



Happy Lunar New Year!

As we enter the year of the dragon, I'd like to wish you all peace, prosperity, and great energy, like a dragon.

I have received a few inputs from readers on topics of interest. Please keep them coming, so I can better serve your needs.

Insight Sharing - Staying with Tai Chi

One of the topics suggested by a reader was how to stay with tai chi. Oftentimes, a practitioner has a lapse in practice, sometimes due to illness, travel, or just being too busy at work. Weeks turn into months, and next thing you know, the practitioner has forgotten the sequence of forms and is unable to pick it back up again.

I'd like to address this topic in two articles. In this first article, I will talk about how to stay with tai chi in the early stages. In the next article, I will talk about how to stay with tai chi after having learned and practiced it for some time.

Here is some advice for new learners, on how to approach learning tai chi:

Keep an open mind, be patient, and set realistic goals. The slow, graceful movements in tai chi are unfamiliar to most people. It entails the imagery of

moving in water, or moving with intent. The tai chi form is practiced with the body in a lowered stance throughout the form, with one or both knees bent for most of the time. Movement across the floor is done by cat stepping, i.e., moving the free foot to its new position on the floor before initiating any weight transfer. Most people are new to these types of movement characteristics. It takes some time to become comfortable with these movements and to develop the skills to do them well. Beginners are often surprised at the amount of mental effort required just to mimic the external movements, let alone move in the manner just described. They may feel that their movements are awkward. It is therefore best to manage one's expectations. Being able to reproduce the external movements to 60-70% accuracy is a good initial goal to set, and give yourself ample time to learn each new form. Tai chi is learned in stages, progressing from the external movements, to incorporating tai chi principles, then understanding force management, rooting, and beyond. It is not necessary to move like a master in order to gain health and wellness benefits from doing tai chi.

Like any other complex skill, tai chi requires a learning process and frequent practice. Unlike activities such as aerobics, zumba, or yoga, where you can just drop in to any session and follow whatever the instructor demonstrates, tai chi is a skill to be studied, much like studying ballet. This requires practicing on your own outside of class. Beyond the learning phase, the National Institutes of Health recommends practicing tai chi for 20 minutes most days of the week for effectiveness. Not dedicating enough time to practice, and falling behind in class is a common reason for students to drop out.

Motivation is key. As with any endeavor, those who are most motivated are the most likely to succeed. Set intermediate goals, such as completing just one form slowly and without pauses. Early successes help fuel your motivation to do more. Find enjoyment in your tai chi practice. Evaluate why you want to learn tai chi and make tai chi practice an integral part of your daily routine. Understand what health and wellness benefits tai chi can offer you. There is an abundance of clinical trials and research papers that attest to the benefits of tai chi. Having a belief that you can achieve similar results will help motivate you.

Hopefully, the above tips will help you stay with tai chi and enjoy the health and wellness benefits for many years to come.

With Warmest Regards,

Vincent Chun, PhD

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