

T'ai Chi and Qi Gong Classes

Welcome and thank you for asking me to help you to experience the benefits of T'ai Chi and Qi Gong.

Practiced by over 300 million people world wide, T'ai Chi Chuen is an ancient Chinese "soft" or "internal" martial art, designed to create a deep sense of unity of body, mind and soul and also healing. Its coordinated body movements and breathing focus on the cultivation of internal energy known as 'Qi' or 'Chi' pronounced "chee". These movements (or Form) appear rhythmical, effortless and in continuous flow, and bring a deep sense of richness and unity of life to those who practice them. *Translated "T'ai Chi" means "Supreme of the Ultimate", "Chuen" means "Fist" or martial art/health exercise.*

Qi Gong is a series of simple static exercises with coordinated breathing, *translated, "Gong" means "Exercise",* often used as a precursor to the T'ai Chi Forms. Over 1300 exercises have been recorded, and have been documented as beneficial for health for over 3000 years. They promote the cultivation and control of Qi, and improve posture, breathing, blood flow and concentration.

T'ai Chi is a unique art, and one that brings benefits in many areas. It will harmonise the mind, body and spirit, by promoting both mental and physical well-being through softness and relaxation. Unlike most forms of exercise and sport, T'ai Chi does not rely on strength, force and speed, making it ideal for people of both sexes, young and old alike whether strong or weak - *Meditation on Motion.*

T'ai Chi is NOT an easy cure-all, a guaranteed stress-reliever or universal panacea for all ills. It requires dedication, concentration and discipline to perfect and to optimise the benefits. Superficial effects will be felt after the first lesson, however even the simplest short form will take at least 10 weeks of daily practice to learn the movements and to start to realise the full deeper meaning.

T'ai Chi WILL however reward tenfold any effort put into its practice, and because of its mind/body control is especially good for effective relaxation and stress relief. You're never too old or infirm to start T'ai Chi practice and once "hooked" it will become a lifetime experience

About Your Classes

I propose to teach you some basic Qi Gong and a simple T'ai Chi form. *A "form" is a short sequence of co-ordinated movements that join together to produce the gentle synchronised series that has become the perception of T'ai Chi.*

The first lesson will introduce you to the concept of Qi, controlled breathing, and simple Qigong. This will hopefully allow you to realise the soothing effects of this form of mind/body control. We will also practice the basic T'ai Chi stance and stepping movement as a precursor to starting to learn your first forms. Subsequent lessons will continue with basic Qigong exercises and the practice of any previously learned forms, with the addition of another form to extend the sequence. This way, over the weeks a complete sequence will be learnt.

Practice is essential, daily for at least 15 minutes if possible, to enable you to master the movements and maximise the benefits. If you miss a week's lesson, don't worry, the previous weeks movements will be recapped at the beginning of each new lesson and you will find that as long as you continue to practice the earlier lessons, you will quickly be able to follow the remainder of the class and pick up.

The classes are there to help you to relax and improve your well-being. Initially you may feel self-conscious, embarrassed or inelegant. You may think that you are not progressing as well as others. DON'T WORRY – it is the level of personal achievement that matters. You are not in a competition or being examined. Nobody will criticise you and everyone will help each other. I guarantee that if you apply the principles of T'ai Chi, no matter what your perception are of how you are progressing, your Qi will start to flow better and, providing you dismiss your misgivings, you can only benefit.

You will find that the Qi from those who have mastered a movement will radiate to those who are having difficulty and the class will gradually tune itself into a one consolidated body. I have seen T'ai Chi practiced by world-class masters and by people with little or no movement and confined to wheelchairs, and all were achieving and benefiting.

Whilst learning and even while practicing at home, you will probably not feel completely relaxed, as the efforts to master the movements are in themselves stress inducing. That is why we intersperse the learning phases with simple Qi Gong and breathing exercises, and constantly repeat the parts that we have mastered.

It is beneficial if you periodically (at least for each new lesson) move to a different position in the class. This will give you a different perspective as you will be following and synchronising with a different person, which will help to unify the movements of the group. I may from time to time ask you to move to a new position. This is because I feel that you will benefit from following someone else, or that someone else can benefit from following you.

Although the movements are very simple and appear to use no external energy, they are maximising internal energy and gently exercise every part of the body, often parts that have not been used for years! If you are not a fit person you probably will feel muscle ache and discomfort during and/or after the practice. This will disappear as you progress, but please remember, NEVER over-exert yourself and don't be embarrassed to rest. Moving to the side and practicing a little Qi Gong breathing works wonders. You can also gain great benefit from carrying out the movements mentally. Also, if you cannot physically carry some of the movements, adapt them to your constraints. ENJOY YOUR T'AI CHI.

Medical Considerations

T'ai Chi is inherently safe and if practiced correctly will not cause injury. I have however to disclaim any liability for any consequential injury or existing conditions apparently worsened by T'ai Chi practice.

