

Tai Chi

from Trauma Healing and Transformation, Chapter 3, p. 32-35
—Patricia Mathes Cane, Ph.D.

Of all the practices that I teach in different countries, the one that people always ask for is Tai Chi. This used to surprise to me, but now I realize that grassroots people recognize the movements as natural to their own bodies. They find in the movements a way to awaken to their body wisdom. Some of my favorite Tai Chi images are of Mayan women with babies on their backs leading Tai Chi meditation, or of union activists starting a march with one or two movements to calm the group. One group of leaders at a women's center in El Salvador used the push-pull movement for a ceremony in the plaza of San Salvador on the Day of No Violence Against Women. Imagine hundreds of women pushing away the violence of their society, and breathing in a commitment to peace. This is a strong statement for women who live in the second most violent country in Latin America. For persons suffering from traumatic stress, Tai Chi is a healing tool that brings balance and harmony back to the body-mind-spirit. With the flowing movements tension, negativity, and stress are released, resulting in a sense of healing and wholeness. I have seen women who were victims of abuse, discover through the grace of the movements, the beauty and goodness of their bodies. Tai Chi builds a stamina and strength of being often lost with trauma. Tai Chi releases stress and rebalances energy, alleviating many traumatic stress symptoms, such as headaches, body pain, insomnia, high blood pressure, irritability, depression, and anxiety. With regular practice the person starts living with the peaceful spirit of Tai Chi, and is able to flow with the challenges and crises of life.

The movements that follow are based on a simple form called Tai Chi Chih developed by Justin Stone, as well as other traditional Tai Chi movements. The movements have been adapted with a verbal visualization to give images to the flow. The connection between the movement, image, and flow of energy provides a very powerful healing process. The purpose of this Tai Chi meditation is not to master a form. Rather it is to empower each person to discover and follow their own flow and form. In other words, to rediscover the Tai Chi that is in their own body. Based on the Chinese philosophy of Taoism that dates back over 6,000 years, the discipline of Tai-chi means "the Grand Ultimate Way of Life as taught through movement." The practice of Tai Chi reunites the person with the source of life, with the universal life force energy of earth and heaven. With regular practice over time the flowing movements deeply affect the whole person, opening them to their full potential of being.

Images to Guide the Practice of Tai Chi

Tai Chi is fluid, relaxed, and peaceful. Feelings and senses are alert. You are present in the moment, fully focused on the movements of your body and on your breathing. Your body becomes a current that is flowing with energy, vitality, and strength. Your body feels as if it were a tree, with roots planted in the earth, receiving light and air from the heavens. Breathe deeply during the movements to keep the energy of the body moving. Feel the currents of energy passing through your body, opening the channels or meridians, increasing the Chi of the body. Relax during the movements and try not to think of anything except the parts of your

body that are moving, or your breath that is filling the Tiantien, the center of vital energy below your navel. Focus your attention on energy centers in the balls of your feet that the Chinese call the Bubbling Springs. Relax completely and allow your body to move freely and fully, without controlling your movements with the mind. Often you will feel pulses or currents in your hands or in various parts of your body. Enjoy the beauty and grace of your body.

Only 9 movements will be given in text form here. For further movements and photos of positions, see the Capacitar manuals.

• The Rocking Movement

Movement: The people of China do this exercise to generate and increase energy in their bodies. It can be done for ten minutes or to start off a series of Tai Chi movements. Stand straight with your feet separated shoulder-width and your hands at your sides. Raise your heels and at the same time with palms facing upwards raise your hands to the level of your chest. Turn your palms and move your hands downward while you lower your heels and raise your toes in a rocking movement. If your body feels wobbly or unbalanced, imagine a center of balance within your abdomen, like a long umbilical cord that connects you to the earth. Continue the motion slowly rocking back and forth while you breathe deeply. With each move drop your shoulders, relax your arms and fingers. Do the exercise smoothly and slowly.

Meditation: Breathe deeply and imagine that your feet are planted securely on Mother Earth and that your toes are like long roots connecting with the nourishing energy of the earth. As you raise your hands imagine that you are able to bring down the energy of the heavens to cleanse and fill you. Sweep your fingers through the air, feeling interconnected with all being. Exhale all tension and worry and breathe in the peace and abundance of nature around you.

• Foot Position

Movement: Begin each Tai Chi movement first on the left side with your left foot forward, knees slightly bent. Your weight is balanced between both legs, allowing energy to circulate throughout the body. The point of balance is in the center of your abdomen. Breathe deeply into this center of balance. After each movement is complete on the left side, do the same movement on the right side, placing your right foot forward and beginning the movement in the right direction. Each movement may be done 7, 9 or 12 time, or according to the wisdom of your body. The movements may be done in any order, depending upon your preference. If you only have a few minutes to do Tai Chi, choose one or two favorite movements that especially nourish you.

Meditation: On the left side you receive or bring energy into your being. On the right side you give your energy to others. As you meditate with the movements imagine the energy that flows into you on the left side. And as you do the movement on the right side, shine your compassionate love and energy to bring healing to the world.

• The Circle of Light

Movement: With left foot forward and hands facing down to the earth, form a circle of light with your fingers. Move the circle of light in a clockwise direction, giving and receiving energy. Repeat on the right side this time moving the circle of light counter clockwise.

Meditation: With this movement imagine that you are interconnected with all being, giving and receiving energy.

• The Globe of Light

Movement: With left foot forward, form a ball of light within your hands at shoulder level. Playfully throw the ball away from your body towards the left side and circulate your hands back to the chest. Repeat on the right side.

