



The Essex Tai Chi Academy Newsletter 9, January 2019

STOP PRESS! HOLD THE FRONT PAGE! IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT!

**We are hosting the Academy's first international workshop
on Friday 7 (instructors), Saturday 8 and Sunday 9 June 2019
at the Lower Plume School, Mill Road, Maldon.**

**The workshop will be led by Darren Pryke and Sherri Nettleton
of the Canadian Tai Chi Academy, who hope to be accompanied by some of their students.
It is a real chance for the Essex Academy to showcase our Tai Chi, and we hope as many of
you as possible will be able to attend.**

The Essex Tai Chi Academy runs classes in Tai Chi, Sabre, Lok Hup Ba Fa and Sword at
Birchanger, Black Notley, Burnham-on-Crouch, Cold Norton, Felsted, Maldon and Mundon

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Tai Chi versus Zumba – David Woollcott

On 10 October the edition of *Trust me, I'm a Doctor* (Michael Mosley) on BBC2 included an article examining the claim that something more gentle, such as Tai Chi, can provide the same benefits as more vigorous exercise. Researchers from the University of Birmingham conducted an experiment with two groups; the first doing 12 weeks of Tai Chi and the second, 12 weeks of Zumba.

The test compared the physical effect of the two types of activity using a pulse monitor to record heart rate and an ultrasound scan of heart vessels. If these become more flexible and elastic so much the better for blood pressure. Blood was also tested for antioxidants and other markers for stress and inflammation.

Mosley found Tai Chi movements calming, was surprised that he experienced something of a workout and, from the stats, surprised too to find that his heart rate had doubled, similar to doing an hour of aerobic exercise.

The ultrasound scan of blood vessels indicated more dilation after the exercise, being their more supple, more relaxed, more elastic. In the blood, there was an increase in some of the stress markers, as well an increase in inflammation and an increase in antioxidants, all of which we need to be able to get the benefits of an exercise session.

How does that compare to a much more vigorous exercise such as Zumba in the long term? The Zumba group showed improved fitness, blood pressure and healthier blood vessels. How did Tai Chi fare? Is it as good as Zumba?

In summary, blood pressure went down, blood vessels' health improved, health markers improved, antioxidants went up. The effects were similar, demonstrating that Tai Chi can give many of the benefits of an energetic workout without, Mosley's words, 'all the huffing and puffing'. Tai Chi is, therefore, a valuable alternative.

[Footnote: one of the Cold Norton students (a former nurse) actually checked her pulse rate before and after a set and – it's true! – the rate was faster.]

Several small studies have suggested that mindfulness –
being in the moment and focusing solely on your movements –
can improve your experience of physical activity.
It may help increase the satisfaction you get from your chosen activity,
and help you make positive choices to fulfil any activity goals.

From *Heart Matters* (British Heart Foundation), Autumn 2018

Suffolk Tai Chi Workshop – Norma & Richard Herriott

On Saturday 6 October Richard and I attended a workshop in Tunstall, near Woodbridge, hosted by Suffolk Tai Chi Academy, with guest instructor Cliff Slater, who had worked with Master Moy. Around 40 students took part and we were able to catch up with some old friends. The theme of the workshop was 'intention', the definition of which is to have an aim or goal.

Cliff applied this to our Tai Chi by emphasizing the importance of the links between moves and ensuring that there is intention throughout to obtain the most benefit from the set. At the outset we learnt that mental intention (focus) is just as important as physical intention, otherwise we can drift through the set and gain little benefit.

During the morning session we concentrated on Brush knee and twist step. By ensuring the tiger's mouth on both hands is open with thumbs pointing downwards and fingers slightly apart torque is created in both arms to provide the intention to link into the next brush knee through opening up into the 'washing line' position. Here we worked in pairs with the observer gently holding the middle finger of their partner's rear arm to create an extra stretch which was to be the intention we would aim to achieve when performing the move on our own. This opening up expands the chest and helps to achieve separation of the upper and lower body helping to massage the internal organs, or as Cliff puts it the giblets.

The afternoon found us working together again on Needle to sea bottom with the aim of opening up the spine by moving the hips backward into a slight sit and allowing the knees to flex, rather than bending like a hinge at the waist. This creates a flatter open spine rather than a curved one, and the same principal can be applied to Punch down. In a previous life (Cliff's words) he was a firefighter and his training included what we know as empty stepping as he searched a smoke filled building unable to see ahead as to whether the next step was a floorboard or a hole. Some time was spent on Parting wild horse's mane' putting empty stepping into practice ensuring the toe is raised when carrying through the foot. Pushing up using the toe of the back foot, rather than rocking onto the front foot, creates the intention needed to link the next part of the move and maintain the flow.

As usual Cliff brought along several props to use in his instruction. A wire coil to represent the spine and show how it can be rotated or stretched in various moves; a large elastic band to represent tendon stretching and intention; a rather menacing looking pole to demonstrate angles and check for in stepping or out stepping.

