



The Essex Tai Chi Academy Newsletter 8, October 2018

*The Life and Rhymes of Benjamin Zephaniah: Poet, Lyricist, Writer, Activist.
The Autobiography*

Instead of focusing on external fighting styles, I concentrated on the internal aspects of the practice, learning how to generate power from breathing, balance meditation and relaxation.

With wing chun [a form of Tai Chi] instead of blocking punches, you learn to use an opponent's force by 'completing the circle' and never blocking their energy but instead using it against them. Even if it looks peaceful, every movement has a fighting application.

Grand Master Chen Zhaosen said: 'Show me your Tai Chi.'
Zephaniah did about three minutes before he was stopped, and corrected.

**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 and Mundon**

The Ten Essences of Tai Chi

Judy Lee-Fenton

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
5. Be aware of weight distribution
6. Co-ordinate the top and bottom halves of the body

7 Continuity in movement

Achieving this means that the various parts of the body move in harmony. So arms and legs move at the same time as the torso; all arrive at the finish of the move at the same time.

In the sixth essence we learned to co-ordinate the top and bottom halves of the body, an essence closely associated with this, the seventh. If the legs are moving before the arms (or vice versa) one part of the body has to stop so that the other part can catch up. Co-ordinated movement allows the form to become soft and continuous. This sets up all that is needed for energy flow and lymph movement to produce vitality and health on all levels.

8 Unite mind and body

When you practise Tai Chi you need to understand the intent of the moves, otherwise it becomes like any other exercise – waving the hands and arms in the air. To gain all the benefits Tai Chi has to offer, you need to use the mind as well, knowing:

- it was intended as a martial application;
- your moves create energy;
- good energy flow brings better health; which
- leads to a more balanced mind;
- you have the ability.

When you use intent properly, your energy flow will be at its strongest and you will achieve the best possible healing effect on your body.

9 Use mind, not force

This area of Tai Chi is frequently not understood. Many students learn to be soft in the movements without actually generating any power. The reason that little or no power has been generated is because the use of mind and intent has not been understood.

Attending to the move and applying concentration highlights the energy force to the move. Energy cannot flow without intent, and without intent Tai Chi will not be complete. It's all about connections. Softness allows our meridians to relax so that the energy can flow through the body via a system of channels, rather as the blood circulates.

So use your mind to visualize, and know that the energy is flowing to achieve the best possible effects on your body and mind.

10 Seek stillness within motion and motion within stillness

When this is found the inner body has the feelings of extension and creation of energy. This is how you find motion within stillness and are able to complete the tenth essence.

The first five essences are physical, and establish the right conditions for the correct practice of Tai Chi. Without the physical conditions of these five, it is not possible to successfully develop the last five.

So, with a strong foundation:

- 6 & 7 work at co-ordination;
- 8 & 9 work at mind and body;
- 10 works at the spirit.

The motion should be rooted in the feet, released through the legs, controlled by the waist, and manifested through the fingers.

Achieving stillness is an important part of Tai Chi practice. As you flow through your movements, the energy you feel is one of a stillness inside yourself, a stillness within. It can almost feel surreal. Everything is one – one move, one thought one energy. So combining motion and stillness is the key to successfully completing the ten essences. You all know the feeling at the end of the set – one of calm but radiating energy.

The tor-yu

Those of us who attended Doug and Susan Overholt's workshops in July experienced 2½ days of tor-yus and don-yus. And we'd like to share that experience with you by reminding ourselves of 'proper sitting' – the gateway to internal work.

Essentially it's time to put more focus on the *transitions* between moves and less on the moves themselves. It is in the transitions that important work and progress happens.

Here (adapted from a Canadian Tai Chi Academy blogpost) are some simple things Mr Moy always stressed in the tor-yu – simple but often overlooked:

1. Going back, *turn the **entire** trunk of the body open* to 45 degrees. Because the lower thoracic vertebrae don't have big sidebars, it is easy to turn the upper body separately from the hips.
2. Now you're at the back 45 degrees, with your arms crossed at the wrist (and get them away from the body!) and your front knee straight (but not locked), *push down slightly with the hands*. Try sitting back a little at the 45 degree angle. Push down with the hands. Simple. And what happens? You begin to sit a little bit, comfortably (don-yu in the tor-yu).

