to study with the best qualified teacher you can find. This means a teacher that been properly trained and can fully embody the principles of tai chi.

I have created *The Insider's Guide to Tai Chi* to provide you with foundational information to help you understand and evaluate the expanding body of material available about tai chi in the West. I'll also go deeper to explain *neigong*, which is the secret that powers tai chi. *Neigong* translated means 'internal energy work' and it explains how qi flows in the body. It is what makes tai chi effective as a martial art, as a health exercise and even for meditation.

When I started learning tai chi many years ago, I found and worked with some of the best masters in China within the Chen, Yang and Wu tai chi lineages. I believe that it is my responsibility to share what they taught me with as many people as possible. This tai chi report, my blog at www.taichimaster.com, the *Tai Chi Mastery Program* and my live events are ways I can share what I learned with you.

I have been practicing and teaching tai chi now for more than 45 years and counting. I first wanted to learn tai chi for my martial arts and had little interest in its health benefits. At the time I was a young man that loved both doing and teaching martial arts. What I found in the internal martial art of tai chi was a system for being strong into old age without the joint and body damage associated with external martial arts.

Later, as time went on, I used tai chi to heal my own body from other illnesses. Once, in India, I contracted a deadly case of hepatitis. Tai chi literally saved my life when I used it to open up the blocked energy channels in my body. The two other people on either side of me in the hospital that had the same thing died. I have had the unfortunate luck to be in eight major car accidents – one in 1982 that broke multiple vertebrae in my back, which doctors said would likely leave me paralyzed. I initially used the Yang Style to heal my upper back and then used the Wu Style of tai chi to heal my lower back. Without tai chi I don't think I would be walking today.

I'm now over 60 years of age and I continue to use my tai chi practice to further heal my body. Not everyone will find the results I have, solely because very few people will dedicate themselves so completely to tai chi. But you'll find you get out of it what you put in, and *everyone*, regardless of age or physical fitness, can achieve life-changing benefits through dedicated, applied practice.

In *The Insider's Guide to Tai Chi* I hope to provide you a practical understanding of what tai chi is, what makes it work so well, and how to choose a style, teacher and practice regimen. I created this report and have given it away because I believe that it contains essential information that will be useful on your tai chi journey, whether you end up studying with me or another teacher.

I hope you learn, practice and eventually teach this amazing art that can continually transform your life!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bruce Stanley".

Founder, Energy Arts

My Website (News, forum, events and products): www.energyarts.com

My Blog (posts, updates and videos): www.taichimaster.com

Tai Chi Mastery Program (launch information): www.taichimastery.com

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SECTION 1: TAI CHI AND ITS BENEFITS

The Tai Chi Solution

While I was in China, I learned how a 3,000-year-old civilization applied their science and technology to the problem of aging and came up with a solution—tai chi. In China, tai chi is the national health exercise, and more than 200 million people practice tai chi daily. Today millions of people in the West practice tai chi for practical benefits -- to reduce stress, improve health and longevity, and maintain vitality and stamina.

According to the [US Census Bureau](#), in 2011, 50 million people in the U.S. (16.2% of the population) were without health insurance for at least part of the year¹. In the U.S., 10,000 people a day are reaching retirement age.

Tai chi can become the foremost preventative health care exercise in America and the world. Helping our younger generations relax and release their nervous systems will directly mitigate the stresses of our age. Tai chi can help the older generation live vibrant lives well past the age when most people's health starts to decline.

¹http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Health_care_in_the_United_States#The_uninsured

Tai chi did not start as a technology for health and wellness. It's an "internal" martial art, so-called for the techniques that give it flow and power and, it so happens, great health benefits.

In China there are three main internal martial arts: tai chi, bagua¹ and hsing-i². Although, classically, they developed internal power for combat, they now are most often used for health, especially tai chi. It also can be said that more and more people are using all of these internal arts as moving meditation.

While I know the healing power of tai chi from first-hand experience – not only in the recovery from my car accidents, but also learning from masters who remained incredibly strong, limber and vigorous well into what in the West might be considered dotage (age 70 and up) – in the West we must measure things to validate them.

¹ [Bagua](#) - Even more ancient than tai chi, the circle walking techniques of Bagua were developed over four thousand years ago in Taoist monasteries as a health and meditation art. The techniques open up the possibilities of the mind to achieve stillness and clarity; generate a strong, healthy, disease-free body; and, perhaps more importantly, maintain internal balance.

² [Hsing-i](#) emphasizes all aspects of the mind to increase its forms and fighting movements. It is an equally potent healing practice because it makes people healthy and then very strong. Its five basic movements are related to five primal elements or phases of energy--metal, water, wood, fire and earth--upon which Chinese medicine is based and from which all manifested phenomena are created.

That process is still relatively new. There are, however, studies that show increased balance and improved cognitive abilities for the elderly and improved blood pressure among the stressed.

Western science and medicine can be incredibly effective for dealing with *acute* problems – for example, stabilizing me after my horrific car wreck in 1982. But my opinion is it does not do as well with *chronic* problems; that is, ongoing issues that are not immediate crisis but that, over time, diminish quality of life, such as ongoing back pain or headaches, two very common ailments.

This is at the core of my teaching and writing. I believe tai chi and related Taoist arts can play a role in healing the world. A health crisis is looming, particularly in the West as the world speeds up and the population ages. So much of our expensive health care system is consumed with applying the methods of acute care to chronic ailments (most commonly, drugs for stress, sex, or sleeping, just to name a few). Just on a purely physical and economic level, mass adoption of tai chi would alleviate so much pressure of modern life, and this in turn has huge spiritual implications.

My sincere desire is that this “*The Insider’s Guide Tai Chi*” report will help *you* start a tai chi practice, or understand and improve your existing tai chi practice. Those who practice and teach are part of a larger tai chi

community who are reclaiming their health and helping others do the same.

What Is Tai Chi?

There are many different ways to answer the question, "What is tai chi?"

Tai chi was developed in China as a very effective martial art. When referred to as a martial art, it is called tai chi chuan (translated as 'grand ultimate fist').

Most people in China and the West practice tai chi not for combat but rather as a potent health exercise.

Distinct styles were developed within specific families in China as a means of protection and each style was named after their founders: Wu, Chen, Yang, Hao, etc. The three most popular styles are the Chen, Yang and Wu. I'll talk more about those styles later in Section 4.

Each style has a series of distinct choreographed movements called forms with short forms lasting only for a few minutes and the longest forms lasting up to an hour. Each style has many variations. You do not have to be a martial arts master to gain benefits from tai chi. Nor do you have to be classically fit, athletic or intelligent.

Unlike many exercise systems or sports, one valuable aspect of tai chi is that it can be done by anyone who can stand up; and it has specific

adaptations for people confined to wheelchairs.

You can practice tai chi if you are fat or thin, healthy or just out of bed after major surgery, young, middle-aged or very old. Tai chi is about how you feel not about how you look!

“Tai chi is about how you feel not about how you look!”

It is interesting to note that in China, half of all practitioners take up tai chi between the ages of 50 and 80 when the need to overcome potential negative effects of aging cannot be denied. Others practice to enhance their physical and intellectual capabilities. Competition athletes use tai chi to improve their reflexes and reduce the time it takes to heal from sports injuries.

Tai chi helps middle-aged people to cope with the ever-increasing responsibilities of life, reduce stress and get a competitive edge in business. Still others use tai chi to develop inner discipline, open their heart and mind, and unleash their spiritual potential.

Like anything that has really stood the test of time there is a lot more to tai chi than first impressions. Tai chi, while developed as a martial art, must be understood as containing important parts of the accumulated wisdom of the ancient world. It is an art that can help everyone overcome the ever-present difficulties of the human condition and engage with life positively.

How Tai Chi Works, What It Does, and Where It Can Go

Like all qigong programs, tai chi relaxes and regulates the central nervous system, releasing physical and emotional stress, and promoting mental and emotional well-being. Tai chi tones the muscles while releasing knots and tension in them.

During each workout the movements of tai chi exercise every muscle, ligament, tendon and joint of the body.

Continuous movements cause every lymph node and internal organ to be massaged, and all the internal pumps in the body to be energized. Tai chi energizes the whole body and gives you more qi, the energy that makes you feel alive, well and vital.

It gives you a great physical sense of how qi gets embodied into your movement and enables you to experience and work with energy in a very subtle and complex manner.

Often when first learning a tai chi form you must spend many days, weeks and months simply learning the external movements. At some point, once you have learned the external movements so that you don't have to 'think' about doing them, you can then start to focus more on sensing the qi flows.

Once you have the external movements and are starting to feel and sense the internal qi, new possibilities open up to use tai chi for meditation.

Tai chi has been called moving meditation. In the West we think of meditation as something that is to be done while sitting. However, moving meditations are very useful because if you can learn to meditate while moving, you can bring meditation into every movement that you do in life.

Practicing tai chi in a meditative way with relaxed focus is only a shadow of the deepest spiritual aspects of Taoist moving meditation. Taoism has a rare meditation tradition that was taught to me by Liu Hung Chieh. He taught me how to incorporate the Taoist meditation practices into tai chi, thus making tai chi a spiritual practice.

Most people will simply focus on tai chi's health benefits, possibly learning the internal components that make it even more useful; however, tai chi used as meditation has the capability for those who are willing and ready to take you into the core of your being and what in Taoism is called the center of the Tao or what in Buddhism is called 'emptiness'.

A Meditation on Tai Chi

In the Taoist tradition, embarking on a spiritual path goes beyond having health and a calm, peaceful mind. The highest purpose of Taoist meditation is to create an awareness of the permanent, unchanging center of one's being, the place of spirit and emptiness that is Consciousness itself.

Meditation moves beyond mere physical and mental relaxation; in Taoist meditation, one rests at the soul level.

Tai chi is a means for deepening the awareness of and ability to relax on all levels of being. The primary emphasis of practicing a tai chi form as an advanced method of Taoist meditation is to explore the nature of opposites, the nature of emptiness and non-duality. These are the concepts of Tai chi and Wu chi which can be experienced through the rhythmic alternation between yin and yang movements in tai chi.

The goal of moving meditation is to find and recognize the place tai chi dwells in the mind, where these differentiations come together and simultaneously become one within emptiness.

Tai chi is commonly referred to as moving meditation. The slow, graceful movements in tai chi can be used as a meditation to provide relaxed focus, to quiet the “monkey mind” and to engender a deep sense of relaxation that helps release inner tensions.

