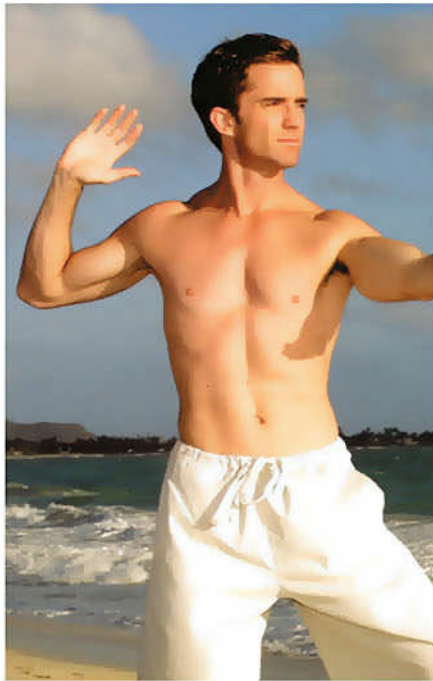


Tai Chi

EXPLORING THE EVOLUTION OF MOVEMENT

Imagine a blueprint of correct movement, an outline, a foundation of divinely expressed human form. Like science and technology, movement evolves. If you don't believe that, look at the progress of athletes in the 20th century in all sports from gymnastics to golf. Records were broken and higher challenges were met at many levels.

This concept is not limited to our century, or even to sports alone. It applies to improvement in all forms of movement, transcending also into the worlds of body awareness, mental acuteness, and spiritual healing. To exploring real progress, enter *Tai Chi* and welcome a blueprint of beautiful movement designed specifically for you.



Welcome To Your Body

You may wonder how this blueprint can change your life and how it was designed specifically for you, but that is all part of the experience. Tai Chi must be experienced to feel it, understand it and individualize it. Tai Chi is movement, and like life, never stops. Have you ever wondered how a fish makes a small movement in its body thrusting it forward in the water? Tai Chi and *Tai Chi Chuan* (the sequence of moves as practiced today) evolved out of natural principles, operating in the same way as the fish: the movement of energy with the least amount of effort.

The typical Western response is, "Oh, it sounds lazy." Quite the contrary, Eastern philosophy would humbly respond that by using energy more efficiently, like the fish, you actually have more energy for everything else.

In Tai Chi, the outward flailing of the arms and legs is de-emphasized, while the internal focus and power is generated through spiraling energy (chi) initiated from the legs and waist, moving like steam through your torso and then outward through your limbs.

I often equate it to that childhood game, *Crack the Whip*, when the littlest kid on the end swirls around with the most speed. The whip effect in Tai Chi occurs as you relax in your own movement, allowing natural force to spiral and accumulate with exponentially more power, using less energy.

Many Westerners have seen Tai Chi on TV or in movies, or on trips to China where thousands of people practice in the streets, parks, and open spaces, but Tai Chi still remains a mystery to most Americans. As yoga has moved into American consciousness, many either confuse it with Tai Chi, or view Tai Chi as an enigma, rather than as something that can be practiced every day like yoga.

Many doctors have quietly recommended Tai Chi to seniors to help overcome arthritis, and some people have embraced the relaxation benefits of Tai Chi, but few people know that Tai Chi is indeed a martial art form derived from thousands of years of movement and natural documentation of human form. Each slow-set posture has a fast-set martial equivalent with self-defense origins. It is the slow energy-building set, however, that defines the movement blueprint for the body at the cellular level.

Behold ... Your Path Awaits

Feeling and learning the origins of movement through Tai Chi is so vitally organic and beautiful that it is hard to describe. It also is rewarding in all areas of physical fitness. From increased slow twitch muscle fiber activity to increased range of motion, you can improve balance and posture, aid digestion, increase metabolism, improve full-body breathing and reduce overall stress. The Tai Chi journey is indeed full of benefits. Internal