As with all exercise programs, if you have a previous medical condition you must gain approval from your Doctor, Specialist or Physiotherapist before starting the class. People with unstable angina or congestive cardiac conditions SHOULD NOT join the general classes. If anyone has had a joint replacement, they should let the instructor know before the class, as certain movements are known to conflict with the range of movement of the artificial joints. This will not however stop you from practicing and enjoying the benefits of T'ai Chi /Qi Gong.

I must also emphasise that I am NOT a medically qualified person and any views and advice expressed by me are based on personal experiences and research.

What do I wear?

The general rule is that participants should wear loose comfortable clothes and flat, thin-soled shoes suitable for exercise. For the T'ai Chi forms, "feeling" contact with the ground is essential and therefore heavy trainers etc. are not really suitable as they will hinder this and also cause imbalance. Many people prefer to practice in bare or stockinged feet. If requested I can obtain shoes designed for TC (and other associated items) at around 60% of UK list price.

Where Do I Practice?

T'ai Chi & Qi Gong can be practiced ANYWHERE & ANYTIME - indoors or outside. Some Qi Gong can be practiced sitting down or at a desk.

In a perfect world, find a quiet level spot, preferably outdoors away from traffic fumes, and ideally choose early morning (just after sunrise) or just before sunset. If the environment is not ideal or indoors, try accompanying the form with a background of music specially developed for T'ai Chi. *My favourite spot is on a quiet beach, just after dawn with the sound of birds and the waves to supplement the form.*

Books, Videos & Further information

There are a plethora of books, videos and websites available on T'ai Chi and Qi Gong. As with any subject, they range from the simplistic to the very good and informative, progressing through the inaccurate and irrelevant to the serious and theoretical. There are several major Forms of Tai Chi and many variants. Most books concentrate on the style and forms used by the author and may confuse the beginner, as they will differ, often significantly with the forms being learnt. The same applies to videos. Here, at worst from a beginner's point of view, they will be a short demonstration (often badly filmed) with no instructional content whatsoever. I do not advise purchase of books or videos until after the first lesson.

Books: If I am asked to recommend books, then I have found that the following are informative and generalised enough to encourage the beginner:

Overcoming Arthritis by Dr Paul Lam & Judith Horstman ISBN 0-7513-3979-2-4 (DK books)

A holistic plan to relieve pain and restore mobility. Half of the book is devoted to part one of Dr Paul's T'ai Chi form that I teach for beginners and arthritis sufferers, with lots of diagrams and explanation. I can obtain these for you.

The Book of Soft Martial Arts by Howard Reid ISBN 1-85675-121-X

A very well-written and easy to understand book that covers the basics of several "soft" martial arts including T'ai Chi, Qi Gong and other related and similar disciplines.

The Complete Idiots Guide to T'ai Chi & Qi Gong by Bill Douglas ISBN 0-02-862909-4

Light, easy reading, yet loaded with information and general tips. NEW Edition due in 2005 – our link is in it.

Videos /Dvds: If I am asked to recommend videos/Dvds I have no hesitation in recommending any of the many produced by Dr Paul Lam. Each is comprehensive and value for money. In my opinion his teaching style is unique and encourages both beginners and experienced practitioners. As an instructor for his programs, and subject to a minimum class order, I can obtain them for you at a discount (currently around 30% on UK prices). These videos are all listed with full cost on his web site (see below).

Further information: If you have access to the web, my own website www.crystaltaichi.co.uk contains some information and links, in particular Dr Paul Lam's website www.taichiproductions.com containing a comprehensive overview of the subject with many informative articles and links.

I will gladly try to answer any of your questions either before or after a class (providing it does not delay the start of the current or the following class) and can be contacted by telephone on **01452830000** or email on trevor@crystaltaichi.co.uk

About myself

My name is Trevor Reynaert and I am an electronics engineer and have been a technical trainer travelling all over the world for over 30 years. It was during my many visits to China, Hong Kong and Taiwan that I was introduced to the benefits of T'ai Chi.

I have been practicing Yang style for several years, and found it beneficial to alleviate my own symptoms of spinal deterioration, however I had noticed that in the classes in which I had participated, although intended as a general level and not aimed at Martial Arts, there was a high drop out rate in the first few weeks. This was due to a large proportion of people who were drawn to T'ai Chi with great expectations, but soon discovered that even a simple basic form appeared too severe for them. To improve my own technique I "discovered" Dr Paul Lam's programs, in particular one developed in conjunction with the Arthritis Council of Australia, to help people of all ages and levels of disability to enjoy the benefits of T'ai Chi. This program was specially designed to needs of arthritis sufferers, but can also be tailored to the requirements of those people who are older and may not wish to learn the more difficult forms or their martial art aspects and for diabetics.

I do NOT teach offensive or defensive Martial Arts, but was however fortunate to be able to attend Dr Lam's first UK training workshop (and since then other workshops), and with his personal tuition have become an Approved Instructor for his Tai Chi for Arthritis/BackPain and Diabetes program. I have also been trained in the full Sun 73 form by Dr Lam and many times gold medal winner Kam Lau Fung. My assistant instructors are also Dr Lam TCA trained.