The Science of the 16 Neigong

Neigong, the science of how energy flows in humans, is the root of the essential qi work of all internal martial arts (bagua, tai chi and hsing-i), Taoist meditation, and Chinese medicine’s qigong therapies and bodywork systems. All the Taoist qigong systems in China have obtained at least some of their technical information and potential capacities from the science of neigong.

Learning tai chi, bagua and hsing-i commonly begins with learning basic movement forms.

For example, tai chi has short and long form styles and bagua has Circle Walking and/or the Single Palm Change. Over time, neigong components are incorporated into the movements at increasingly sophisticated levels with the goal of progressively opening up all the energy channels of the body, mind and spirit.

The circular process in which neigong components are learned is unique to Taoist energetic practices. On the first pass through a particular component, you may only learn its basic elements. Then, on the next pass, you might move on to deeper aspects that you again integrate into your physical movements.

You return over and over again to specific neigong components to flesh out their more refined aspects and applications within the movements.

The sequence of learning the 16 components is not cast in stone, although many people find that learning the breathing and alignment components early on is particularly useful for health and relaxation.

The sophistication of neigong is experienced by practitioners as progressive and systematic improvements in health and the energetic and spiritual capacities of the mind, body and spirit occur through continued practice.

This ever-deepening sophistication is what allows tai chi, bagua and hsingi

to become exquisite exercises and profound meditation vehicles for Taoist spiritual practices.

Developing Physical Fitness through Energetic Fitness

Tai chi literally changes what happens deep inside your body on an energetic level. Tai chi provides instant access to control of your inner ecology, rewiring your nervous system so you can move away from tension and towards relaxation.

Tai chi develops what I call *energetic fitness*, which can be defined as your ability to feel, move and store qi. *Qi* is also known as the vital life-force in your body. Energetic fitness is your natural birthright.

Tai chi's approach of using conscious slow movements is a radical departure from the typical Western approach to fitness, which often focuses on the repetitive movements and physical exertion of fitness regimes such as running, biking or weight lifting. Usually, the goal of Western exercise is speed, distance, or strength.

“Tai chi focuses on softening your body thus enabling you to put your mind inside your body to feel your qi.”

Tai chi has a completely different set of markers and guideposts for success: namely consciousness of your body, proper alignments and the development of the smooth flow of energy. Generating relaxation within the entire being is at the center of a tai chi practice.

This will strengthen your body, but in a different way than most people who work out would consider “successful.” There is no focus on six-pack abs in tai chi. In fact, quite the opposite. While a “tai chi belly” is firm, it is not rigid, and moves continually from hard to soft as necessary. This allows the organs to be freed, and as the torso expands and contracts with your breath, the organs get a continuous, gentle massage.

The same goes for your arms and upper body, which appear soft, but in actuality have the ability to change from hard to soft as necessary. The key is to allow the system to function smoothly and without strain, so blood and oxygen flow, lymph pumps, and the muscles don’t get in the way.

Much of the heavy lifting – keeping the body upright, flexible and strong, like the proverbial sapling – is done through proper alignment of the bones and very muscular thighs.



Laying the Foundation: The Three Treasures

All Taoist practices are based on the Three Treasures: body, energy and spirit (*jing*, *qi* and *shen*). Learning tai chi serves as a body practice and advances into an energy practice. So whether or not you have an interest in practicing tai chi for spiritual pursuits, it always starts with the body—making the practitioner incredibly healthy right down to the cellular level.

The physical body is the container through which the other two treasures, energy and spirit, flow. Through tai chi, one learns how to exercise the body down to its most subtle aspects. This is the physical approach to health, longevity and optimum performance. A tai chi practitioner must understand the body's physical mechanisms and realities to gain the most benefit.

The legendary martial arts abilities of tai chi masters are derived from the development of subtle energy. This is where many of the “secrets” of tai chi are hidden and why some train over many decades to achieve mastery.

Increasing your life-force energy, which can be achieved through regular tai chi practice, can produce extraordinary healing and provides the gateway to human intuitive or psychic capacities. People who are very energetically sensitive or psychically developed can benefit from tai chi. Practice can help ground and smooth energy, so they can make use of—rather than be overwhelmed by— their natural talents.

Spirit's sphere of influence works directly with the mind and the invisible spirit within us. It involves the art and science of meditation, which originally generated the first two levels of body (*jing*) and energy (*qi*).

Accessing your spirit's energy is required in order to fully engage your true personal power, obtain emotional balance and inner peace, and actualize the potential of your mind.

While intent can take you a long way with body and energy, the Heart Mind is required to fully activate spirit, which is the center of your consciousness. That is the place where thoughts and images come from before they reach the conscious level.

There are beginning, intermediate and advanced techniques when it comes to working with body, energy and spirit. They are learned much the same way as music: basic techniques build on each other until they seamlessly blend through practice.

The art of tai chi is as complex as the greatest symphony. At its most

advanced stages, the body, mind and spiritual components blend into a unified whole that lead you to experiencing the Tao.

Unlike learning music, however, where you progress by learning successively more challenging pieces of music, in tai chi you perform the same series of movements, each time going deeper and learning more.

Unlike some forms of qigong, which begin at a purely energetic level with minimum physical work, the very foundation of the energy work in tai chi is accessed through working the body, the physical. Even though the emphasis of the practice may be on chi, the physical work of tai chi must be done. Comments like "just feel the energy flow within you" are normally insufficient to develop qi. Students must learn the physical movements and body alignments of tai chi forms to produce the energetic benefits.

At intermediate and advanced stages, students are introduced to all the possibilities of how qi works. The fullness of advanced tai chi is generally only known or taught by martial tai chi masters. Push Hands, traditional weapons, and all of tai chi's martial arts skills are usually the medium by which the overwhelming majority of genuine masters teach the complete qi methods of tai chi.

Specific details and aspects of all 16 neigong components are integrated at the higher levels of tai chi training. Mastering the neigong is crucial to successfully obtaining the greatest worldly benefits tai chi has to offer:

health, stress relief, longevity, high-performance physical skills and internal power. Standing postures and sitting techniques may be used extensively at the advanced stages of practice.

Progressively, your awareness focuses on different invisible places inside your body. These spots then generate the fundamental impulses to move the muscles of your hand or waist. A progression could move from stretching the insertion points of various muscles to activating specific energy channels, to expanding the fluids inside your joints, or any of the other internal techniques contained within 16 neigong system.

With increased awareness, familiarity, and experience, a conscious understanding of moving the deep insides of your body will create the external movements of any internal martial art. The inner moves the outer. Gradually, the mental and energetic abilities necessary to support your inner journey are developed.

An essential part of recognizing and releasing the buzz inside your nervous system is to release stagnant qi. This may happen naturally as your tai chi improves or because you learn to apply various components from the 16 neigong system to specifically address stagnant qi issues.

Neigong methods within tai chi that resolve stagnant qi situations include:

- Balancing the sinking of your qi to the lower tantien and the raising of qi to the top of your head
- Clearing stagnant energy from the central, left, right or other channels of your body
- Working with various openings/closings to eliminate sticking points

To gain the most benefit from tai chi, you will need to learn and embody the 16 neigong system in greater depth for two basic reasons. First is to maximize the amount of exercise, qi flow and power each minute of your practice time will generate.

Second is to prevent unnecessary injuries, which reduce your ability to train and use up valuable time in recovery. At the most extreme level, injuries could compromise your abilities, as often happens to competitive athletes who get so damaged that they must retire with lifelong pain.

Although some teachers may introduce qi principles in beginning classes, qi development occurs most strongly in intermediate and advanced classes taught by teachers trained in the 16 components of neigong. It is best to work with teachers who have been trained to teach students to progress according to their individual developmental needs, as have qualified Energy Arts Instructors.

If you want to learn qi development, you need to ask teachers if they know and are willing to teach it to you. Before working with more advanced methods that can strongly develop your qi, you first need a strong foundation in tai chi's basics.

Tai Chi for Stress Reduction

Too many of us live in a constant state of stress, which charges and ultimately shreds the nervous system. You need a practice that helps you deal with, not escape, stress. We are constantly plugged in to computers, cell phones, and other stimuli; this, and the general pace of modern life, exacts a toll on our bodies, minds and spirit. Tai chi is about engaging the environment so we can function at a high level without getting snagged on the sharp edges of modern life or suffocated by its weight.

“Tai chi could be called the exercise for the new millennium because it helps you relax your nervous system – tai chi is an antidote to stress.”

All too often, fatigue and lethargy are confused with relaxation. So many people are stressed out that most can't remember ever having felt their body fully relaxed. Typically, many top athletes or dancers, when asked to relax their shoulders, neck, and chest, cannot—even after a life spent in physical training.

Because tai chi trains you to feel progressively more deeply inside your body, you develop an awareness of where your body holds tension within itself, and this gradually extends into your daily life. You begin to notice how your neck and shoulders tense when working long hours at your desk or computer, what happens inside your body when you are angry or sad or how mental exertion under pressure causes your body to fatigue.

From the perspective of stress, the techniques of tai chi are more about training your central nervous system than your muscles. It is jangled nerves that lie at the root of anxiety, particularly in our technological age, with its immense amount of intellectual output.

This anxiety affects almost every population group—from babies to the elderly. Overloading the brain directly affects your nervous system, resulting in a fight or flight response that induces tension and causes the nerves to overload. Over time, this can produce a condition in the brain and nerves where almost any thought or decision, no matter how small, causes anxiety.

The regular practice of tai chi allows you to consciously relax your mind and body before they start to tense, and prevents the condition from being painful or chronic. Because qi moves through the central nervous system, the process of relaxation begins by smoothing out the functioning of the nerves. Relaxing the muscles is only part of this process.

The regular practice of tai chi trains the body to relax at increasingly deeper physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual levels through the interaction of five components that are embedded within its movements.

Tai chi does the following:

1. Trains the body to practice moderation, by implementing the 70 percent rule.
2. Increases your level of qi-energy, thereby strengthening the nervous system. Weakening the body's qi can cause the mind and nervous system to become agitated. Conversely, an agitated mind and nervous system can downgrade the body's qi, eventually resulting in physical problems.
3. Boosts your general level of health and stamina. It also releases and flushes out stress and illness-related toxins from your body and mind. Whenever you feel a major release of toxins, be sure to drink lots of water to help release the toxins faster, and to help prevent them from being reabsorbed into your system.
4. Stretches and elongates tissues which habitually become shortened or congested due to stress.