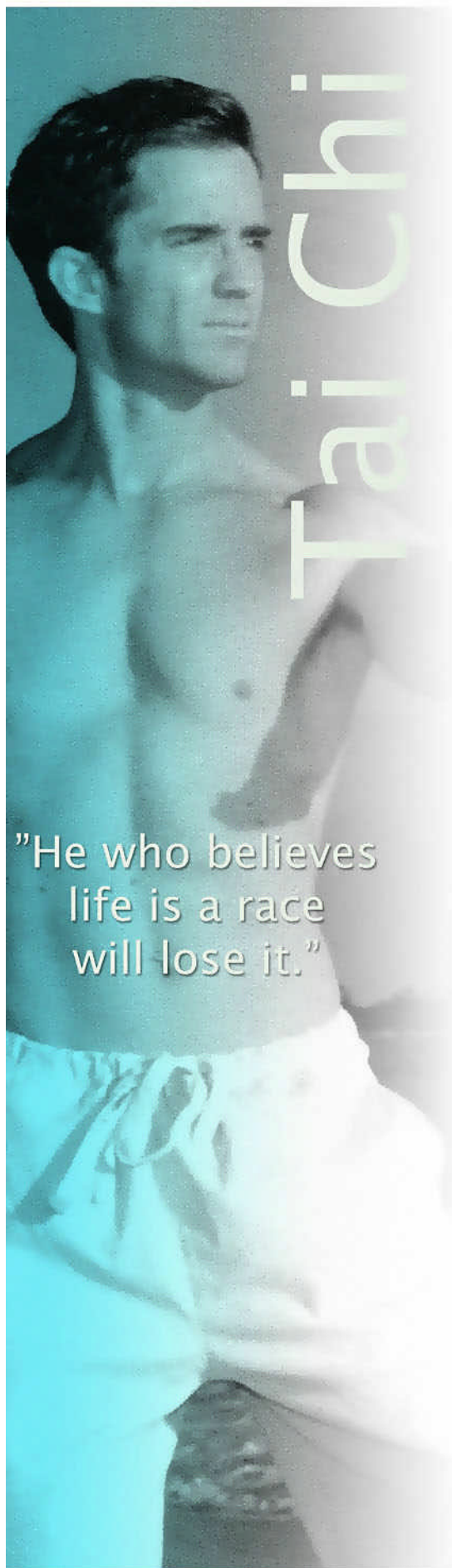
clarity and power are also byproducts of the "Chi" experience.

Beginning students often become frustrated because the slow set feels like too much to learn. Like a novel, sometimes it doesn't kick in until the third or fourth chapter. Give it time. Practicing patience with yourself is part of the message, along with enjoying the process. Don't worry about "getting it right." Besides, there are many things about Tai Chi that you can incorporate into your life right now.

Often called "a string of pearls," Tai Chi is beautiful to behold, and its principles and postures represent individual pearls of wisdom, born out of the need to experience, resolve, learn and move forward. In the beginning there was *Wu Chi*, meaning stillness, or the state of perfect balance. Next came Tai Chi, movement. Life is in a constant state of movement, and Tai Chi represents all of the movement through life.

Holding that thought for a moment, imagine yourself as a happy little oyster, sitting somewhat complacently at the bottom of the sea. Life is good—a little boring—but good. Your life as an oyster changes drastically the day a grain of sand enters your soft cushiony little world. Irritated? You bet. Now, oysters don't move a lot by our standards, but they do by oyster standards, especially when a grain of sand comes in. It rocks an oyster's world, literally. The only way for the oyster to deal with this grain of sand is to move around it, work with it, include it, redirect it, and eventually *smooth* out the situation, again, literally. Voila, a pearl is born, and resolution is created out of movement.

Tai Chi is that movement, and like the oyster, you will use natural and imposed force to your benefit, working with it, not against it. Deflection, rather than resistance of force is the norm. Even the natural force of gravity is beautifully addressed. So basically, never meet any force with force. Consider this Chinese proverb: "*He who believes life is a race will lose it.*"



"He who believes
life is a race
will lose it."

Transforming ... From The Race Into The Journey

Taoist and Buddhist philosophies most closely parallel Tai Chi principle and training, teaching resilience, an ability to yield and rebound. In the *Tao Te Ching*, Chinese philosopher, Lao Tzu asks, "Can you have the softness and resilience of a breathing child?" The answer is a resounding "Yes."

Any person living and breathing can employ this simple concept starting right now. It is a very comforting internal image when you see your body as a breathing child, regardless of age, flexibility, fitness level or perceived limitations.