3. From the 45-degree angle, release your front knee slightly, *turn the body to the front without moving forward*, while opening the crossed hands to shoulder width apart (smoothing the tablecloth). Yes, turn the hips square to the front. You think you've turned all the way but you haven't!
4. Finally, from the square position, *push the hands forward and up* until you have a straight line from the heel to the head and your arms are at shoulder level. Try to relax (sink into) the front hip as you push out. This will stretch the front hip more. Don't let the front knee travel beyond perpendicular.

In summary, Mr Moy would count three:

1. Turn the entire body open to 45 degrees. Push the hands down slightly. Sit.
2. Turn to the front and open the hands while releasing the front leg at the knee.
3. Push out and relax the front hip.

All the while keep to the Five Principles.

Notes from the 2018 Cambs Tai Chi workshop with Doug and Sue Overholt: Toni Walsh

Several times through the workshop, Doug explained a point, he started with the words 'Mr Moy said...'. Here are a couple of examples -

Chi: on being asked about Chi, Mr Moy said "Man has been trying to understand chi for 3000 years – if you understood that you would be a master, not a student".

Raise hands and step up (and other moves): Mr Moy said "stand up and sit down at the same time".

Other notes from the workshop:

Don yus:

- Do what you're supposed to be *doing*, don't think it nor focus on specifics
- Spread load over whole foot
- Work on opening lower spine

and Tor yus:

- Weight fully on back foot at back of move (Doug demonstrated this by lifting his front foot slightly off the ground).

Their application to brush knee:

- sit applies to both legs as foot comes through
- foot coming through roughly parallel to floor
- balance step, if used, should be roughly where it is in Stork Cools Wings, ie about a foot's length ahead
- also application to Wild Horses and Fair lady

and to wave hands:

- 45 to 45
- keep structure; express the shape of the move (cylinder) – “no 'squishing'”

Single whip:

- Look down whip arm
- Left arm movement led by spine

Raise hands:

- Express to corner
- Think “Don yu”
- Relax lower back

Single push hands:

- Circulatory motion of hands at about chest height
- Rhythm, differences between working with different people
- Varying speeds

and no-contact push hands practice:

- Solo single push hands exercise
- No hands push hands, opposite partner but no arm involvement

Standing Jong

- Posture – legs straight but not locked
- Arms slightly curved, elbows softly down
- If ache too much or start shaking then slowly bring arms down – “do not re-engage”
- After session, walk around gently for a short while

Mary Dann – my balloon ride

On World Tai Chi Day 2016 members of the Academy kindly and unexpectedly presented me with a very generous Red Letter Day gift, catching me totally unawares.

I considered several options – scuba diving with sharks maybe? But decided on a balloon flight, something I had fancied doing for some time. However it took two years for this to finally happen. After booking a date, you have to ring up the evening before, after 11pm, to find out if your flight is on and which site of several it will be going from. The weather is all important of course, and my flight was cancelled six times. There are no flights in the winter months, so two seasons came and went. Finally we struck lucky – the morning of Saturday 19 May this year was beautiful, calm and bright, with a chill in the air. We were to meet at Blake End at 6am.

There were 16 of us; two unfortunates turned up to find out they were not on the list and were actually booked on the evening flight. We all helped to prepare the balloon and basket, which takes about an hour. After being laid out the balloon is inflated by giant fans. We had to practise getting in and out of the basket, and the landing procedures, then after the pre-flight checks we were ready to lift off.

Well, lift-off is maybe not the right term, for it feels as though the ground is just falling away. There was enough breeze to move the balloon up to a height of around 1500 feet, although it was hardly perceptible, and apart from the occasional puff of the burner, it was quiet and peaceful.

Our pilot, Ravi, navigated by i-pad, explaining that there was a blue line on his map around Stansted airport, obviously a no-go area, and red lines around areas where he had to maintain a height of at least 700 feet, and could not land, for instance where there was stock. Ravi told us that he and his driver spent the winter ballooning in Thailand.

Before long we were floating over Felsted, and I could make out the hall where we hold our Tai Chi classes. Can you spot it? It was like looking down on toy villages and farms, somehow quite different from the view from an aeroplane.



After half an hour or so, Ravi started to look for a place to land. This can't really be decided in advance, as conditions can change during the course of the flight. Eventually he spotted a suitable field on the outskirts of Pleshey, and before long we were sinking down, skimming over the trees, and gently touching down in a small meadow behind a thatched cottage. Three of the younger, stronger passengers jumped off to hold and guide the basket to a stop. No one emerged from the house to see what we were up to. Ravi's partner, Andrew, had been following our progress by road with the trailer. However when he arrived he discovered the gate to the field was too narrow for him to bring the trailer in. This meant we would have to take off again and find another landing spot! So off we went. One promising field turned out to be a no-no – two horses were in fact a large bull and a cow!