5. Creates an environment where your mind can reduce its jangled, congested, and churning thoughts and experience a clear, open, and relaxed mental space.

Tai chi practice develops the habit of allowing the sense of inner pressure to pass and be replaced by a sense of inner peace. It is tai chi's synergistic approach that gradually releases stress—no one single component is the “magic bullet” for learning to relax deeply.

In China, the Taoists discovered that physical relaxation is only the beginning of relaxation's potential. There is also the need to relax your qi-energy, emotions, and mental activity and discover what it means to you to be a spiritual being. Complete relaxation integrates all these kinds of relaxation.

At the most basic physical level, tai chi accomplishes nine things:

1. Gives the body the full range of movement it needs.
2. Provides better structural support to the body.
3. Massages your internal organs.
4. Stretches everything inside you lengthwise, down to the smallest muscles and ligaments.

5. Laterally twists soft tissues and gives you access to areas of your body, which may normally be difficult to reach and positively affect.
6. Makes all the fluids circulate evenly inside your body.
7. Increases qi flow.
8. Increases your breathing capacity.
9. Establishes (and stabilizes) highly efficient biomechanical alignments of the body.



Few health exercises have stood the test of time for as long as tai chi. The practice of tai chi has been steadily growing in the West for decades and its benefits are mostly spread by word of mouth. Those who do tai chi know it makes them feel and function better.

This low-impact exercise can do as much or more to improve overall health and relieve stress as aerobics and other exercises. It improves muscle use

and the circulation of blood in your cardiovascular system without generating potentially damaging shocks or trauma to the joints and organs.

Tai chi keeps everything inside you healthy, from the smallest muscles to ligaments, joints, bodily fluids, vertebrae, and internal organs. Besides giving you a good whole-body workout, tai chi helps you to reduce and manage pain of all kinds, and to recover more rapidly from trauma.

The 70 Percent Rule

A central principle, the 70 percent rule, governs and underlies how all tai chi techniques should be implemented. The 70 percent rule enables you to achieve the most benefit because it trains practitioners to practice and live with moderation. This “rule” lies at the heart of the living philosophy of the Tao. It is a powerful antidote to the all-pervasive stress that turns so-called success into ashes in our mouths. Above all else, the 70 percent rule helps condition the mind and body to soften and relax.

The 70 percent rule states that you should only do a tai chi movement, or any inner qi technique, to 70 percent of your potential capacity. Striving for 100 percent inherently produces tension and stress because as soon as you strain or go beyond your capacity, your body has a natural tendency to experience fear and to begin, even without you being aware of it, to tense or shut down in response.

At 70 percent capacity, you can throw 100 percent of your energy and effort into your practice. By only going to 70 percent, you still generate 100 percent of the possible qi that a tai chi movement is capable of producing. Going beyond the 70 percent point in fact drains rather than increases your energetic reserves.

Staying within 70 percent of your capacities produces optimum physical accomplishment and, simultaneously, reduces psychological stress. The more you relax, the more qi energy, stamina, and strength you will have.

The 70 percent rule powerfully counters the prevalent Western philosophy to never give less than 150 percent, as embodied in the phrase, “No pain, no gain.” People who don’t “give their all” are branded as lazy slackers who will never get anywhere, much less succeed. This philosophy of strain and stress helps keep our generally over-scheduled, overwhelmed society in a state of anxiety. It is a root cause of the stress syndrome, and a contributing factor to medical illness.

The core of the 70 percent rule is a creative art, not a science. It says you should use your full effort and energy, but not to the point of strain.

Maintaining a natural comfort zone without using force brings the following benefits:

- It allows you to challenge your capabilities and progressively increase them without over-exhaustion, damage to your nervous system, or physical injury.
- You can absorb and integrate inside yourself what you learn more easily, both in tai chi and in your life, and to build on it, ultimately enabling you to grow and flourish as a human being.
- It enables you to start storing qi, so that you have a reserve of energy when you most need it. Some stressful situations are unavoidable. Tai chi provides the reserves to cope with them and maintain that reserve under all circumstances.
- Moderation protects the practitioner from internal resistance, which is inherently a survival mechanism against excess. Internal resistance is a major reason why people can't maintain any regular exercise program, including tai chi.
- The absolute amount (100 percent) of what you are capable of doing at any one time continues to increase upwards, smoothly and easily. As you reach each new pinnacle of health, strength, and stamina and continue to practice at 70 percent of your improved capabilities, you will progress in terms of absolute accomplishment, at times exponentially, without stress on your system. This gives you the will and the courage to set higher goals for yourself and to achieve them.

SECTION 2: CONSIDER YOUR GOALS

Tai Chi Sounds Great, But Am I too Old to Start?

Clearly, the earlier in life you start practicing tai chi, the greater your physical and mental capacities will be in old age. However, many people basically ignore their health until the natural healing and physical capacities of youth start to wane.

Suddenly, you may have a wake-up call. Or maybe an injury that could heal in a couple of days previously now lingers on for a couple of weeks. And when you stay up all night with little sleep, you feel out of sorts for several days until the weekend when you can rest for a whole day or more. Maybe you find that you suffer from colds and other viral illnesses more often. General tension and anxiety seem to last longer. Your libido may decline. These are all signs that poor health habits are catching up with you.

Commonly, these wake-up calls happen to people in their 50s.

Unfortunately, there is a growing number of younger people burning out and experiencing these problems in their 30s and 40s—some, even in their 20s.

You can ignore the warning signs and stay in denial, or you can do something right now to reverse the damage and begin regenerating your

body, mind and spirit—regardless of your chronological age. Tai chi’s goal is to make you functionally younger.

Now, you may be in your 50s and yet, be pretty darn healthy. If so, there’s no doubt that you’ve managed to do something, or many things, right and you probably already recognize that maintaining your good health will allow you to continue enjoying your active and fulfilling lifestyle.

In China, half of the people who practice tai chi begin after age 50. It was mind-blowing for me to watch so many older people regain the strength and vitality that most people have in their 20s and 30s. All of them told stories of how tai chi made them feel better throughout their whole day. Practitioners in their 70s and 80s told the same stories, but with a much greater sense of gratitude.

It opened my eyes to the nature of living a whole life. As a youth growing up in the 1960s and 1970s, I, like most of my peers in my generation, believed life was basically over when you were old. And old was anyone over 30! Realizing the full potential of your dreams and making positive contributions to your family and society all starts with your health, not your age.

Although all practitioners can expect to gain the range of tai chi’s health benefits, practicing tai chi has special benefits for people over 50.

Tai chi:

- Increases physical balance
- Regulates and lowers blood pressure
- Improves circulation
- Promotes a good night's sleep
- Re-establishes biomechanical alignments
- Restores sexual vitality



Tai chi practitioners in Beijing, China.

Many health studies conducted in China and the West show how tai chi and other Taoist practices improve health. You may have determined that you want to learn tai chi for one or more reasons, which may include:

- Relaxation and stress reduction
- Improved health and wellness and longevity
- Joy of movement, entertainment and socialization
- Learning a tried and true and challenging body/mind/spirit practice
- Self-defense
- Putting more qi in your life
- Spirituality and personal growth.

Perhaps you want to enhance your life or address specific health issues. Tai chi research has shown to have a positive effect on mitigating high blood pressure, pain (physical, emotional and mental), carpal tunnel and other repetitive stress injuries, and helping patients recover from accidents or operations. Perhaps you need a teacher skilled at teaching the handicapped or the elderly.

You need to tell potential teachers what you specifically want to achieve and ask if they can help you, rather than assuming that they can. Not all teachers may be able or willing to teach what you need or desire to learn.¹

Choosing a Teacher

In tai chi, who is the beginner? This is truly a trick question. Even after 20 years of practice, many students genuinely consider themselves beginners, especially after watching a high-level tai chi master at work.

Tai chi's beginning, intermediate and advanced practices are like a continuum without exact, defining landmarks. Criteria and standards of what constitute beginning, intermediate or advanced methods vary widely between individual teachers and entire schools of tai chi. However, there are markers that can help you assess potential teachers, as well as your own progress, which I'll get into in more detail later.

Some teachers have a larger, more complete knowledge of the entire tradition than others. Consequently, one group's idea of what constitutes an advanced technique, by another group's standards may be considered something only marginally more advanced than the basic level.

Still, even accounting for variances, at minimum you should expect to learn:

¹ For detailed information on this topic please see the author's book: [Tai Chi: Health for Life](#) pages 253-278

- Sequences of movements
- Basic body alignments
- The 70 percent rule of moderation
- Coordination
- How to protect your joints.

During the first year, unless you are exceptionally sensitive, it is unreasonable to expect to feel a lot of qi. Although at its advanced levels tai chi's primary goal is to grow and balance your qi, in the beginning approaching your practice only from the perspective of qi is neither necessary nor desirable. Staying grounded in the body tends to keep any self-perceived experiences of energy from being pure fantasy or overly exaggerated.

Benchmarks for Beginners

Tai chi is challenging to learn. People who do tai chi well make it look easy and effortless. But the truth is tai chi is not especially easy to learn. Keep in mind the interesting point that things are difficult when you can't do them and easy when you can. The road to attaining fluidity, smoothness and relaxed movements in your tai chi practice requires much patience and effort, just like any sport or art form.

Tai chi progressively develops gross and subtle physical coordination. Tai chi is one of the most sophisticated methods of integrated whole-body movement.

Tai chi is a workout that can be as strenuous and invigorating as aerobics, even though it can look easy, simple and relaxed. You will likely use muscles that you didn't know you had. Before you really learn to relax and soften your body, the habitual tension stored in your legs and shoulders may make you tremble and ache.

It is quite normal to feel some emotional unpleasantness, especially as you begin to really notice, often for the first time, what stress is doing to your nervous system, or how unquiet and devoid of inner peace your mind and emotions really are. For everyone, part of learning tai chi is learning to recognize the subtle tensions within your body and mind. This can freak you out; the degree of unconscious tension held by most people is extreme. However, if you can overcome it, you will feel truly empowered about your ability to let go.

At first, it may be difficult to practice on your own. It is best not to feel guilty about this; just accept your limitations rather than quitting.

Attending a weekly class is the best way to create a regular practice rhythm.

Many students focus on learning movements correctly or doing them

perfectly. It is not possible to do tai chi perfectly, so don't approach learning tai chi with a been-there-done-that mentality.