Meditation: Imagine you are a joyful child delighting in play. Form the ball of light between your hands and feel the radiance of your being. Freely toss the ball toward the world connecting with the gift you have to give. Feel a smile on your face and gratitude in your heart for this joyful moment of play.

• The Shower of Light

Movement: With left foot forward and palms facing each other at a distance of about one foot, move your hands in a circular motion upward to head level and then downward as if receiving a shower of light. Feel the shower of energy cleansing your aura and your energy field, filling and nourishing your body, mind, and spirit. Repeat on the right side, with right foot forward.

Meditation: Imagine the life force energy that surrounds you. As you do the movement on the left side, get in touch with any stress, tension, or negativity you may be holding, and let it go. As you raise your hands breathe in the shower of light, and as you lower your hands exhale and let go of any negativity within you. Feel the light of the heavens cleansing and renewing you. As you do the movement on the right side, get in touch with the violence and negativity in the larger world around you. In the name of the human community commit yourself to healing the wounds of violence around you. Breathe in the cleansing light to strengthen the human community.

• Let Go and Open to Receive

Movement: With left foot forward, palms curved softly downward and hands at chest level, push your hands outward in a gentle arc, letting go of all tension, negativity and violence in your being. Turn palms upward and draw them back towards the chest, breathing in the goodness and abundance of life. Repeat with right foot forward.

Meditation: Connect with whatever wounds, tension, or violence you may be holding in your heart. As you do the movement on the left side, breathe out the pain and violence. Breathe in peace, grace, and the abundance of life around you. As you do the movement on the right side, connect with the violence and pain of the world. In the name of the human community, let go of the violence, and breathe in the peace and healing needed in our world.

• Ask and Receive the Grace of Life

Movement: With left foot forward, hands at waist level, palms facing upward, move your hands outward in a clockwise circle and then back toward your body. Breathe in deeply and feel the life force of the earth flowing in through your fingertips from Nature. Repeat on the right side hands circling counter-clockwise.

Meditation: The Scriptures tell us to ask, knowing that we shall receive. Ask for what you may need, confident that you will be filled with abundance. On the right side, ask for those around you. Include in your prayer all who are suffering poverty or violence in the larger world.

• Fly through the Air

Movement: With your left foot forward, your left hand is above your left shoulder, palm outward. Your right hand, palm upward, is level at your right waist. Swim or fly through the warm, energizing air. Enjoy the grace and lightness of your body. The motion should be free and light with arms and shoulders relaxed. Repeat the movement on the right side starting with your right hand above your right shoulder, and left palm at your left waist.

Meditation: Fly freely through the air letting go of all that weighs you down, feeling the liberation of your spirit. Think of all the possibilities and desires you have for your life and growth. Open your heart to begin manifesting these. As you fly on the right side, imagine all the possibilities for the human family in different parts of the world. Imagine you are able to fly around the planet encouraging and inspiring all those you meet.

• Window of Eternity

Movement: Take a moment for meditation before returning to the activities of life. With the heel of your left foot elevated and balanced against your right inner ankle bone, interlace your fingers and elevate your palms to slightly below eye level. Relax your gaze, looking out over your hands, without focusing. Feel at one with your body, mind, and spirit, enjoying this eternal moment of peace, knowing that you carry the light always within you in the midst of the turmoils of life. When you feel ready, slowly lower your hands to your sides.

Meditation: Imagine a column of light passing up your spine connecting you with earth and heaven. Feel the radiance of your being shining out in all directions. Connect to past, present, and future in this eternal moment. Feel at one with all Being.

• **Namasté Bow of Reverence to the Community**

Movement: If you are practicing Tai Chi with others, place your hands together in front of your chest as if you were praying, and bow to each person in the community. Look deeply into their eyes, acknowledging and appreciating their unique beauty and grace of soul.

Meditation: Namasté. I honor the place in you in which the entire universe dwells. I honor the place in you which is of love, of truth, of light, and of peace. When you are in that place in you, and I am in that place in me, we are ONE. Namasté!

• **The Dance of Tai Chi**

Expressing the Tai Chi of your Body: After completing the Tai Chi movements and before finishing, listen to your body, mind, and spirit and begin to move according to your own inner rhythm. Express your feelings and emotions through movement. Look at nature and feel a profound connection between your body and the heavens and earth. Express this connection. Feel the balance and unity between your body, mind, and spirit, and express this through your movement. Breathe deeply and continue moving and flowing with grace.

Resources for Further Study

Books

Chungliang Huang, A. Embrace Tiger, Return to Mountain: The Essence of Tai Chi. Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts, 1987.

Chuckrow, R. The Tai Chi Book: Refining and Enjoying a Lifetime of Practice. Boston, MS: YMAA Publication Center, 1998.

Klein, B. Movements of Magic: The Spirit of Tai-Chi-Chuan. North Hollywood, CA: New Castle Publishing Co., 1984.

Le Guin, U. Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching: A Book About the Way and the Power of the Way. Boston: Shambhala, 1997.

Stone, J. Tai Chi Chih. Satori Resources, 1974.

Music for use during Tai Chi

Babbling Brook. Interludes, Great American Audio, New Rochelle, NY.

Anjali: Melodies of Ancient India. 1991, Sri Rama Publishing, Box 2550 Santa Cruz, CA 95063

Tapes and Videos

Capacitar Tai Chi Cassette with background music and meditation:

MJB Communications, 504 Antioch Lane, Ballwin, MO 63011 314-227-7445

Video: Pathways to Self Healing, Produced by Mercy Health Partners & Capacitar—with Tai Chi segment:

Capacitar Inc., 23 East Beach Street, Suite 206, Watsonville, CA 95076 831-722-7590

Contacts

Tai Chi Centers and community courses are now available in most parts of the U.S.