Finally we were able to land in a field behind a chicken farm. Once the farmer realized we weren't going to land on his crop, or frighten his chickens, he was most helpful and friendly. In fact I think he enjoyed having plenty of people to talk to. Again three chaps got off to guide the balloon; after jumping over a ditch, they managed to avoid the basket coming to rest on a large pile of chicken manure. The smell was pretty strong even from a

distance! Our total time in the air had been an hour and a half, and we had covered approximately seven and a half miles.

Once we had all helped to roll up the balloon, and packed it in the basket, already loaded onto the trailer, it was time to have our champagne, while we waited for our transport to take us back to Blake End. It had been a wonderful experience.

Thank you everyone.

Connecting with Cold Norton

Elaine Hampton

Now ... you are really trying my brain (which has slowed down to Lincolnshire time!). I can remember Dawn and I saw an advert for the new Tai Chi class at Cold Norton village hall and we thought it would be a good idea to get some exercise. We didn't know what to expect but were greeted by the lovely Mary and Michael. From then on there was no looking back. Michael really inspired us, and Dawn and I used to practise on her driveway, trying to remember the sequences and having many a laugh. I still do the first 17 moves most mornings.

I now go to a Tai Chi class at Mablethorpe, although it is a different form and I found it hard to adjust, but we have now started to include 'Fans' and I love that part.

The Village Hall – Sue Garnham, one of the village's archivists

The first hall in Cherry Blossom Lane was an ex-army hut from World War I, originally lit by oil lamps, heated by a coal fire and without water or sewage connections. Despite its obvious drawbacks it seems to have been well loved and enjoyed by the small population that then existed in Cold Norton.

Over the years the hall has been in daily use by one club or another, and regular dances, rummage sales and fetes were held. By the 1950s & 60s one of the famous Elsan toilets had been installed, and the hall was wired for electricity. This was also the time that a local man – Terry Woodward – installed a really fine 'sprung' dance floor.

Fast forward to the early 1980s, the village was growing, a much improved facility was called for, and with funds sought from here there and everywhere demolition of the old hall was carried out by hall committee members (no money for contractors, and not much health and safety regulation either!) and the new one opened by Christina Foyle (of bookshop fame, who used to live in the village) at Christmas 1986. Fittingly, Terry Woodward was willing and still able to re-lay the original dance floor in the middle of the new hall floor.

Jacqueline Twyman

I first came across Tai Chi some 20 years ago at Centre Parcs in Suffolk. Despite all the other activities on offer, it was the only one that really caught my attention. So I went to the class, loved it, and then – came out of the hall in the dark. I had NO idea how to get back to our 'villa'. But, as they say, with a tongue in my head ...

There were classes in Maldon, but in the evening. And, as many of you know, I'm not an evening person. (Pedro, you'll never know how much it 'cost' me to run those six weeks at the Plume! Really glad you're still with us.) So, what a thrill to hear of new *daytime* classes in Maldon and Cold Norton, led by Michael and Mary.

I've been going to class for some ten years now, and in December 2014 Michael and Mary accredited me as instructor. Tears were in my eyes as Michael handed me my certificate, and he offered me his tissues. My accreditation came about as Michael became more ill, and asked me to lead the foundation exercises, then demonstrate in class, and gradually lead the classes when he was unable. I have never been more proud – or more scared – taking my first class. I remember Michael with affection and respect – he will always be The Boss of my Tai Chi. I thank all of Michael's and Mary's original students for continuing to come to my classes. And a thank you, too, to the newer students who also keep coming back.

I wish there was a way to teach Tai Chi *without* teaching the set – because Tai Chi isn't about the set, folks – as Mr Moy said, 'You're not learning movement; you're learning will and patience' – two essential ingredients to progressing in Tai Chi. Sometimes the work is not easy, but persevering and being patient yields results. I learnt a lot from Doug and Susan Overholt, not least that my wish has come true – something along the lines of 'the set is a playful way of doing the exercises'...

For more on this aspect, reflect again on the Tor-yu... and on Toni Walsh's piece on the July workshop.