I once asked my teacher Liu if he had ever done tai chi perfectly and he said that he had. Later, he said that he realized he had practiced tai chi even better than the time before!

Although tai chi is not especially easy to learn, it is not the most difficult thing to do either. As noted above, half of China's 200 million people who successfully learn and practice tai chi daily begin after age 50. If they can learn tai chi, so can you.

Some degree of challenge makes most recreational activities more fun, interesting and alive, whether they are physical (golf, skiing, tai chi), mental (reading good books, doing crossword puzzles), or artistic (playing music, painting). Lack of any challenge causes many activities to become boring, causing people to quit.

Conversely, all worthwhile activities that continue to have both short- and long-term pay-offs usually have continuing challenges.

You don't have to be an expert to benefit from learning tai chi. Even when done poorly, tai chi fosters vibrant health from deep within your body. As you grow in experience and are able to pay more attention to body alignments and energy mechanics, you'll find you gain more and more from your practice.

Give Yourself Time to Absorb

The most important thing is to learn the whole sequence together even if you have to fudge some moves. This builds confidence for the long haul. Refining the moves happens with practice, or in the next rounds of learning new information.

If you have specific moves you really like, do them singly outside the sequence of the form. This builds up your confidence and creates the foundational skills needed to eventually overcome the bigger challenges of more difficult moves.

Do not emotionally beat yourself up over moves that you personally find difficult. Just move on and complete the entire sequence as best you can. Don't get hung up on one or two moves. You will improve with practice.

Whatever you do, don't compare your learning speed to others. Tai chi is challenging for everyone to learn although some will pick it up faster than others. It's your commitment that matters--not how fast you can play the game.

Above all, be patient with yourself.

Although everyone would love to begin studying with a master, for a variety of positive and negative reasons, most beginners do not need to do so. You do not initially need to learn piano from a world-class concert

pianist to enjoy the benefits of playing the piano or to understand whether you want, or have the talent, to become a world-class pianist yourself.

The basics, particularly for beginners, can be taught effectively by many tai chi teachers. By practicing regularly you will begin to acquire the health and relaxation benefits of tai chi.

However, the better the teacher, the faster the students who are exceptionally committed will learn and absorb what is being taught and the more motivated they will be to continue their practice. If you are highly motivated, take the time to seek out exceptional teachers who can help you advance more quickly.

Remember that this lifelong practice requires effort to learn and looks easier than it is. Here are some guidelines that will help you choose the teacher who is right for you:

- Basic body alignments
- Again, consider what goals you want to achieve, then apply some competence gauges
- Evaluate the instructor's teaching experience and their ability to communicate
- Understand the differences between styles/frames/forms and how they may apply to you

- Think about which teaching approach works best for you and which personality types you can work with.

Not All Great Practitioners are Great Teachers

There are many thousands of people, with various levels of skill as teachers and practitioners, who teach some form of tai chi. This is just as it is in any art (dance, yoga, music, cooking, etc.). And as in any art, the most skilled are those who put in their time – you can't just go to a weekend workshop, "feel the energy" and be qualified to teach, which unfortunately happens at times.

Aside from time put in practicing, there are no simple criteria for determining competence. To make this issue more complicated, the criteria for determining a teacher's competence for a beginner is very different than those for an advanced student.

The four basic issues that generally define the better teachers are:

1. Quality of the teacher's knowledge (competence)
2. Teacher's ability to communicate verbally and non-verbally
3. Decency, honesty and generosity
4. Student's comfort level with the teacher.

Most students who choose and stay with a tai chi teacher will define why they like that teacher in one or more of these terms. If you have teachers with the same innate talent, the ones that are decent, honest and generous are likely to take you further and upgrade your knowledge faster.

Tai chi is an art that deals directly with the human spirit.

Very few people are both great teachers and great practitioners. You may learn much more from someone who has a solid understanding of the fundamentals of tai chi and is able to help you embody those principles than from a grandmaster who pays scant attention or who simply doesn't know how to teach.

All that said, if you must choose between comfort and excellence, choose excellence. In general, the quality of instruction will be remembered long after the price of learning is forgotten; or, as the old maxim goes, "You get what you pay for." In all cases, competence is the baseline, no matter how charismatic the teacher or how comfortable they make you feel.

Understand Your Motivation for Learning

Tai chi is ideally practiced daily as a primary health maintenance exercise. My teacher Liu used to say, "You become what you practice." Practice becoming healthy and you will become healthy. Practice becoming relaxed

and you will become relaxed. Practice letting go of negative habits and they will increasingly dissolve and be released.

More vitality and energy for life, a capacity for joy and relaxation, and realizing one's inner potential are among tai chi's gifts to those who persevere.

However, teachers of tai chi, qigong and other internal health practices know that at some point, many students stop practicing for long periods of time or quit altogether. Some become discouraged at the challenges of learning the physical movements; some become uncomfortable when they experience the depths of their negative emotions; still others stop for seemingly no reason, even as they begin to experience tai chi's benefits.

Let's look at some of the reasons why people stop practicing, the deterrents that can arise when people try to integrate a body-mind practice into their daily lives, and the stages that can lead to taking ownership of their practice.

Motivations for Change

Generally people make major changes in their lives and adopt new habits and rhythms for one of two major reasons: they are motivated by fear of negative consequences, or have positive goals.

Fear-driven change: Something goes wrong and if changes are not made, more troubles will follow that will have larger negative consequences. At this juncture, people become motivated to give up such habits as smoking and poor diet and begin tai chi. Fear of negative consequences is the largest motivator for change.

Positive-driven change: People understand that they can continue feeling good and stay healthy well into their old age if they make lifestyle changes. They investigate such options as tai chi, meditation, exercise, dietary changes and supplements. Establishing a new rhythm of practicing tai chi on a schedule will help you change established habits and mindsets. It will help greatly if you can do the following three things as you start tai chi:

1. Find a teacher who has a regular class or a local practice group near your home (your desire to attend will decrease exponentially as the distance you need to travel increases)
2. Commit to attending class regularly for 2-3 months *no matter what*
3. Adopt a beginners mind, not judging yourself or comparing yourself with other practitioners

Creating a new habit is not difficult, but it requires that you wake up a bit. A tai chi practice can help you to live in the present moment—not the past, not the future, but right now. Tai chi also develops your attention and awareness.

Many forces in our culture have steered many people away from taking responsibility for their health and adopting better habits.

Advertisers continually target us with products and services that are designed to bring instant “self-improvement” – get rid of cellulite, grow more hair, trim tummies, smooth wrinkles ... the list is almost endless.

Worse, we are told there is a pill or ointment or procedure for every ailment. The more you can avoid the ‘heal in a weekend’ mentality and look at tai chi as a lifelong practice that allows you to own your physical, mental and spiritual cultivation, the more likely you will be to stick with it to see the results.

Because of this conditioning, many people confuse their internal lives with stuff they can buy. Tai chi is a direct method for helping you retrieve your health and reduce stress. It’s not some magic elixir ... well, it is, but one you must create yourself, not one you can buy, drink and sit back and get results from. It will give you the personal power and inner strength to stay healthy and follow your inner compass.

Energy practices from China are designed to help people become aware of what is inside their body, mind and spirit. Over time you will tune in to how you feel physically, mentally, emotionally, energetically and spiritually. As you do this you have a great opportunity to become a more alive and more conscious human being.

Seven Stages of Learning

Generally, it takes about 30 days of continuous practice to establish a new habit. Taking classes three or four times a week helps develop that new rhythm. Classes provide a good practice environment and the teachers and students provide a nurturing support system.

Practice in class also helps students become aware of the abundance of qi. During this stage, it is important for the teacher to explain the differences between external and internal practices and what the process of learning is likely to be as well as telling students what they might expect to encounter emotionally and what to do about it.

The teacher should also explain the challenges of tai chi, which include:

- Remembering the physical movements
- Slowing down and maintaining the 70 percent rule
- Not comparing their learning rates to others
- Letting go of competitiveness
- Feelings of awkwardness
- Problems with established self-image.

Having taught tai chi and qigong to more than 15,000 students, I have identified seven distinct stages that my students have gone through in learning and adopting tai chi into their daily lives.

STAGE 1: GET IN THE GAME

Students talk to their friends and health and fitness practitioners. They read books and research on the Internet about practices that can help them achieve their goals. They find something that rings true intellectually or emotionally—it seems right, it makes sense or they think it will solve their particular problems. They look for intellectual confirmation to bolster their view and narrow their choices to a few. Others might jump right into a class without asking any questions.

STAGE 2: SEEING WHAT FITS

In this stage, many people research what teachers and classes are available. They may take an introductory class or weekend seminar and talk with students and teachers. They may purchase a video and try a practice on their own. They find out about the challenges involved and then must make a decision if it is something they want to do. They are going beyond the idea of what they ‘think’ tai chi is to ‘feeling’ what it is like to learn and practice.

STAGE 3: COMMITTING TO A CLASS

In this stage, some people begin to commit to a class several times a week. External factors matter, such as the setting of the class and the personalities of the teacher and other students play a big factor whether the practice seeds and become part of the person's life, or if the class is just a one-off experiment that did not stick. Often with the right class and right teacher, many become hooked and start to love the art of tai chi.

STAGE 4: PRACTICING OUTSIDE OF CLASS

There is an ancient phrase that tai chi teachers like to quote: "The teacher leads you to the gate, but only you can pass through it." At some point, students must take their tai chi practice unto themselves and make it their own, which begins with practice outside of class.

The teacher will ask students to practice in order to progress. At first, beginners will feel happy to learn the basic movements and get better at them. But, the bigger challenge is to learn them well enough to feel their impacts deep inside the body and mind and develop the new inner rhythms that will lead to adopting tai chi as a daily practice.

When students begin to practice outside of class their practice is often erratic. There is no support from their teacher or other students when they encounter moments of forgetfulness or awkwardness.

There are also the very real challenges of encountering negative emotions without anyone to provide guidance. In addition, there is the inherent slowness of the process in learning and remembering the moves and feeling the benefits. The best strategy for success at this stage is for students to find a consistent time and place to practice—a time that is held apart and becomes routine and inviolable in a place where the practice cannot be interrupted. If the student can find other to practice with even better as it can be more enjoyable and you can keep each other accountable.

