

Tai Chi and Togetherness

Practicing tai chi with the intent to improve togetherness must become a study in yielding. Each step of the path thus far: learning the moves, then the form, then energy work, are all ways to quiet the mind. When it comes to our developed skills in yielding, our internal quiet mind is similar to our dominant hand, given it's been our primary focus. I'm asking you to change your focus to developing the non-dominant skill of yielding to others.

My Tai Chi Cairns:

1. Learn the **shape** and **name** of movements
2. Learn the **sequence** and **variations** in forms
3. **Internalize** (practice, practice, practice) Develop both the movements and the forms to be as recognizable as your face.
4. 'Add complexity' through **conceptual energy work**. (This step is a bridge between mental and physical.)
5. Develop your **quiet mind**. learn to be present.
6. 'Add complexity' through the art of **yielding** (This step is the bridge between the personal and the social)
7. Practice **Interconnected Joy**

Quiet, a book about introverts and extroverts, describes the way in which all individuals self-regulate the number of stimuli they engage for their *own optimal performance*. We do this with our tai chi practice as noted in steps 1-4. Step 5 is to bring stillness to the pond that is your mind. While we lack the ability to choose the thoughts that come, we can strengthen our ability to let go, stay focused, and keep rooted (hold steel wrapped in cotton). Achieving steps 1-5 we get to experience the timelessness of the present. However, as we repeat (in effort to internalize), the movements, the forms, and the conceptual energy work, we become lazy in familiarity with 'what we know'. At this point **ego** can siphon off little amounts of our consciousness dividing our attention and pulling us out of the present. Split like this, we delegate our actions to muscle-memory and so our minds can be elsewhere. This is how you arrive home without the conscious memory of the drive it took to get there.

From our efforts in achieving and maintaining a quiet mind we learn that ***Yielding is an egoless effort.*** Become the void where ego has no perch. To stay present be active in your tai chi and add complexity where you let go of the now. Maintain your mind/body connection. When practicing, **ask your ego to sit this one out.**

Consider **what is the intent behind this practice.**

- a. To learn the technique and build energy **Steps 1-3**
(apply the tai chi principles to any movement)
- b. To express and play with the energy **steps 4 & 5**(Drift your bliss)
- c. To flow with others. **Steps 6 & 7**(the strong yield to the weak.)

Tai Chi *is* an act of self-growth. ***You are now what you are becoming***

By ***practicing tai chi as a form of meditation***, we stretch our patience like taffy. Through fluid action we maintain our presence in “the now”. We meditate on letting go, a practice in non-attachment. We all self-regulate the number of stimuli necessary in our own individual practices to be better versions of ourselves. (steps 1-5)

Give yourself permission to change roles, make mistakes, try something new. Our growth requires support in other’s growth. How can I be my best self if I cannot also help others be their best selves too? See yourself as part of the whole. Together do we move like a flock of birds in flight, the cells of a beating heart, the throbbing audience at a live concert? How do you imagine our interconnectedness? ***Let our added complexity be the yeast in our ever-growing form.*** (step 6)

Tai chi develops my balance, strength, and flexibility not just during practice, but throughout my daily life. This is also true when I practice to be a part of a larger community. I get to practice joy and expand my access to vitamin L with all of you and everyone else. (step 7)

Possible spaces for growth and discovery:

Consider the imagery that groups of things make, debris in a tornado, the locked embrace of two colonies of ants in a summer battle, the unified bounce of gnats as the air current shifts, the exchange between a snake and crane. How do the tai chi principals apply this mental play to our form?

I asked, “***What do you call a group of tai chi practitioners?***”

Along with many other spirited replies, Allan found the smile that I feel when I am moving with all of you. A **cheer of Chi'ers**. This embodies the joy our practice brings to my day and year.

Two things I can ask you to do to develop your practice with the intent of yielding to others.

1. At the beginning of your practice just after universal post but before move hands like seaweed turn your palms up as if holding the forearms of your mirrored self who is also in horse-stance with you. Internally **ask your ego**, “Thank you for being with me in everything I do, but you deserve rest and what I am about to do does not require your participation. Please sit this time out and I will join you after.” Upon saying this, turn your palms over with the exhale and release. Continue into wave hands like seaweed.
2. This is a practice that happens best at first separate from tai chi. Attempt to use your non dominant hand for simple tasks, but be thorough. When I wash my hands, typically its somewhat of a joint effort between left and right. As part of my practice lately, I intentionally use one hand to wash the other exclusively. Everyone is a benefactor of self-care. The struggle I find is that whether signing my name or the act of bathing, my hands act as two old lovers who work as one relying on long established roles. If I start with my left (non-dominant) hand, my right casually lifts the burden of inexperience by taking away the pen, brush, or bar of soap without either protest from the left or willful intent by me. Familiarity takes over. When I stay present and focused on discovering the new dexterous way I am asking my left hand to move I sometimes find I must first watch my right demonstrate the gesture, such as throwing a ball. This is newness. I must

abandon the familiar and be patient with the new until it feels natural and consistent.

This conversation between the dominant *known* and new, is the void we must direct our focus. This space between what you have to contribute to an exchange and what you have to gain from active listening is the space that growth occurs. Consider those in your peripheral view are speaking to you and those behind you are listening. Discover the yin and yang in your community practice so not to be the one who breaks mid-flow to wait for others moving slower or drop phrases in the telling of your form leaving others lost. Ask yourself, how I am a part of this whole before me. To release ego is to have arms to embrace. Come let's dance.