



The Essex Tai Chi Academy Newsletter Six, April 2018

The bow

There are many variations – pick whichever seems right for you. Although, if you attend more than one class with a different instructor, it is a courtesy to perform the moves as you are advised.

As a reminder, women grasp their left thumb with their right hand; men, their right thumb with their left hand. The reason for this is yin (female energy) is the right side of the body; yang (male energy) is the left. In both cases the hand holding the thumb closes over the other.

The important thing to remember is to stretch outwards with the arms, giving you a good stretch in the back; bend forward from the waist, keeping the legs as straight as possible.

You can touch the forehead with the joined hands, stimulating the opening of the ‘third eye’ at the commencement of the bow, and at the end, signifying that it may rest.

The bow may be performed with the arms making the shape of the yin and yang symbol, acknowledging the two energies that will flow during the set.

The Ten Essences of Tai Chi

In this Newsletter we look again at the ten essences:

1. Lift the head to raise the spirit
2. Lower the shoulders to sink the elbows
3. Soften the chest and curve the back

4. Loosen the waist

If you have managed the first three essences, your body should have started to relax and become softer. This allows you to breathe from your lower abdomen rather than, as we usually do, breathing from the upper areas of the chest. Abdominal breathing allows your breathing to sink to the Tan Tien, your store house of energy and your centre of gravity. All movement comes from this area, making you more grounded and intuitive.

Before you learn to co-ordinate you must learn to separate the top half the body from the bottom half. We do this in 'Turning John', one of the foundation exercises, where we move the arms and waist, but not the hips and legs. Doing this exercise sitting on a chair emphasizes the loosening of the waist.

5. Be aware of weight distribution

Settle into the Commencement stance, and go through the first three essences. There is an energy centre on the spine, level with your tummy button. This helps to send energy to the kidneys and is on the spot where the spine is apt to encourage you to stick your bottom out. So it's better to 'curve' your back the other way. Think of pushing the energy centre in your spine to the inner body. With the correct stance you are ready to become aware of weight distribution.

Use the 'pouring' exercise, where you imagine all the fluids coming up one leg, across the pelvic area and down the other, at the same time taking your weight and balance from one leg to the other. Do this several times, until you become aware of weight distribution. Then settle again into your Commencement stance, being totally aware of your own personal weight balance.

6. Co-ordinate the top and bottom halves of the body.

Mobilization of the whole body is one of the fundamental requirements of Tai Chi.

Beginners usually do tor-yus with the top half of the body, leaving the bottom half (where the strongest muscles are) unused. The more experienced student will use the whole body in their moves.

This is easy to see, as when a move goes forward the knee should stop moving at the same time as your elbow. All moves become one move – not the 108 moves of the set, but one move. If one part of the body finishes before any other (remember the timing on don-yus) then your co-ordination needs improvement!

The remaining Essences, which Judy will cover in the next Newsletter, are:

7. Continuity in movement
8. Unite body and mind
9. Use mind, not force
10. Seek stillness within motion and motion within stillness

Spotlight on Mundon

The Petrified Oak Forest of Mundon – who knew?!

It would be easy to drive through Mundon without paying much attention (apart from when our classes are taking place at the Village Hall!), but you shouldn't ... because Mundon is home to a petrified oak forest (or furze).

The dark and twisted branches of the once-magnificent, centuries-old oak trees were part of a forest used to build ships for the Royal fleet, appear haunting. And don't they look somewhat similar to the Tai Chi figures of Woody Fox Willow?

What caused the oaks' demise? It is believed to be nothing more sinister than a change in the water table. Which is even more haunting when you think of these giants reaching up as the water they rely on slowly drains away, and they no longer change with the seasons but remain frozen in time.



Jackie Figg
In Mundon on Mondays
Tai Chi is performed
Victorious in the Victory Hall
Positive Energy Flowing Through All

Judy Lee-Fenton

I have been attending Mundon Village Hall for classes since the Academy first moved there from Plantation Hall/Quaker Hall about 6 years ago. It's a spacious hall, set on the edge of Mundon woods. Many of you will have attended this venue when we held our recent AGM and workshop. (Which was, I'm glad to say, a very successful all-day session, with an amazing lunch and the launch of our ten-year anniversary celebration T-shirts. It was enjoyed by all who went.)

I attend Wednesday evening classes, which are practice classes for Tai Chi, Lok Hup Ba Fa, Sword and Sabre. I also go on Thursday evenings, when the classes are mostly for Lok Hup, with Sword and Sabre, taken by our Chair, Mary Dann.

On Monday mornings I have the privilege of taking a Continuing Tai Chi Class. I have taken this class now for just over three years, when I inherited it from our late Chair, Michael Baker-Rogers. Just recently, I have started teaching the Set again from the beginning.

Hello, my name is Liz Whyte ...

one of many who enjoy Tai Chi .We are lucky to have a lovely venue in Mundon's village hall, which is well used by the community. Occasionally embellishments, such as coloured cotton, flowers or sequins, appear on the floor, evidence of the hall being well used! Sometimes there's an unusual Tai Chi movement as something sparkly catches our eye and we bend to pick it up – maybe left by the sewing community?

As well as Tai Chi I too love sewing, part of which entails trips to the fabric shops – visits to Tiptree's Cheap Shop being a particular favourite. At present this includes collecting many different 'fat quarters' (small pieces of fabric of various patterns that come in packs of co-ordinating colours) to make gifts for Easter.

Happy Easter to you all XXX

Norma Herriott

I have always thought of Mundon Village Hall as my 'home' venue as I practise most of my Tai Chi, Lok Hup Ba Fa, Sabre and Sword there. It was also the first venue I attended when I moved to Essex, and I have fond memories of Michael, my instructor at that time, who made me very welcome.