STAGE 5: COMMITTING TO MASTERY

Students have stuck to the class long enough to learn basic movements and have developed the practice habits that bring about new internal rhythms. While practicing tai chi, there will be breakthrough moments when new plateaus are reached. In these moments students suddenly feel more agile and alive; their minds and spirits have moments of great clarity and focus; they feel moments of total relaxation combined with a new ability to handle tensions and anxieties. They recapture the sheer joy of learning they once had as children.

What is Mastery? In an art like tai chi it is a life-long pursuit and one that need not be rushed. Once a person has decided to practice for excellence a different energy shows up to support and drive the practice. Those on the path of Mastery often want to teach and share what they know with others.

STAGE 6: FACING CHALLENGES

Movement and energy practices inherently come with difficulties to overcome and pass through. Plateaus may be followed by periods when not much seems to happen, the practice seems to be going nowhere and self-sabotage is likely. This is where students feel their negative karma and the effects of the accumulations of negative emotions.

Some may quit just before a new summit is reached and sink back into self-destructive habits. Tai chi brings practitioners increasingly into contact with their ego and the flow of their energy. When they begin contacting that energy, for better or for worse, they will contact areas of their emotions or thinking that may make them feel out of control. When they start traveling in unfamiliar territory they might become uncomfortable and afraid of working through these feelings. They become fearful of what they may encounter and stop practicing.

One of the warning signs of self-sabotage is disassociation. Students do the movements on automatic pilot and remain unaware of their effects. They will have to make peace with themselves before they can pass through it and head towards the sublime. With diligence and perseverance, students will build a foundation that will effectively and increasingly enable their practice.

STAGE 7: RE-INSPIRATION

In the period that follows a plateau or an encounter with a self-destructive habit, students need approach their practice gently and find ways to challenge themselves with small successes so that their practice inspires them again.

They might try:

- Balancing the sinking of qi to the lower tantien and the raising of qi to the top of your head
- Focusing on relaxing particular body parts while doing the movements, such as softening their shoulders or relaxing their stomachs
- Making the movements more connected and smooth
- Doing movements extremely slowly
- Practicing one movement over and over
- Relaxing into one posture and holding it for a minute or more

Thinking of ways to continuously re-inspire themselves will keep the practice fresh and alive. Satisfaction must come from the inside and increasingly this is what the practice of tai chi can provide.

SECTION 3: ASSESSING TEACHERS AND YOUR APPROACH

What is a Tai Chi Lineage?

I was once asked how I want to be remembered in 100 years. I don't particularly care if I am remembered. I do hope however that what I teach is remembered. This is the concept of carrying on a lineage, the living tradition of the art that maintains its vitality over centuries and millennia. I have never officially accepted any 'disciples,' although I do have a handful of senior students who over many years have put in many practice hours to become excellent teachers in their own right.

The novelty of tai chi in the west, like yoga before it, has left the field open to celebrities and self-proclaimed gurus. This demeans the lineage. I continually tell students to focus on the work. It is not about me. There is an old Taoist saying, "leave no footsteps."

Lineage is important because it honors and preserves the material which runs like a river through generations. The closer to the original source of the transmission, the more pure the techniques and the better chance there is of maintaining the flow.

When a lineage is passed down, the highest standard of practice is expected to be maintained down the line. This was so that the outer and inner teaching – the form and function -- would not get diluted over time. Often this honor was only bestowed onto one or two people. Why? The most obvious answer is that few have the talent and dedication necessary to fully actualize the teachings.

My Training and Tai Chi Lineages

I began tai chi in the mid-1960s. In 1981 I became the first American certified to teach tai chi throughout all of China by the Chinese government. I've studied the Yang, Wu, and Chen styles from some of the greatest masters and practitioners in the world. From this experience and knowledge I have taught over 20,000 students and trained 500+ instructors worldwide.

In the Wu style, I studied with Liu Hung Chieh, who was an inner door, in-house student of the person who founded the Wu style. I also studied the Yang style, starting with Chen Man Ching, then later with Yang Shoujung, the great grandson of the original Yang, from where the name, Yang style tai chi, derives.

I studied the Chen style of tai chi with Feng Zhiqiang, who was the last and youngest student of Ch'en Fa-k'e, who brought tai chi out of the Chen village, where tai chi originated, and into Beijing in 1928. Master Feng until

his recent passing in 2012 was the head of all tai chi throughout all of China.

If you are interested in my story you can read more about my teachers by visiting the Energy Arts website here: <http://www.energyarts.com/internal-arts-masters>

All my teachers have been important, but I must emphasize my gratitude to Liu Hung Chieh, who taught very few people and whose lineage forms the main basis of my teaching.



Bruce Frantzis works with his main teacher, the late Taoist Lineage Master Liu Hung Chieh, in Beijing, China.

All “Masters” Are Not the Same

While the term has been used for millennia in China, the title of “Master” is often thrown around loosely in the West, without much regard to its true definition and meaning.

It is very useful to know the different skill levels within any sport or movement form like tai chi, especially for a student who is looking for a tai chi instructor or a tai chi “master.” Once students know what they are looking for they can know what to ask for, saving them from going down the wrong path or not achieving their full potential.

This is the dilemma that confounds many inexperienced people looking for a tai chi teacher. They do not understand that tai chi is a very sophisticated and carefully constructed body-mind training, which, with practice, deepens and has a profound effect on health, emotions and longevity.

Tai chi affects the insides of the body and mind in ways that are not obvious and are even counterintuitive to those who have not learned from a good teacher. More is required of a skilled tai chi teacher than one teaching an intellectual skill, such as mathematics or English. When students are working with qi development and personal internal growth, intellectual knowledge alone is insufficient.

The level of the teacher's personal accomplishments also determines their capacity to transmit these qualities to another. The universal spiritual qualities of teaching intricate body-mind relationships mandate that teachers be able to embody and communicate the qualities they teach non-verbally.

The challenge today with regard to tai chi is not in finding someone to instruct you, but rather finding someone who has been *authentically* trained. There are many teachers out there who have gone to a weekend workshop and then start teaching. (Can you imagine a medical student going to a weekend workshop and then practicing the next week?).

Unfortunately, there is no equivalent to a consumer's guide to help you choose among the thousands of tai chi instructors and there are few true masters currently teaching in the West.

Five Levels of Credentials

There are no black belts or other obvious markers of competence in tai chi. Nevertheless, in China, there is a long-established hierarchy of learning and teaching that progresses in five levels:

LEVEL 1—BASIC MOVEMENTS AND BODY ALIGNMENTS

Beginning students study until they are competent in the basic movements and body alignments. The overwhelming majority of China's active tai chi instructors belong in this category.

LEVEL 2—INTENSIVE STUDY

Junior students study regularly for at least five years with a master and actively practice for at least 10 years. Their advancement to the next level depends on natural talent, hard work and other factors.

LEVEL 3—STUDY DIRECTLY WITH A MASTER

Senior students take classes with a master several days a week—if not daily—for at least a decade.

LEVEL 4—FORMAL DISCIPLE WITH SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGE

Masters are the *formal* disciples of lineage holders. They receive the deepest and most secretive levels of specialized knowledge available in tai chi.

Masters can be truly exceptional at some but not necessarily all aspects of tai chi.

LEVEL 5—LINEAGE HOLDER

In a particular style of tai chi or martial arts tradition, lineage holders are disciples who over time are chosen and specifically trained in the entire

tradition to hold all, not only selected parts, of the tradition and the knowledge of the previous lineage holder.

Although some masters are beginning to issue teaching credentials to students who have passed instructor trainings, **which have varying degrees of authenticity**, the vast majority of available tai chi teachers lack such credentials, much less the competency to offer such credentials. I have certified only Level 1 and 2 Instructors, as well as identifying Senior Instructors, who have been studying with me between 10 and 30 years. Each Senior Instructor has attained the highest levels of competence in numerous Energy Arts programs.

Tai Chi as an Effective Martial Art

In the nineteenth century, tai chi proved itself to be an exceptionally effective, practical fighting art. Tai chi teaches the timing, fighting strategies, and presence of mind necessary to succeed in unrehearsed fighting with someone who has aggressive lethal intent and cannot be psychologically dissuaded.

Until the 1920s, the martial side of tai chi was normally emphasized. However, a shift occurred during the 1930s, and tai chi began to be taught purely from the perspective of health and longevity. From that time forward, many teachers downplayed or completely eliminated its use as a fighting art.

Today, only a small number of practitioners are sufficiently skilled in using tai chi's martial arts techniques to effectively teach how to counteract even the most severe violent circumstances. However, there are some teachers who can show a few of the fighting applications either with or without making martial arts the main focus of the class. Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of tai chi teachers and practitioners do not know the martial arts aspects, and therefore you cannot expect them to teach you tai chi as a practical fighting art.

Tai Chi Push Hands

Many tai chi teachers will bring in some form of gentle, non-threatening Push Hands into their classes because it is an effective tool for training relaxation. Relatively few teachers, however, know how to use Push Hands specifically as a realistic self-defense training tool. Push Hands eventually can become as intense and rough as any contact sport.

In Push Hands, you and your partner's hands or arms touch and ideally remain in contact during the entire exercise through three basic progressive stages.

1. The weight of both practice-partners alternately shifts completely from the front to the back leg. Partners usually move forwards during attack and backwards during defense.

2. Both partners continuously turn their hips and waist from the front to the side, in coordination with attack and defense moves. This is the first step in unifying the power of the whole body for maximum physical efficiency.
3. As both partners move back and forth, their hands, forearms, elbows, shoulders, and possibly even hips engage in gentle or very serious attack and defense flows. Ideally all movements are much more circular than linear.

Neither partner tries to hit or kick the other, only to unbalance and push. Only in the most martially orientated Push Hands styles, like the Chen style, is it permissible to also throw or apply joint-locks. All Push Hands is done standing up, albeit at times in a very deep crouch. No wrestling on the ground, pins, strangles, or other mat work techniques are involved.

The goal is not to use overt muscular strength to overcome your partner. Rather it is to rely on relaxation, intent, awareness, sensitivity, and moving qi energy through your body to produce the subtle yet significant physical power necessary either to withstand an opponent's onslaught, or to project power from your body to uproot your opponent.

The basic circular Push Hands strategy is "one half of the circle defends and the second half attacks. For defense, the focus is on grounding (rooting), deflecting, or yielding. Then, this focus shifts quickly and the

goal becomes to counter by returning your opponent's force back to him or her, by unbalancing or pushing rather than hitting or throwing as in jujitsu or karate.

