



CELESTIAL TAI CHI COLLEGE NEWSLETTER

Term 3
P.O. Box 1135, Box Hill, 3128
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June 2014
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Brighton Centre

Park Lessons

Saturday 21st June

Time: 10:00am to noon

Malvern

Central Park Malvern
Cnr Burke & Wattleree Rds
(Melway 59 G10)

Sunday 29th June

Time: 10:00am to noon

Fairfield

Fairfield Park
Cnr Heidelberg Rd & Fairfield Park Dr
(Melway 30 J12)

Don't forget that the park lessons also offer a free introductory lesson for anyone who is interested so tell a friend, bring your family

Other Dates

- Sept 21st Tai Chi Workshop
- Remember to keep December 6th free for our annual Tai Chi Banquet

Some inspirational insights from the greats Lao Tzu, and Confucius:

*Health is the greatest possession
Contentment is the greatest treasure
Confidence is the greatest friend
Non-being is the greatest joy*

*Our greatest glory is not in never falling,
But in getting up every time we do*

Tai Chi **A Beginner Starting Over**

I remember. I was fifteen when I first found myself here at the St. Andrews church hall in Brighton for what was then a weekly Fellowship teenager get together and dance. Exciting times. Something new, different. With unfamiliar faces – though they all seemed friendly enough – testosterone flowing – cool clothes – cool music. And *girls!* Here we go ...

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Fast forward forty plus years (did I really say forty?), and I look around this old hall – its aged-timber roof trusses, exposed brick walls, timber floors. Really hasn't changed much. And again, I find myself excited. Something new, different. Again, unfamiliar faces – although they too seem friendly enough – cool clothes? Well ... And not so much testosterone as then but I certainly can hear cool music. It's not as loud as I remember, more meditative I would say.

Let's give this Tai Chi thing a go, I think. I hear it's good for the mind and body. And I might be able to do the moves even with these ageing bones. Who knows? I know I need something.

I take my place amongst the other newbies and pay attention. We're to start with something called ki-gong? Qui Guong? I'll never remember that – and these new moves – arms everywhere – legs everywhere – my knees will never take this – turtle splashes the water – where? What turtle?

'Split into your groups, everyone. Beginners over here. This is level 1 Tai Chi. Clear your mind.' Here we go ...

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Three months pass – I receive a certificate for completing Level 2, and I know it's just a piece of paper – but to me it's so much more.

Three years ago I had just seen a second surgeon who had confirmed the prior diagnosis that my knees were beyond repair and needed replacement. A lifetime of martial arts practice, snow skiing and generally believing and acting as if you're immortal will lead to that.

I was then relegated to that world where regular exercise consisted of the occasional walk (more like a shuffle my accompanying wife would complain) and managing the regular pain that accompanied my frequently inflamed joints. That world where every physical action required pre-emptive planning – let's get on board the boat – sit down first – swing your legs over – try to stand – oh God, just how old am I? No, I don't want to ski this year – let's take a taxi instead of walking – anyway you probably get the drift – that world of feeling old. I'd have to bite the bullet and get my knees done. Soon.

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Now, I know it's premature – I know not to get too excited – and it's probably just an enormous coincidence but ...

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This morning my pecs are sore, not my knees. What from, you ask? (Yes, you did). Well, yesterday, I went tunnel flying in Sydney. You know, where you simulate a parachute jump free-fall by 'floating' horizontally in a special vertical wind tunnel. Where you arch your back and an incredibly powerful updraft suspends you up to fifteen metres high in mid-air – where you manoeuvre by twisting and moving arms, legs and back. Now I'm not sure whether I'd call wind tunnel flying an extreme sport – oh, who am I kidding – of course it is!

Yesterday, I also had a long walk through Bondi, along the famous beach where my wife complained that I was walking too fast ...

Yesterday, I found myself contemplating skiing later this year ...

Yesterday felt like my yesterdays used to ...

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Could it be the Tai Chi you ask? After three months? Don't be ridiculous. Surely there must be other factors, other differences, other things I am doing. Must be. Only problem is – I can't think of one.

Every day I practice my Tai Chi (I even do the horse stance while cleaning my teeth – yes I know, I’m weird – and come to think of it – what horse?). I’m starting to forget what my knee pain feels like. Already I can do the practice with more ease. My wife has decided to start Tai Chi this week, after, she insists, being impressed with her introduction at one of the practice in the park sessions. I think she loves the changes she can already see in me.

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I’m at the beginning of my Tai Chi experience. I realise that. I’m all arms and legs, all wobbly and unsure. But this new experience will be one where I intend to focus on the journey more so than the final destination. And I’m pragmatic enough to realise my knees are worn out and do require management. But for now – here we go ...



Alan Chandler –
Tai Chi – Level 2
& Wind Tunnel Flyer
& . . . (to be advised) .