Cliff's workshops are always enjoyable and informative with his many anecdotes keeping the atmosphere light yet full of useful content. We came away with much food for thought and inspiration to improve our Tai Chi.

TAI CHI WORKSHOP AT MUNDON

I recently attended the workshop at Mundon village hall on 25th November and enjoyed my trip up from Wales so much that I felt I should share my experiences with you.

I had sterling chauffeur service from Richard and Norma to and from Chelmsford rail station which really made my trip as seamless as it could possibly be. My B&B was superb – think country house weekend – glowing fire in the sitting room, fresh flowers in my bedroom and the most enormous breakfast choice I have ever seen.



This was just the cold selection BEFORE any cooked breakfast that also included kedgeree!



Stork Spreads Wings

I have to say that much of my weekend trip to Maldon was taken up with eating; it started with afternoon tea with Judy and Jacqueline on Friday – not as innocent as it sounds but great fun nevertheless.

Concerning the Tai Chi, for all of those who could not attend the workshop please be assured that the day was reassuringly familiar. There was tea on arrival, followed by a set after which was the usual dissembling of a move that was then put back together again. Nothing new or strange, just good old fashioned practice!

After the customary buffet lunch (is there a record anywhere for how many different quiches will appear on the day?) we had plenty of time for the sabre set followed by sword practice.



Jacqueline Twyman & Judy Lee-Fenton

It was an enjoyable day and thanks must go to all those from Essex Tai Chi Academy who made it possible.

Sarah Drew



Group photo

Beaming in on Black Notley – David Woollcott and Jacqueline Twyman

The Black Notley Community Association hall has an interesting history, being the social club for the Black Notley Hospital – which was first opened in 1904 as an isolation unit for people with smallpox. In 1930, a sanatorium was opened for people with tuberculosis. Eventually, the hospital went on to specialize in orthopaedics and plastic surgery before its closure in 1998. Over time, 350 homes were subsequently built on the site. The social club, which hosts a range of activities, also has an open-air swimming pool. Although we do Tai Chi outdoors when it's warm no one has ever been for a dip afterwards...



The hall (?) as it might have looked years ago

Our Tai Chi classes at Black Notley commenced November 2009 and have run continuously since then. From time to time Beginners' courses have run alongside an existing class and many of the newcomers have successfully transferred into our Continuing class on Tuesday mornings. The hall is one of the largest available to us and has been used for some of our workshops.

Have you ever noticed the lane you turn into to get to the hall is John Ray Gardens? Ray (1627-1703) is considered the 'Father of Natural History' (preceding Darwin by nearly 300 years). He was also, apparently, the author of the saying, 'The road to hell is paved with good intentions' (1670). There is a monument to Ray in the St Peter & Paul churchyard, and he also features on the village's sign.



The church itself, a black-painted-structure from the twelfth century, was coated in tar for protection against the weather. Many changes have obviously taken place since then. However, the black paint also led to a change in the name of the village – to Black Notley (Notley meaning nut wood) as opposed to White Notley, just down (or up) the

road. An alternative theory is that Black Notley got its name because of the burials in the village due to the black death, as opposed to White Notley, which escaped the plague.

On 1 September 2018, hundreds of former employees, some coming from as far as New Zealand, returned to their old stomping ground to reminisce and discuss the past – a ‘celebration’ of the hospital closing 20 years previously. For some, the hospital was a ‘second home for many young girls undertaking their nurse training, a daunting experience for a 17 or 18 year old’ said one attendee. The afternoon was celebrated with events and activities followed by a barbeque and a 60s, 70s and 80s disco in the evening. There was a commemorative tea towel to purchase with proceeds going to Essex & Herts Air Ambulance and Cancer Research UK. It was particularly fitting that this celebration coincided with the celebration of 70 years of the NHS.

John Herring

Every Tuesday morning we gather in the hall.
To walk about and wave our hands
And try our best to understand
That if we're patient and persist
With Grasp Bird's Tail and Chop with Fist
And every other turn and twist,
That one day it may come to be
Something that looks like Tai Chi.
But though we know it does us good
We seldom practise as we should,
The movements that we ought to know
To stand, then sit, then step, then go.
Let's all try it once again, and again
and again and again and again.
And if this leaves your mind all broke up,
Have more fun and try some Lok Hup!

All Set? (Or, How not to introduce the Tai Chi set to a beginner)

Honestly, it might look complicated but really, it isn't.

To begin, all you have to do is make a deep bow, grasp the left side of the bird's tail, then grasp the whole thing and turn it into a single whip. What could be simpler than that? Now, step up and raise your hands before cooling your stork's wings. Brush your left knee, then play the peipa (that's a Chinese musical instrument). Brush it again and make a twist step, first to the left and then to the right. Brush your left knee again, play the peipa again, then brush your knee one more time and take another twist step. To finish the first section, you just chop with your fist, step up, deflect, parry, then punch, before appearing to close your entrance and crossing your hands.