So, you now have a potential blueprint of movement, a past life as an oyster, and a newfound feeling of resilience. The beginning of the Tai Chi Chuan *Yang Slow Set* mimics this state of relaxed balanced stillness, bringing breath into the child with the first movement. "Commencing Form" lets you bring it into your body.

Standing with your feet apart, arms relaxed at your sides, raise your arms slowly forward to shoulder level, joints relaxed, palms facing each other. As your hands reach shoulder level, relax your shoulders, your elbows, your wrists and your hands, lowering your arms slowly, allowing your palms to face outward naturally as you lower your arms. Try it a few times, inhaling as you lift your arms and exhaling as you lower your arms. Feel yourself going from stillness to movement. Notice also the feeling of warmth in the palms of your hands. Chi, or energy, is stored and originates at a point called the "Dan Tien," located a couple of inches below your navel.

In traditional Tai Chi practice, the tongue rests gently on the roof of your mouth as you breathe through your nose on both inhale and exhale. It is even believed that the saliva created during the slow-set practice has mystical healing powers, not the least of which is better digestion for the individual practitioner. As you form a more clear mind/body connection—and you will because it is the natural order of focus—you will find that you will warm up and even sweat through some of the slow moves as you internally heat up by focusing your mind on the Dan Tien. Remember, it is a RELAXED focus, don't try to bend any spoons.

Try "Commencing Form" again, this time with your tongue relaxed and in place on the roof of your mouth, and your mind focused on your Dan Tien. Do you feel any different? Your abdominal cavity has no external outlets, so you are heating up the core of your body like a teapot, preferably your favorite herb tea to avoid the jitters. Your relaxed, refined mental energy will create quite an efficient furnace and you will

become aware of your body like a spider in a web, your spider is your Dan Tien, your web is your entire body.

We are creatures of movement and we can learn and remember the positive influences of nature on our bodies, minds and spirits. Movement and breathing exercises to create heat in the damper climates of China proved to be a cure for illness and are documented as early as 722 B.C. The movement patterns of animals were regarded as valuable examples. For instance, stretching your arms out like a bird spreading its wings, proved to be good for the heart, while bending forward like a bear was discovered to be good for the back and kidneys.

One of my favorite exercises simply mimics the monkey. Merely relax your knees and lower back allowing your arms to swing naturally in front of you, your shoulders rounded slightly forward. Breathing is natural and monkey noises are optional.

These early animal-inspired movements formed the basis for the healing practices of *Chi Kung* (also spelled *Qi Gong*). *Chi Kung* precedes Tai Chi and consists of thousands of movement and breathing exercises that balance energy, strengthen internal organs and promote overall health and vitality. Tai Chi evolved out of these early movements, incorporating *Chi Kung* influences in many of its postures. Animals and nature again play a prominent role in Tai Chi. *Parting Horse's Mane*, *Snake Creeps Down*, *Needle at the Bottom of the Sea* and *Repulse the Monkey* are just a few of the Tai Chi Chuan slow set.

Tai Chi is reverent, disciplined and playful, and as an aggressive male in my mid-30s, I can honestly say practicing and teaching Tai Chi has changed my life. Whether you choose to study with a Tai Chi master, a book, or a video, I encourage you to try Tai Chi barefoot in a park, on a lawn, or somewhere with natural significance to you. Imagine an elderly person in China, full childlike resiliency, practicing Tai Chi in the same spot next to a tree they have grown up with for years. Pick a spot that you would like to place your valuable energy, forming your new blueprint, and go for it, even if it is just for five minutes a day. Expand your horizons like that little oyster, and pretty soon you will open new doors of expression at all levels.

Qi Gong for Health and Vitality by Michael Tse, and *108 Insights into Tai Chi Chuan* by Michael Gilman are the books recommended for beginning study. The *Tai Chi Training* video featuring Scott Cole can also guide you to a basic understanding of *Chi Kung* moves, slow set introduction, and a fast set workout. ☀

Fitness Expert, National Aerobic Champion and 'Abs of Steel' star, Scott Cole, has motivated audiences in 31 countries worldwide. Cole's 'Tai Chi Training' and 'Millennium Stretch' videos have been named #1 by both NBC and ABC.