NEVER TOO LATE TO UN-LEARN

To appreciate Tai Chi Chuan we should consider that it is not an activity where you are learning new stuff. It is what you are, but have forgotten, it is an awakening of innate qualities of what it is to be human. We can refer to the teachings of F. Matthias Alexander the creator of the Alexander technique. When refining the aspects of his technique, Alexander upon considering his observations of his own habitual actions (resulting in bad posture) and their origins, the culture of China may have either endorsed his thinking or influenced it. "The Alexander Technique is not a method to accumulate information nor the art of learning something new. It is, instead, the art on unlearning, which is much more subtle and, sometimes, a more difficult endeavour-unlearning that which is habitual, instead of natural; letting go of old patterns and of those repetitious opinions arrived at in times and circumstances totally different from those of the present."* This indeed is applicable when engaging in the art of Tai Chi Chuan.

When one is in the early stages of practicing Tai Chi Chuan the brain takes on its habitual role of analysing every unfamiliar action and attempts to adjust your action back to a habitual action, a familiar, "comfortable" action.

The brain is wonderful in problem solving and all the neurological tasks that the brain is required to perform. The brain is not so good at recognizing the habitual, due to the fact that quite often it fails to recognize its own inappropriate habitual thought processes. When the brain is engaged with Tai Chi Chuan, the brains analytical skill is best used to create memory trigger points when a new move is introduced, which can be referenced when you go home and attempt to replicate the move or moves without the assistance of the instructor. In time the muscle memory will supplement the brains conscious memory and it will eventually be replaced. The habitual muscle memory (inappropriate action) will be replaced by the concordant muscle memory. The challenge for the student is to take the brain out of the role of back seat driver and put it in the passenger seat. Analysis is then replaced with an awareness of the delicate natural internal body rhythm, which Tai Chi Chuan will in time inhabit to give it form. This is the Chinese way and if nurtured one will realize it to be the natural way.

* Laura Huxley forward to "Body Learning. An introduction to the Alexander Technique "by Michael Gelb.

In summing: when we were young we were in concord with our natural body rhythms but as we immersed ourselves in the world and life's experiences the subconscious brain developed bio-mechanic reactions inappropriate to the stimulus we confronted.

Tai Chi Chuan provides the blue print of appropriate actions and reactions for both mental and physical responses.

“Focus your breath until it is supremely soft. Can you be like a baby?”[∞]

Chris Cain
Assist Instructor – Brighton/South Yarra

Tai Chi – Development of body, mind and spirit

Compiled by Joe Pellone – Brighton

BODY

Stretching the muscles. Loosening the joints. Improvement in circulation of the blood. Achieving flexibility of the body. Movements come from what the Chinese call ‘wu-wei’ or ‘not- doing’; from letting go, from stillness. ‘Sinking the weight’ establishes roots; we re-learn our connection to the earth. Suspending the skeleton from the crown of the head ensures the energy flows upward towards the spirit (shen). Enjoyment of good health and longevity: “Are you able to gather your intrinsic energy to attain the suppleness of a new-born baby?” (Lao Tzu). Continuity in movement: the body should move like the rhythmic flow of water on a river or like the rolling waves of the ocean.

MIND

Find empty time not crowded with activity. Give yourself permission to be quiet, calm, relaxed. We receive in proportion to what we give. Self-discipline is important and becomes a healthy compulsion. Initially, it's an act of faith. The mind should be calm; if it is not one cannot

[∞] Tao Te Ching, 54.1 4-5

concentrate. Concentration serves as the medium to increase the feeling of awareness of Chi. Use an imaginary opponent to enhance concentration. Determination. Constancy in practice. Patience. Never give up. Keep trying even if you think you get it wrong. Persistence pays off. Chang Sang-feng, the reputed father of Tai Chi and a Taoist monk wrote "*Ultimately, everything depends on one's will or mind and not on the external appearance of the movements.*"

SPIRIT

Spirit (Shen) cannot be clearly put into words but is often referred to in Tai Chi. It is one of the qualities considered when evaluating a Tai Chi performance in competition. It is seen in the posture, in the concentration, in the wholeness and completeness of the art. When we are really in the moment, in 'the zone', opened up to something greater than ourselves, we are possessed by and demonstrating spirit. The form is but an empty shell filled with inner vitality; the spirit makes it live. In giving form to energy the spirit is made physical. Do not let the spirit extend outward and get lost; rather let it be condensed inward and recycled. Give yourself up completely, both physically and mentally. Yield totally to the universe. Yield to the infinite. Relax and merge into the unity which the Chinese philosophy describes as the 'integration of sky and human'.

SOURCES

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The essence of Tai Chi Chuan: The Literary Tradition. Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books.

Tem Horwitz & Susan Kimmelman with H. H. Lui (1983). Tai Chi Chuan: The Technique of Power. London: Rider & Co.

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College Dates 2014

June 21	Park Lesson Malvern (10am to noon)
June 29	Park Lesson Fairfield (10am to noon)
June 30 to July 6	College Break

July 7 to August 24: Term 4

August 16	Park Lesson Malvern (10am to noon)
August 24	Park Lesson Fairfield (10am to noon)

August 25 to October 19: Term 5

August 31	WTPA Wushu & Taijiquan Competition
September 21	Tai Chi Workshop

Sept 29 to Oct 5	College break
October 11	Park Lesson Malvern (10am to noon)
October 19	Park Lesson Fairfield (10am to noon)

October 20 to December 7: Term 6

November 29	Park Lesson Malvern (10am to noon)
December 6	College Annual Banquet 6:30 pm
December 7	Park Lesson Fairfield (10am to noon)