Got it? Okay, let's move smoothly on; there are 108 moves to get through, but it should feel like one continuous sequence...

Carry your tiger to the mountain and do another single whip, this time making it diagonal. Put your fist under your elbow and step back to ward off the monkey – you'll need to do this three times altogether: first to the right, then to the left, and then to the right again – before you fly at a slant, step up and raise your hands. Now, cool your stork's wings and brush your left knee again, before reaching down for the needle at the bottom of the sea. Next, fan through to the back, turn and chop with your fist, step up, deflect, parry and punch, as before. Then step up again, grasp the bird's tail again, and turn into a single whip, again. Right, now make cloud shapes with your hands five times, one after another, turn into another single whip, and give your horse a high pat. Here, you need to separate out and kick with your right toe, then do the same again, this time kicking with your left toe; turn to give a final kick with your left heel. It's time to brush your knee and twist step left again, followed by brushing your knee, once more, and twist-stepping to the right. Stepping up and punching down is new, but then you chop with your fist again, step up, parry and punch and make a right heel kick. Hit the tiger left, hit it right, then right heel kick again and now strike ears with fists and left heel kick, before turning to do a right heel kick then chopping with your fist, stepping up, deflecting, parrying, punching, appearing to close your entrance and crossing your hands.

All of this making sense. Yes? You'll find you've done a lot of the stuff in this next section before, but a few things will be unfamiliar. The important thing is just to keep going...

As at the beginning of the previous bit, carry your tiger to the mountain, but this time make your single whip horizontal. Parting your wild horse's mane will be new to you, but first do it to the right, then to the left, now to the right and, again, to the left, then finally to the right once more. It's time to grasp the left side of the bird's tail again, then to grasp the whole thing and turn it into another single whip. Follow the fair lady as she works her shuttle to the left, to the right, to the left and again to the right, before grasping the left side of the bird's tail once more, grasping the whole thing and going into a single whip. Remember cloud hands? Do it again here seven times then go into a single whip. Now creep low like a snake and stand like a golden cockerel on one leg – first on the left, then on the right. Stepping back to ward off the monkey is something you know, so first do it to the right, then to the left, and again to the right. Having done that, fly off at a slant, step up and raise your hands, cool your stalk's wings, brush your knee to the left and then reach down for the needle at bottom of the sea. Fan through to the back, once again, now turn and make the white snake put its tongue out, step up, deflect, parry, then punch. Step up again and grasp the bird's tail, then go into single whip, followed by three cloud hands and another single whip. High-pat your horse, as you did before, and cross your hands to penetrate. Turn, cross your hands and kick, you chop with your fist, you step up, you deflect, you parry, you punch, you step up to grasp the bird's tail and you go into your final single whip. You're close to the end now so, creep low like a snake again, step up to form 'Seven Stars', retreat to ride the tiger, turn to sweep the lotus, draw your bow to shoot the tiger, chop with your fist again, step up, deflect, parry and punch, for the last time, appear to close your entrance, cross your hands and finish. All you have to do now is to make another deep bow, and you're done.

So, what do you think? All set?

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Pedro also took the photograph of the John Ray monument

Reminders

- Subscriptions are due from Wednesday, 2 January
- A six-week introductory beginners' class, led by Judy, started on Friday 30 November at Park Drive Health Club, Maldon CM9 5JQ and will continue in the New Year. It runs from 11.15am–12.30pm.
- Chinese New Year is on Tuesday, 5 February. Details of our celebratory workshop and AGM will follow shortly.
- World Tai Chi day falls on Saturday 27 April. Let's gather at 10.00am to celebrate with other Tai Chiers worldwide. Venue to be confirmed.
- The library is once again somewhat depleted. Naming no names, but these are the books currently out on loan, as they have been for several months:

Taoist Tai Chi for Seniors

The Harvard Medical School Guide to Tai Chi – both copies

Ba Gua: Hidden knowledge in the Taoist internal martial art

The Power of Internal Martial Arts and Chi

Xing Yi Nei Gong: Xing yi health maintenance and internal strength development

Live Longer: Your whole health route to longer life

Elementary I Ching

Opening the Energy: Gates of your body: chi gung for lifelong health

The Great Stillness

The Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Buddhist Wisdom

The Shambhala Guide to Taosim

Please check your shelves and return any books at the AGM/workshop. Some of the books are very expensive, and in some instances irreplaceable. Equally important – a book lying around at your home is unavailable to other members

**Felsted class – your turn next for contributions please!
Have a think about what you'd like to write about come the spring.
Thank you.**

Thought for the quarter

In November 2018 a reader wrote this letter to *The Guardian* in response to an article headlined 'Loneliness is an illness of the body – as well as the mind':

Ten years ago I joined a tai chi class and recently a second,
to combat the loneliness of being profoundly deaf with tinnitus.

The well-being from the beautiful exercise and the friendliness and support of the group
cannot be emphasized enough.

A prescription pill would not produce this.