Sue Dunn

Oh what fun we had (**have**) (Madness 1980)

Week one – The key saga

We are a small group. Jacqueline is our very patient and calming instructor; Janet and Norma are our fabulous corners; the rest of us still have our L-plates on.

There's Kim – brave and determined; Hazel – amazing in so many ways; and Jenny, who holds the hall keys, brings the milk and sometimes drives the getaway car. I was the last one to join – slightly do-lally but trying my best to be as graceful as the others.

A little while back we all arrived, ready for our class, but when we got out of Jenny's car, we discovered we didn't have the keys. Jenny rummaged in her bag, we searched the car inside and out, rechecked it and emptied Jenny's bag. (It's crazy what we actually carry in them.) Jenny decided to drive home to see if the keys were still indoors. The next minute Kim's husband turned up – we didn't know why, and didn't think he did either. He left pretty promptly. With all the frantic searching and comings and goings we must have looked like the Keystone Cops.

A few moments later Sue, one of the archivists at the hall, arrived with *her* keys, and kindly let us in. Jenny returned without the keys. Jacqueline decided we should start class with tea break – courtesy of the archivists' cupboard, as we had no keys to ours. We sat and chatted – poor Jenny still trying to work out what had happened to the keys. Class then carried on as usual.

Lo and behold, as I got into the back of the car I spied the keys wedged between Jenny's seat and the centre console.

Our morning had been absolute **madness**, and guess what? Jacqueline was wearing **baggy trousers**.

Week two – The tea saga (or, ‘One lump or two’?)

Following last week’s excitement we were looking forward to a calmer class.

I didn’t think the milk looked right as I took it into the kitchen, but Jenny assured me it was fresh. Class proceeded as normal and at 10.30 we arranged the chairs and made our drinks. We poured in the milk and, hey presto! – cottage cheese floated to the top. Jenny’s lovely husband Jack (no, really he is) had put fresh milk into an unwashed bottle, and unknowingly invented new drinks. The tea looked like porridge and the coffee wasn’t quite a latte. The fruit tea was almost a dessert. Should we dunk our biscuits or try it with crackers? Decisions, decisions.

We threw all the drinks away. (I was sure we could have made some money if we could get enough people interested.) Hazel managed to get some milk from a secret stash (the Guides) and we started to make a fresh lot. Unfortunately someone had mixed the fruit tea with the breakfast tea. This was not at all enhanced by the milk – however fresh.

At this point I believe Jacqueline was considering one of those lovely white jackets that tie up in a beautiful bow at the back. Lovely crisp fabric but very difficult to drink tea without spilling it down your chin. Third time lucky, and the chimps’ tea party came to an end. I’m not sure how we managed our Tai Chi set with dignity, but we did.

Maybe next week we should call in a security company and caterers...

Reminders

- Subscriptions are due from Monday 1 October.
- Tai Chi workshops:
 - Led by Cliff Slater, in Tunstall, Suffolk on Saturday 6 October; and in Palma, Mallorca on 12-14 October;
 - Led by Dorothy Cowley of the East of England Academy on Sunday 7 October in Bugbrooke, Northants;
 - St Ives Corn Exchange on Sunday 18 NovemberYou should have had emails about these – if not, your instructor/s can provide details.
New date: WE are holding a workshop on Sunday 25 November at Mundon Village Hall, CM9 6PD. See you all there!
- Our Christmas meal will be at Lian’s in Witham on Tuesday 11 December. The Academy subsidizes this wonderful get-together, so it will cost you only £15. Guests are welcome, and are asked to pay £30.
- Chinese New Year falls on Tuesday 5 February. T-shirts for the Year of the Pig are under way. Plans for our celebration and AGM in the next Newsletter.
- Academy members are welcome at any and all of our classes:
 - Monday: Tai chi at Mundon village hall, 9.30-11.30
 - Tai chi at Burnham carnival hall, 7.30-9.30
 - Tuesday, Tai chi at Black Notley, 9.30-11.30
 - Wednesday, Tai chi at Birchanger village hall, 9.30-11.30
 - Tai chi at Cold Norton village hall, 9.30-11.30
 - Tai chi at Mundon village hall, 7.30-9.30
 - Thursday, Tai chi at Felsted village hall, 10.30-12.30
 - Lok hup at Mundon village hall, 7.30-9.

Thought for the quarter

Our intrepid Toronto Tai Chi-ers have been more than a little teased for sharing their tourist photos, but not their Tai Chi ones – glad to put the record straight on their behalf!