You may wonder if you must learn self-defense to get the health benefits of tai chi. The simple answer to this is no. However, knowing some simple fighting or self-defense applications for each move will help you remember some of tai chi's choreography and how to string the moves together in longer and longer sequences.

Simple fighting applications help you remember how to move qi from point A to point B in your body, both within each move and in the transitions between them. It is difficult for anyone not trained in movement or dance arts to remember long sequences of relatively complex movements, much less the even more complex energetic movements. The traditional and effective way the more qualified teachers were trained was by showing how specific postures would be used for self-defense.

Your intent moves your qi. Thinking of either hitting or deflecting physical attacks with hands or feet automatically activates your intent, thereby moving your qi to the desired location, provided that you have learned the necessary steps. At first, most people have trouble remembering and then visualizing all the movements and technical energetic details. Self-defense metaphors are more easily remembered than other memory techniques.

For those who abhor anything that resembles violence, it is worth considering that if you have no violence in your heart, internal visualizations (mental pictures) of self-defense moves do not create the seeds of future violent intent. Rather, they become schematics for moving qi and thereby benefit your health and spiritual wellbeing.

Emotional Self-Defense

Emotions, in balanced proportions and at appropriate times, make life smoother and more enjoyable. However, when your emotional balance is greatly disturbed you may involuntarily hurt yourself and others, either physically or emotionally.

Tai chi generally, and Push Hands specifically, physically and psychologically help balance your emotions by smoothing out the excessive secretions from your internal organs that make you pre-disposed to certain damaging emotions.

Taoist philosophical principles of tai chi are very real and accessible to the practitioner. These pieces of ancient wisdom carry over into the psychological arena and offer excellent tools to soften the potential emotional shocks and blows of life. These principles are useful on many levels for our modern, stressed out, world.

Excessive aggression often can make you uncontrollably angry. Anger can

cause you to say and do things impulsively that you may later regret, with a stressful level of force many don't appreciate. Because you can't emotionally slow down and understand what is going on, you may not look before you leap. The stressful emotional havoc that anger can wreak on yourself or others, either through lost friendships, unsatisfying relationships, creating enemies, or the desire of others to get even with you, is physically and emotionally debilitating. The emotionally softening tai chi principles of "following and yielding to an opponent's force" can help circumvent the endless emotionally painful situations that fill the lives of many.

Emotional bullying is common. Without being obvious, the yield to force principle can enable you to psychologically refuse an emotional bully a solid place to hit, control, or coerce you into doing something to which you fundamentally object. Another tai chi quality, *strength within softness*, makes many bullies lose interest in using emotional force on you, as they intuitively know it will not be worth the trouble. Listening to and interpreting your opponent's force or energy trains the emotionally unperceptive (those who are constantly putting their foot in it), to become more sensitive and aware.

SECTION 4: CHOOSING A STYLE

The Appropriate Tai Chi Style for You

Choosing a style to learn closely follows in importance the question of from whom you learn. In both cases one key factor is considering *why* you want to learn tai chi. Essentially, all tai chi styles have far more similarities than differences. All improve health, reduce stress and help you move more gracefully. All develop chi, and all incorporate flowing, circular movements, usually in slow motion.



One of the major differences among styles is “frame,” which refers to size of their external movements – the positions of the arms in relation to the body, for example – and their energy development techniques. There also can be differences whether or not explosive, fast movements are incorporated, as is the case with the Chen Style (although all styles have fast forms), or sequences of movements through which tai chi techniques are practiced.

While most practitioners choose to learn based on the quality of the teacher, the convenience of the school and other personal factors, knowing a bit about the styles will upgrade and guide your knowledge.

The Five Major Styles of Tai Chi

Each style has a different syllabus, structure and flavor to the application of its techniques. All five styles can give you tai chi's health benefits.

Four of tai chi's five major styles—all except the combination styles—derive their name from the founder's surname. Historically, tai chi has been referred to as of the Yang Family, Wu Family, Chen Family and Hao Family.

Each style takes a different approach toward specific movements and many variations are contained in each school. Each school is composed of practitioners who follow specific leaders or teachers within the style. Their forms may have recognizable stylistic differences, trademark movements or develop specific self-defense techniques. Let's look at the five major styles:

Yang Style Tai Chi

Yang style tai chi is the most popular and widely practiced tai chi style worldwide. In England and the U.S., at least 20 main variations of the Yang style exist, and in China there are even more. The various schools

originated from the approach of different masters and from different regions within China. Each variation has a distinct flavor, looks different from the others to a greater or lesser degree and may emphasize different technical points. All, however, will be called Yang . Generally, Yang style is done in a medium frame.

[Click here to see Bruce Frantzis doing Yang style tai chi.](#)

Wu Style Tai Chi

Wu style tai chi is the second most popular style. It has three main variations with strong stylistic differences that derived from the founder, Chuan You, his son, Wu Jien Chuan, and his grandchildren.

Wu style tai chi was created directly from the Yang style and, as such, is the largest variant of the Yang style. However, unlike most traditions in the Yang style, most Wu schools emphasize small, compact movements over large or medium-sized ones. Yang and Wu style practitioners, with all their variations, encompass the vast majority (80 percent or more).

[Click here to see a video of Bruce Frantzis doing Wu Style Tai Chi](#)

Chen Village Style

Chen Village style tai chi is the original style of tai chi from which the Yang style was created. It is relatively hard to find Chen style teachers and

adherents account for about one percent of tai chi practitioners. Chen style is medium to large frame.

Unlike most tai chi, not all the movements of the Chen Style's first level of training are done in slow motion. The Chen style alternates slow-motion movements with short, fast, explosive ones. It demands more physical coordination and may strain the lower back and knees more than other styles; consequently it is difficult for the elderly or injured to learn.

The complexity of its movements, which include fast releases combined with jumping kicks and stamping actions, makes it more athletic and physically difficult than most other tai chi styles and, as such, is often more appealing to young people.

[Click here to see Bruce Frantzis demonstrating the Chen Style](#)

Hao Style Tai Chi

Hao style tai chi is exceedingly rare in China and almost non-existent in the West. Its frame is extremely small. Its primary focus is on tai chi's more internal qi movements with physical motions being much less important. As such, it is considered an advanced style that is difficult for practitioners without significant background knowledge of tai chi to appreciate.

Combination Styles of Tai Chi

Combination styles are the third most popular, after Yang and Wu styles. These styles freely mix and match movements from the four other tai chi styles as well as movements from other internal martial arts styles, such as bagua and hsing-i. A popular combination style of tai chi, Sun style tai chi, which was created by Sun Lu Tang, amalgamates the Hao style with hsing-I and bagua.

Choice of Frames

Once you have chosen a style of tai chi, another factor comes into play. Generally, each style emphasizes a frame, and this, along with the way they develop energy and technique, is a key element of picking a good fit for your own practice.

Each style has versions with different frame sizes. *Frame* is used in the sense of the size of a picture frame. Smaller physical movement fits in smaller frames; larger ones need larger frames.

A frame may be looked at from two basic perspectives:

1. How large do you make your external movements?

Large frame styles have obvious extended arm movements with large waist turns and long deep stances. Small frame styles condense the

movements, using relatively small and subtly intricate arm movements, medium to small waist turns and shorter stances. These shorter stances usually stand higher although they can go as low as the most stretched-out large frame stances.

In a large frame style movement your hand, wrist or elbow may move 30 inches in space, but only 5-10 inches in a similar small frame style. In large and medium frame styles your waist may turn a full 90 degrees completely to the side, but only half that amount, 45 degrees or less, in a small frame style.

2. How do you develop qi?

Large frame styles emphasize correct external movements and naturally focus your attention to the space outside yourself. The initial strategy is to focus your attention on the muscles, tendons and alignments needed to maintain your skeleton's structural integrity. This is done in order to ultimately influence your deeper bodily systems and the creation of qi within you. From the external to the internal, the outside opening the inside.

Small frame styles use a more internal approach. They emphasize correct movement of qi through the deeper internal systems inside your body—including the spine, internal organs and spaces within the joints—to create correct and efficient physical movements and body alignments.

Some people and body types may prefer the long extended movements of large frame styles; others may find the compact, less extended, close movements of medium and smaller frame styles more appropriate.

It is slightly more common for long-limbed body types to gravitate toward the extended movements of large frame styles and for those with shorter limbs or a longer torso to prefer small and medium frame styles. Although all frame styles stretch the muscles and make the body more flexible, the large frame strategy is to focus on outer stretching. Hands and feet extend farther and farther away from your torso creating a lengthening effect, just as in a leg split where the lower you go the more you stretch. However, deeper, longer stances may aggravate the knees and back for some body types.

Small frame styles focus more on inner stretching—releasing internal organs and ligaments while increasing the spaces between your vertebrae and within your joints. All this occurs simultaneously without extending your hands and feet very far away from your torso. Small styles have an inner orientation and tend to release bound or stagnant energy faster. They make it easier for you to focus on the emotional realities you live with consciously or unconsciously.

Choosing the Appropriate Form Length

Each style contains a number of individual or repeated movements (postures) called a form or set. The postures are connected by smooth transitions that create a seamless flow. While styles generally have a dominant frame, they all have a variety of form lengths — short, medium and long — and these forms may be similar or radically different.

Medium and short forms originate from their style's long form. Short forms usually have 15 to 40 movements, medium forms between 40 and 70, and long forms 80 or more movements, some of which repeat.

Most forms practiced for health and stress reduction are done slowly. Although the vast majority of tai chi schools only teach slow-motion forms, a few schools from all tai chi styles teach forms that alternate slow-motion moves with fast ones.

Generally, the longer a form, the deeper it works its benefits into your body and the greater the commitment it demands. Shorter forms require less commitment from you in terms of practice and learning.

Short Tai Chi Forms

Most beginners are better served starting off with a short form, which they are more likely to finish and practice. After a little grounding in the art, it is more likely you will acquire the interest and desire to learn longer forms.

Short forms provide most of the essential broad benefits tai chi can offer, although not to the same degree as the long forms. The perk is that you obtain the real experience of doing tai chi without having to make a major commitment in terms of learning or practicing; you can maintain the practice in only minutes a day. And because short forms take less time to learn and the sequences are easier to remember, they are ideal for older people who may have less stamina or are beginning to experience memory problems.

Medium-Length Tai Chi Forms

Medium-length forms of between 40 and 70 movements are most commonly found in the Yang and Chen styles. They tend to contain most of the postures (moves) of a long form, but don't repeat specific postures as many times as long forms do. Because they have significantly more individual movements than short forms, they challenge your physical coordination skills more. However, they require less stamina and time than long forms.

