



Chen style single whip, Villa Lapa Jungle Village, Costa Rica.

Greetings!

Spring is finally here. It is also an opportunity to take your tai chi practice outdoors, where the air is fresh, there is ample space to move and you can improve your skills by playing the forms on uneven terrain.

I have begun online classes in a Chen style tai chi form. My online 24 Forms tai chi class is beginning to focus on rooting techniques shortly. Anyone interested in these sessions, please contact me. My in-person classes at the [Milano Center](#) in Melrose continues to welcome new participants as well.

In this edition's newsletter, I continue with last edition's topic of staying with tai chi, this time focusing on established practitioners. I also have a few thoughts on a specific skating skill that doesn't seem to be discussed much.

Insight Sharing - Staying with Tai Chi (Part 2)

In this article, I present a few tips on how to stay with tai chi for those who have learned a form or more. Occasionally, one may become busy or otherwise occupied by other activities leading to a pause in one's tai chi practice. Days turn

into weeks, weeks turn into months. Then it becomes too difficult to pick back up again due to forgetting the form or just inertia.

Every person's situation regarding a potential lapse in practice is unique, so the following are generalities that may or may not apply to a given set of circumstances. First, one should assess and evaluate the benefits that tai chi has brought to you. There are health and wellness benefits at each stage of skill development. Have you noticed those benefits commensurate with your level of skill (see list at a later paragraph)? Are they of value to you? Are these benefits worth the effort to continue or restart your tai chi practice? Do you feel motivated to continue your tai chi journey?

For some, the answer may be that the effort is too high and the desired benefits could be achieved with other, lower effort activities. Indeed, tai chi is a patient, dedicated learning process, much like studying ballet. It is not an activity where you just follow an instructor during a workout session. Nevertheless, if you assess that the benefits are worth the effort, below are a few tips on how to stay with tai chi.

- Join a group that practices on a regular basis, outside of a classroom environment. The social aspect of group practice is helpful for mental health, mutual encouragement, and exchange of ideas. Comparing notes with other practitioners can also help to improve your tai chi skills. However, you may need to learn a new form if the forms you know are not among the popular ones.
- During periods when you have less time, practice in an abbreviated manner, such as playing a form once instead of multiple times, or playing only a section of a long form. I often practice silk reeling, standing pile, or tai chi walking while waiting for food to cook. I practice sitting meditation while sitting on a bus, train, or plane.
- If you haven't already memorized your chosen form, try to do so as best as you can. Ability to play your form from memory instead of following an instructor or other external cue will free up mental bandwidth for applying tai chi principles. It will also allow your practice to become a moving meditation and increase the likelihood of maintaining your tai chi practice after a hiatus.
- Run through the sequence of forms in your mind if you don't have time to perform it physically. I use this technique to refresh my memory of the Wu style 108 hand form and the Wu style 108 sword form, which I practice only occasionally. I do this before going to bed or while sitting on a bus, train, or plane. It allows me to remember the forms without frequent practice.
- Periodically select an element of tai chi skill to focus on for improvement. To prevent your tai chi practice from falling into a rut, repeating the same old routine day after day, find some aspect to improve on, to add new purpose to each practice. These could be something as simple as continuous movement, more disciplined cat stepping, more disciplined head and eye movements, gentle resistance, using the pelvis to drive the torso and arms, etc.
- Continue on your tai chi journey by learning higher level skills or learning a new form. Learning new things can be an invigorating venture, leading to new insights and increased satisfaction with what tai chi can do for you.

The following are typical health and wellness benefits, and their associated skills:

- Increased strength and flexibility - tai chi is an isotonic and isometric exercise using body weight. Isometric muscle activation through the imagery of gentle resistance against heavy air or moving in water engages muscles along the entire kinetic chain. It is a whole body exercise.
- Improved balance - cat stepping (i.e., stepping by gently touching the free foot on the floor before initiating the weight shift from the weighted foot onto the free foot), if done diligently, develops better awareness and control of balance.
- Improved posture - attention to upright posture throughout the tai chi form translates to improved posture throughout the day.
- Calmed nervous system - the slow, gentle movements, the long, deep breathing, and the isometric muscle activations all contribute to reduction in anxiety, lowering of blood pressure, and reduction of pain perception. The expansive postures also contribute to improved mental health.
- Increased mindfulness - the mental focus on a panoply of tai chi skills during forms practice improves mindfulness that translates to other facets of one's daily life. Mental skills and attention during forms practice involve: recalling the sequence of forms and movement details within each form, ensuring proper weight transfer (cat stepping), gentle resistance, upright posture, continuous movement for beginning/intermediate practitioners; chi flow, rooting, and internal dynamics for advanced practitioners.
- Eased symptoms of many medical conditions - research studies have shown that tai chi has eased the symptoms of many diseases and have improved the immune system.

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

Insight Sharing for Figure Skaters - Finding George

There is a technique, referred to as “squeezing George,” which imagines a dollar bill (or the quarter coin) - the one with George Washington on one side - being tucked between the butt cheeks, and the glutes activating to keep the dollar bill or coin from falling off. The purpose is to maintain proper structural alignment during figure skating elements. The term was even mentioned in an episode of Dancing With the Stars in relation to a paso doble competition.

I had found it difficult to maintain the “squeeze George” muscle activation of the glutes, but I have come to realize that the resulting structural alignment is very helpful for higher jumps, better 3-turns, and other rotational elements, and have belatedly begun practicing it more diligently. While the “squeeze George” imagery primarily focuses on the glutes, the technique additionally involves the abs, the pelvic floor, and the lower back muscles. It minimizes pelvic rotations in the coronal (frontal plane), i.e., elevation (hip hiking) on one side and depression (lateral tilt) on the other side that otherwise may occur during 3-turns, jumps, and other figures elements. I find it interesting that techniques such as this for pelvic stabilization are seldomly mentioned or discussed in skating articles and videos. If you have insights to share on this topic, I would love to hear them.

With Warmest Regards,

Vincent Chun, PhD

If you find this article to be useful, please feel free to forward it to others.



©2024 Tai Chi + Skating | tcsk8rchun.com

[Web Version](#) [Forward](#) [Unsubscribe](#)

Powered by
[GoDaddy Email Marketing](#)®