Although the heating fluctuates, and the floor looks rather tired, this is compensated for by the friendliness of the other students and instructors. It is also good to be able to do a Tai Chi set in the grounds at the rear of the hall when weather permits.

Richard Herriott (Trainee Bard of Burnham)

Mundon Village Hall our second home
The car seems to know just where it's going
Signal early to turn in and park
As behind you there's usually a speeding bright spark.

We arrive and the hall should be warm
But sometimes we keep our coats on
The previous users have switched off the boiler
Which for us and Tai Chi is a bit of a spoiler

If we catch the culprits, for them it's 'curtains'
The hall definitely needs some new ones for certain
Tai Chi and Lok Hup are not too taxing
The break in the middle is nice and relaxing

We sit around, put the world to rights
Looking forward to the lighter nights
On Thursday from Mary instruction we take
But best of all is Jan's home-made cake

Light as a feather we then float through a set
With Sabre and Sword still to do yet
Please come along and join in our fun
We're a friendly lot here at Mundon

Birchanger – please would you strut your stuff for the next edition?!

Performing the Set – Brush Knee and Twist Steps; Chop with Fist; Step up, Deflect, Parry, Punch; Appear to Close Entrance

David Woollcott and Judy Lee-Fenton

As we move on through the moves of the set from Newsletter 4, Brush Knee follows on from Playing the Pei Pa. Brush Knee benefits the heart, the lower digestive tract and stomach disorders. The body rises up from the 'sitting' position of Playing the Pei Pa, and the connecting moves between Brush Knee and Twist Steps are very important. This stretch across the chest with the arms open wide through to the tips of the fingers and standing tall is also excellent for the heart and expansion.

The Twist Step strengthens the legs and the lower back, helping with the digestive organs. Successive moves assist the lymph and energies around the body in addition to working the spine through rotation. The whole motion of the Brush Knee moves is to maintain forward momentum, rather than rocking back, otherwise balance and momentum are lost.

In martial arts terms, the movement of the front hand and arm being drawn in, then downward, followed by brushing the knee with a twist of the arm and hand to one side and upwards, is very effective in deflecting or grabbing a kick or punch to the body.

After Playing the Pei Pa for the second time, the next Brush Knee and Twist Step continues the offensive movements forward. Stepping Pa kua (sometimes referred to as Bagua, Pakua, Pakwa) and locking the left knee behind the right is a very strong position from which to move into Chop with Fist, Step up, Deflect, Parry and Punch. The latter moves again assist the lymph movement and energies around the body, actually helping in the reduction of body fats and treating the glands.

Appear to Close Entrance treats gastric problems with added expansion and contraction effects. In martial arts terms, the brushing off the right forearm with the left hand is effective in removing an assailant's grip on the arm, shirt, jacket, etc.

Moving into Cross Hands involves a don-yu – ensure there is no leaning forward. It signals closure of the first part of the Set, a moment to stop, gather balance with equal weight on each foot through the bubbling spring and to correct posture. It relieves stress when standing a moment in wu chi (empty space), the commencement stance. Remember that, although the arms are crossed at the wrists, there should be lots of space between them and the chest, rather than collapsing the arms towards the chest (which closes the lymph glands and compresses the chest).

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

As you know, when you join the Academy we ask you to complete and sign an Application for Membership, providing us with your name, address, phone numbers, email address and date of birth. We also ask for relevant information regarding your health and a contact for emergency purposes. All the information provided is treated in the strictest of confidence.

On 25 May 2018, as a result of European legislation, the Government's new GDPR comes into force regarding the collection and use of personal information. It involves stricter regulations and tougher fines for all organizations (including charities and the voluntary sector) for breach of the legislation.

In order to comply with the GDPR, we will be issuing a new form to all ETCA Members. It will ask you to confirm the information about you we hold, ask you to update it if necessary and advise you how we store, protect and use it; and also how we dispose of it in the event that you leave the Academy. You will be asked to sign two copies as consent. Our Chairman will hold and use your personal details for the purposes stated. You should retain the second copy for your records. Please ask your Instructor if you have any questions or concerns.

A little publicity for my daughter-in-law, Jane Twyman www.jane-twyman.com

Jane draws wildlife and pet portraits in colour and pastel pencils from photographs. This is Nessie, a yellow labrador/golden retriever cross who was the last guide dog we boarded in the last four months of her training. It may seem strange to give a portrait to a blind person, but Paul, Nessie's owner, has photos of all his previous dogs around his home...



Thought for the quarter (not as esoteric as usual)

When your Tai Chi shirts are past their best, what do you do with them? Recycling is the best idea, of course, or donating to charity, but have you ever considered the consequences...?

Members are asked to remove the sewn-on Academy badges and to cut out embroidered/printed badges. Although the latter means that the shirt is useless (except for rag), we really don't want our shirts appearing in the news being worn by inappropriate organizations. These might include refugees or, at one extreme, Somali pirates! This would take some explaining!

Reminders

- Subscriptions are due from 3 April
- If you have any stamps, please give them to your instructor. Thank you
- World Tai Chi Day is on Saturday 28 April. How shall we celebrate?
- Upcoming workshops:

Sunday 20th May	Lok Hup	St Ives Corn Exchange
Saturday/Sunday 26/27 May (venue to be advised nearer the time)	Tai Chi	Shropshire
Saturday/Sunday 21/22 July (with Doug Overholt)	Tai Chi	Cambridge Regional College
Sunday 18 November	Tai Chi	St Ives Corn Exchange