Medium-length forms are better than short ones in terms of the number of different postures, which reach deeper into the body. As you go deep into the body you stretch soft tissue— tendons, ligaments and fasciae— and increase range of motion.

Long Tai Chi Forms

Long forms provide tai chi's maximum benefits. Long forms are designed to *exponentially* increase the flow of qi at regular intervals during the form. Unlike short forms, the long forms of the Yang, Wu and combination styles are divided into three clear sections.

At the end of each movement phase your energy revs up to a higher level. In other words, the more movements there are the bigger volume of energy you accrue per minute of your practice routine. There is an even bigger jump experienced in energy accrual when you do a long form's second and final sections.

Long forms require the most work, commitment and perseverance and are initially more difficult to learn. Some find it hard to remember what move comes next, especially if they do not have someone to follow or have not practiced for a while.

“Energetically, each new and different individual posture provides added benefits to your whole body's qi circulation.”

How Long Does It Take to Do a Form?

For health and stress reduction the forms are done at four degrees of slow-motion speed. From start to finish, using a standard baseline of a 108-movement long form, a moderately fast degree of slow motion would need 15 minutes; slow motion, 25 minutes; very slow, 45 minutes; and a super-slow speed, an hour or more. A short form can range from between three and 20 minutes to complete, depending on the number of movements and your practice speed.

Further Considerations: Style, Form, Frame and Length

The styles that are done in slow motion tend to be more effective for healing. The Chen style's explosive movements, which are regularly interspersed throughout the form, can jar the joints and spine.

This tends to make it less effective for healing in general, and for back problems specifically. All styles work equally well for healing musculoskeletal and internal organ problems due to weakness or energetic imbalance.

For problems caused by external physical, chemical or psychological trauma, the small frame, deeply internal styles tend to be more effective. This is due to their ability to release stuck energy deep in the body, which normal movement alone usually will not unravel.

The Best Style for Beginners

If a style is naturally more comfortable and easier for you to learn and remember, you are more likely to finish learning it, remember the order of the moves and practice it on your own. As such, the following points should be considered when choosing a style:

- The physical coordination skills of the Yang, Wu and Hao styles are usually the easiest to learn, combination styles are in the middle and the Chen style is the most difficult.
- If your body is extremely tight and your goal is to get stretched out, the large styles of tai chi will initially work faster, especially for the legs and hips. However, the smaller styles will also get the same job done over time.
- For those with a bad lower back or injured knees, forms with higher stances are better. Smaller frame styles tend to have higher stances. Deeper, longer stances, more common in large frame styles, can aggravate the knees and back. If your knees are in good shape, deeper, longer stances can make your legs stronger at a faster speed.
- Large styles initially make it easier to develop leg strength because of their longer and deeper stances.

- Smaller styles make it easier to access the more internal work tai chi has to offer, including making it easier to work directly with the internal organs.

The Best Style for People over Fifty

The slow motion, short form styles are generally best for people over age 50 because they take longer to learn movements than younger people.

The key however, is a person's cognitive function, which can be fairly intact even into the mid-70s. Once the function becomes impaired, something with less movements, and maybe even qi gong, with simpler movements, is a better bet.

When I was in Beijing studying with Feng Zhiqiang, he had students who didn't start with him until they were in their 60s or 70s. None of them did any of the fast, shaking, vibrating movements that exist in Chen style tai chi. Stamping your feet on the ground, jumping in the air and doing a kick; what goes up must come down, and with that comes a shock. Feng would encourage students not to do any of these movements, at least not until their body reached a certain point of strength.



Slow motion, smooth movement forms that have no potential shock factor to the physical body are ideal for seniors.

Therefore, beginning with a short form and learning a long form later on, if desired, is a less frustrating and easier path for older people to enjoy, absorb and remember tai chi.

For elders, the bigger movements of large frame styles may be easier to remember initially and the smaller styles more fascinating, once you have some tai chi background.

Tai Chi is 5% External, 95% Internal

The real question when looking at a person doing tai chi is, “Do they have qi in their tai chi?” I teach a course called *Get More Chi in Your Tai Chi* because I have found that so few students know the basic energetic principles that form the foundation of a solid tai chi practice.

If you have the physical movements correct but are not getting the energy to flow, then you are missing out on many of the benefits of tai chi and simply doing a physical exercise.

It is important to find a competent teacher and to learn how to feel, move and store energy. Learning to do this will take time but will be well worth the rewards: better health and more aliveness.

“Tai chi is about energetic fitness and the measuring stick is how well your qi is flowing.”

Initially, having a teacher who just knows the movements and alignments will be enough to get you started. However, if you do tai chi for self-defense or high performance, it is important that your teacher—whatever style he or she teaches—includes some degree of internal qi work in order for you to get the maximum benefit from your practice.

SECTION 5: HIGHER LEVELS OF PRACTICE

Subtle Energy: Qi Development and the Heart-Mind

For most of human history the higher arts of learning how qi energy works have mostly been kept secret and only shared with a privileged few. These ancient traditional barriers are beginning to break down, so that access is becoming more openly shared.

Nevertheless, the work itself can be definitely challenging. Developing qi can sound deceptively easy, in much the same way that golf can sound easy—you just hit a ball through the air and tap it into a hole in the ground, right? But when its components are clearly laid out one can begin to see the complexity.

The basic tai chi principle at work here, *the mind moves the qi*, is the process of how human beings can influence their qi from within. This occurs in two ways.

The first is through the normal use of awareness, will and intent. This is the entry point of practice. Here, your mind has a specific goal of what you want to have happen. You then, without tension, gently focus your will and intent like a laser to accomplish X or Y. This is the way to acquire a foundation and then progressively advance, step-by-step, one stage building on the next until you reach a high level of qi development.

“Tai chi helps you to profoundly relax—physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually—so that joy and compassion can flourish.”

The second is the Heart-Mind, where the energy art of tai chi comes alive. The Heart-Mind is the center of consciousness in the body, located in the center of the chest next to the physical heart. Here, rational intellectual thoughts and what we call the emotional feelings of the heart are one. In the Heart-Mind, there is no schism between the talking head and heart-felt wisdom. The Heart-Mind is what makes human beings more than just jumbled emotions or biological thinking machines.

The Heart-Mind functions before the specific conscious intent to do something arises. The Heart-Mind merely has a general tendency or possibility. It is diffuse rather than goal-orientated. It flashes with an intelligence that shines before words and intellectual descriptions monopolize your awareness. It also gives your intention the power to function well.

Although intent or will enables you to achieve focused goals, using it exclusively is often myopic and devoid of balance. For example, the conscious or unconscious sense of how to achieve your goals often leads either to positive or negative ramifications that can affect your whole being as well as your inner and external environments.

The Heart-Mind allows you to see the whole forest of consequences; using the intent only allows you to see clumps of trees. It is not at the level of intent but at the level of the Heart-Mind that inner peace, emotional balance, intuition and spiritual insight arise.

It is said that you only can go as high in tai chi as your foundation is solid and deep. Developing qi, by its very nature, progresses from the gross (which is easier) to the subtle (which is more difficult).

It will be most useful if you have a teacher who is willing and able to teach qi work from the start, even if you can't yet feel the qi energy inside you. You can simply imagine your qi moving in line with the specific recommendations your teacher gives, so that over time you can develop a sense of it. This will help you benefit even more from the physical exercises.

How qi works can be intellectually described. However, like love, it has a subtle mysterious quality that must be experienced for it truly to make sense. When encountering the *qi* of tai chi, it will most reliably happen through a series of basic processes on which different teachers have different views.

Two Phases of Qi Development

Upon recognizing what your own qi feels like, you begin two separate phases that synergistically work with each other. The first is centered on your central nervous system. Having gained the experience of putting your mind (awareness) into your muscles, you now learn to put it into your nerves. Relaxing and releasing the nerves themselves enables you to recognize the constant buzz that runs through your entire nervous system.¹

Most of us are not aware of this ever-present stressful buzz because it has become so normal. This buzz is a sure sign that your nervous system is either beginning to rev up (like a car going from 0–60 miles per hour in a few seconds), or even worse, has been locked habitually into a constant rev. This rev or buzz is how stress seeps through and hardens into your body. You now focus on ways to re-soften this nervous buzz inside you and progressively relax and release it from your nerves.

With a growing capacity to relax, you move into the second phase. Here you want to release the more-subtle nervous buzz of blocked qi inside all your body's tissues. Progressively, step-by-step, you find and release the rev in your joints, blood flow, spinal system, internal organs and glands.

¹ Yang style tai chi teacher, T.T. Liang, wrote a book that poetically describes this process, *Imagination Becomes Reality* (Dragon Door Publications, 1992).

Each stage of releasing the rev from your bodily systems makes your body more awake. This takes you into more subtle and powerful experiences of what it means and feels like for your body to be fully alive.

Releasing Stagnant Qi

An essential part of recognizing and releasing the buzz inside your nervous system is to release any stagnant qi. This may happen naturally as your tai chi improves or because you learn to apply various techniques from the 16-part neigong system, the secret of tai chi and the family of internal arts, to specifically address stagnant qi issues.

Neigong methods within tai chi that resolve stagnant qi situations include:

- Getting the balance right between sinking your qi to the lower tantien (a center of energy roughly under and behind your belly button)
- Clearing stagnant energy from the central, left, right or other channels of the body.
- Working with various openings and closings so that when you are pulsing between opening and closing you don't get stuck on either end of the pulse.

Resolving stagnant qi conditions can become major ongoing projects.

Tai Chi Postures and Specific Energy Flows

It is important to know that individual postures (movements) have specific qi flows, as do four or more linked moves. The qi flows of these linked movements have specific internal rhythms, which together create a certain kind of qi. Small series of movements benefit the body's overall qi in specific ways. Individual postures create specific qi flows within particular parts of the body.

Intermittently, you may get spontaneous insights into how specific energy flows work. Initially, however, impressions are usually more vague and imprecise, or just out of reach. You sense you know but aren't quite sure how.

You can make your qi flow in various specific ways. For example:

- Inside to outside, outside to inside
- Up to down, down to up
- Left to right, right to left
- Towards or away from the spine, lower tantien, or central channel of energy
- Within the energetic space or aura around your body
- Between the physical body and the boundary of the aura.

Chi flows may stay focused only within the physical body to the edges of your skin, or may extend into the external space around your body, commonly called the bioelectric field, etheric body or aura.

Supercharge Your Tai Chi with the 16 Neigong Components

Taoist monks developed their qi to maintain superior health, heal illness and realize profound inner stillness and spirituality. Later their work created neigong, which became what is often called qigong today and formed the energetic foundation of the internal martial arts of bagua, tai chi and hsing-i.

These ancient methods, which have been kept relatively secret for millennia, have immense depth. With good teachers, they may be communicated on a surface, medium or very deep level.

Each one of the components of neigong could merit a very large book of its own. Each component forms a segment of a continuous circle, where there is no definitive starting or ending point and each is organically connected to the rest. The order in which these are written and described in my books is not fixed or linear, only descriptive.

As it is impossible to state the precise beginning or end of a circle, so the 16 neigong components also have neither a beginning nor end point. As such,

each and every time you go around the circle of 16, it becomes possible to go to a deeper, more fulfilling and beneficial level with each individual component.

The complete neigong system can be made accessible for an ordinary person, although it is generally only known or taught by tai chi martial arts masters. Any individual tai chi school may know or teach a few of the components, all of them or none. Some are comfortable teaching the 16-part neigong system openly, others only in secret. They are:

1. Breathing methods, from the simple to the complex. In regular breathing, your belly expands as you inhale and shrinks when you exhale. In reverse breathing, you do the opposite—shrink your belly when you inhale and expand it when you exhale. Every anatomical part and energetic function within your body and external aura will get larger and smaller in coordination with the expansions and contractions of your belly.
2. Causing qi to travel along all the various ascending, descending, and lateral connecting channels within the body. The whole process includes methods to help you feel your qi so that you can move it smoothly to where it will work most efficiently for varying purposes. Part of this is concerned with how to transform or dissolve and release the qualities of the energies flowing within specified channels.

3. Precise body alignments to prevent the flow of qi from being either blocked or dissipated. From a Western perspective, practicing these principles brings about exceptionally effective biomechanical alignments.
4. Dissolving, releasing, and resolving all blockages of the physical, emotional, and spiritual sides of yourself.
5. Moving qi energy through the main and secondary acupuncture channels, energy gates and points, as well as a multitude of tiny channels that cause specific functions to occur. Many of these are not widely known in the West.
6. Bending and stretching the body's soft tissues from the inside out, from the outside in, and along the direction of the body's yin and yang acupuncture channels.
7. Opening and closing methods. Opening means to expand, grow larger, or flow outwards and emanate like a sun. Closing means to condense inwards, and get smaller along an inward direction of motion, like the gravity flow of a black hole or dwarf star. Closing carries no connotation of tension, contraction, or force in the movement, only continuous inward flow toward a point of origination, like iron filings moving toward a magnet.

Opening and closing actions can occur within any of the body's soft and hard physical tissues. Equally, opening and closing can occur anywhere within the body's subtle energy anatomy (channels, points, aura, etc).

8. Working with the energies of the external aura (etheric body), as they interchange and connect both with the contents of the physical body and non-physical mental states; equally, going beyond the personal to the connections between the physical body, aura, and the rest of the psychic and spiritual forces and flows that exist within the universe.
9. Generating circles and spirals of energy inside your body that have been almost entirely dormant, as well as amplifying and controlling the flow of these currents that are already naturally operating well.
10. Moving qi to any part of your body at will (especially the internal organs, glands, and spots within the brain and spinal cord). This includes absorbing or projecting qi from any body part at will.



Energy Arts students perform Wu Style Tai Chi

11. Awakening and controlling all the energies of the spine, and what they connect to. This includes the vertebrae, cerebrospinal fluid, and the spinal cord itself.
12. Awakening and using the body's left and right energy channels.
13. Awakening and using the body's central energy channel, which ultimately controls all the other channels.

14. Developing the capacities and all the uses of the body's lower tantien, the main energetic center that directly affects all physical functions, our sense of bodily fear or insecurity, including death, and our sense of being stable and grounded in this world.
15. Developing the capacities and all the uses of the body's middle and upper tantien, the "higher" human spiritual centers. The middle tantien, also called the heart center, governs all relationships. It is intimately tied to our most subtle emotions and intuitions, and is considered the source of consciousness within the body. The upper tantien, located within the brain, is critical to longevity because of its ability to activate the master glands of the body, the pituitary and pineal glands. It is also responsible for well-functioning thought processes and potential psychic capacities.
16. Integrating and connecting each of the previous 15 components into one unified energy, physically and otherwise. Permanent integration is different from a temporary buzz, or having a lot of energy that generates strong experiences but ultimately goes nowhere. Lacking number 16, it is difficult to absorb and integrate the good qualities of the other 15 in a stable and comfortable manner.

ABOUT BRUCE FRANTZIS AND ENERGY ARTS

Thank You

It is my hope that the information provided here has been helpful to you, that you now better understand the tai chi world. I invite you to join me at a retreat, workshop or online course in the future. I also invite you to join my mailing list at www.energyarts.com or at www.taichimaster.com.

Thank you and good luck on your tai chi journey.

About Bruce Frantzis

Bruce Frantzis has more than forty years of experience in qigong, healing practices, meditation and martial arts having taught over 15,000 Westerners these practices. Fluent in Chinese and Japanese, he has drawn on 16 years of intensive study in Asia to develop a systematic approach to teaching Taoist energy arts.

The Taoist lineages that Bruce Frantzis holds and teaches today are in the Water tradition of Taoism, which has received little exposure in the West. Part of his lineage empowers and directs him to bring practices based on that tradition to Westerners.

He learned the Chinese language and became immersed in the traditions of China during his training there, which spanned a decade. This has enabled

him to bridge the gap between Chinese culture and the West and to bring living Taoism to Westerners in a way that they can comprehend and learn.

Frantzis studied acupuncture and worked as a qigong therapist and tui na bodyworker in medical clinics in China. In 1981 he was the first Westerner to be certified in Beijing by the People's Republic of China to teach the complete system of Tai Chi Chuan. Frantzis has studied with some of the greatest masters of Hong Kong, Taiwan, Mainland China and Japan including Kenichi Sawai, Morihei Ueshiba and Han Hsing Yuan (I Chuan); Wang Shu Jin and Hung I Hsiang (bagua and hsing-i); Yang Cheng Fu's eldest son Yang Shao Jung, T. T. Liang, Lin Du Ying and Feng Zhi Qiang (Yang and Chen style tai chi).

In 1981, Frantzis was accepted as one of only two disciples of the late Taoist Sage Liu Hung Chieh. Prior to becoming a Taoist Lineage Master, Liu had been declared enlightened by the Tien Tai School of Chinese Buddhism. For several years, Frantzis studied bagua, tai chi, hsing-i, qigong and Taoist meditation daily with Liu in Beijing.

In 1986, Liu formally passed his lineage to Frantzis, empowering him to teach bagua, tai chi and hsing-i, as well as Lao Tse's Water method of Taoist meditation, a practice which had been virtually unavailable to Westerners.

Twenty years of prior training provided a foundation to prepare Frantzis for Liu's teachings. At the age of twelve, Frantzis began his comprehensive study of martial arts, healing therapies and meditation. He earned black belts in judo, karate, jujitsu and aikido by the age of eighteen. To pursue advanced training, he moved to Japan, where he trained for two years with Morihei Ueshiba, the founder of aikido. He then went to China and studied Taoist energy arts for 11 years. Frantzis also spent two years in India studying advanced yoga and Tantric practices.

After the death of Liu Hung Chieh in 1986, Frantzis journeyed back to the United States. He offers workshops and instructor trainings in North America and Europe. Frantzis has personally certified more than 400 instructors worldwide. He has lectured at Oxford University in England and served as an advisor to Harvard University's Qi Research Group.

About Frantzis Energy Arts

Drawing on sixteen years of training in Asia, Bruce Frantzis has developed a practical, comprehensive system of programs that can enable people of all ages and fitness levels to increase their core energy and attain vibrant health.

The Frantzis Energy Arts® system includes six primary qigong courses that, together with the Longevity Breathing® Qigong program, progressively and safely incorporate all the aspects of neigong—the original qi cultivation (qigong) system in China invented by the Taoists.

Core Qigong Practices

The [Core Energy Practices](#) consist of:

- [Longevity Breathing®](#)
- [Dragon and Tiger Medical Qigong](#)
- [Opening the Energy Gates of Your Body™ Qigong](#)
- [Marriage of Heaven and Earth™ Qigong](#)
- [Bend the Bow™ Spinal Qigong](#)
- [Spiraling Energy Body™ Qigong](#)
- [Gods Playing in the Clouds™ Qigong](#)

Books, CDs and DVDs

- Taoist meditation series: [*Relaxing into Your Being*](#), [*The Great Stillness*](#) and [*TAO of Letting Go*](#), [*TAO of Letting Go CDs*](#)
- Qigong: [*Opening the Energy Gates of Your Body*](#) and [*Dragon and Tiger Medical Qigong Instruction Manual*](#), [*Dragon and Tiger DVD Set*](#)
- Internal Martial Arts: [*Tai Chi: Health for Life*](#), [*The Power of Internal Martial Arts and Chi*](#) and [*Bagua and Tai Chi*](#)

Workshops, Retreats and Instructor Training Opportunities

Bruce Frantzis is the founder of Energy Arts, Inc., based in Marin County, California. Energy Arts offers instructor certification programs, retreats and corporate and public workshops and lectures worldwide. For a complete list of Energy Arts events please visit www.energyarts.com/events.

Train with a Certified Instructor

The Energy Arts website contains a directory of all the certified instructors worldwide. To search for Energy Arts Instructors in your area, please visit www.energyarts.com/energy-arts-instructor-community.

Energy Arts Contact Information

Energy Arts, Inc.

P. O. Box 99

Fairfax, CA 94978-0099 USA

Phone: 415.454.5243

Health & Safety Notice

Anyone with medical, emotional or psychological problems should consult a physician or psychotherapist before embarking on these programs.

Energy Arts events are not intended as a substitute for the services of a physician or psychotherapist.

The Frantzis Energy Arts® System provides the tools to increase your core energy and attain vibrant health. Energy Arts offers courses in qigong, internal martial arts, Longevity Breathing Yoga, Taoist meditation and related subjects. These programs are especially valuable for alternative and conventional health practitioners, athletes, martial artists and people looking to enhance other forms of exercise.