Learning Tai Chi Ch’uan

“The Way is the Goal”

A practical reference and guide to learning about the 24 Forms Tai Chi Ch’uan and other essential principles and related concepts

by Lester Heath
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“The Way is the Goal”

A complete and practical reference and guide to learning about the 24 Forms Tai Chi Ch’uan and other essential Tai Chi principles and key concepts

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Foreword - About this book

This book is a compilation of the notes that I have made over a number of years to support my teaching of Tai Chi Ch’uan. While my notes are often enhanced when I learn something new from my own training or a new course or through study, most of what I have written has been as a direct result of the initial instruction from my teachers and my learning from my own teaching. Whenever I run a Tai Chi course I create notes. These notes enable me to easily restructure a repeat course or parts of the course and also serve as practical hand-outs for my students.

While I teach different forms of Tai Chi from the different Tai Chi styles, in this book, I go into more detail on the Yang Style 24 forms. In my Tai Chi teaching program this form is the standard. I believe that this form is not only a very special form, but it is ideal as an introductory form for a person of average physical abilities. It is relatively short, it comprises some challenging steps and it is widely practiced around the world, allowing the student a greater opportunity to attend classes and continue with his/her training wherever they may travel or live.

The inspiration for me to write this book came from a new Tai Chi student, a German speaking lady who asked me if I could recommend a good book for her to learn more about Tai Chi. While I have read some very good books on Tai Chi, I was not really able to recommend a good German book for her because the books I was reading at that time were all English. The student who had heard about my Tai Chi course literature asked if she could buy copies of my notes and she would try to translate them.

Needless to say, I provided her with copies of my notes that were relative to her beginner level for free, but on reflection, it dawned upon me that my own notes, those that I use on a routine basis were exactly what I wanted new students to learn and therefore, why not reproduce my notes in a logical format as a book that could also benefit other persons thinking of starting or already practicing Tai Chi Ch’uan and so, I began compiling this book.

I hope you, the reader, enjoys this compilation and that reading this book will give you a broader understanding of Tai Chi Ch’uan and other associated concepts and teachings that will enrich your Tai Chi journey.

Below is a summary is what is inside this book:

- Theory to give the reader an overview of the basic history of Tai Chi Ch’uan
- Basic information as taught by me on some of the fundamental Tai Chi principles
- Snippets of interesting and useful information about the Tai Chi Ch’uan 24 forms relative to other Tai Chi Styles and forms.
- An outline of well-known Tai Chi warm-up exercises that I use for safe and effective Tai Chi practice
- Step by step illustrations and explanations of the Tai Chi Ch’uan 24 postures
Brief insights into some of the more advanced routines that could serve to improve important components of practicing Tai Chi Ch’uan

Acknowledgements

I compiled this book as an easy reference and a source of useful information for my Tai Chi students who always inspire me to perform at my best.

Teaching for me, has always the best way to improve my Tai Chi.

Thanks to two of my very good friends, Regula and Arthur who practice Tai Chi with me and who have helped me with taking some of the included pictures and allowed me to use them as sounding boards throughout the development of this book.

Thanks to all of my students, past and present who continuously motivate me as they themselves, strive so hard to learn and improve their Tai Chi Ch’uan.

Thank you all!
Section 1 - About the Author

I am from Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) and I am a father of four grown up children. I am currently living in Spain and working as a freelance, professional Coach and Tai Chi Teacher/Coach.

I am an experienced martial artist and a qualified and registered Tai Chi Instructor. I have had the privilege of attending courses with and learning Tai Chi under some of the most acclaimed teachers, namely, Dr. Paul Lam, Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang, Grandmaster Chen Zheng Lei, Master Mantak Chia and the late Master Lim Lai Leong of Penang, Malaysia.

Like many people coming from Zimbabwe I have had to immigrate and resettle in a new country more than once. In hindsight, the repeated relocation has been good for my martial arts learning, as I have had to change from one system to another and I have been exposed to the teachings and influences of a range of teachers of different backgrounds from China, Malaysia, Thailand, Switzerland, Australia, Hungary, Israel, America and the United Kingdom.

While I have practiced different martial art systems over the years and really enjoyed the different open-hand and weapons fighting forms, my real passion for some years now is the study and practice of Tai Chi Ch’uan.

I cannot impress you by telling you that I have a Tai Chi pedigree, or that I am a Tai Chi Master, or that I come from a long Tai Chi generation lineage. In fact, because I have met and received instruction from some of the best, I am quick to acknowledge there are many outstanding Tai Chi teachers and Masters out there and I am simply a dedicated student with a life-time of Tai Chi learning ahead of me.

I am fascinated by the origins and connections of different martial arts, whether they originate from Japan, India, Israel, Thailand, China, Okinawa or any other country. The history and the deeper similarities of one system to another intrigue me, as do the basics of all of these systems, the fundamentals are so connected and the basics to these fundamentals are always the same. More than this, I just love teaching Tai Chi. I am committed to teaching and learning Tai Chi Ch’uan. I have taught for years and I am always rewarded when witnessing students, young, middle aged, elderly and sometimes disabled persons benefiting from practicing Tai Chi.

I am a training fanatic, practicing karate and Tai Chi on a daily basis. The Tai Chi forms I enjoy are the 24 forms Yang style, the 13 and 18 step Chen style forms, the 32 and 42 sword forms, the 42 Combined (Chen, Wu, Yang and Sun styles) form, the 18 steps Fan form, the Sun style 73 forms and the Tai Chi for Arthritis I and II forms. Other forms I practice and teach are Tai Chi for Rehabilitation, Tai Chi for Diabetes, Tai Chi for Osteoporosis, Tai Chi for Energy and the Cheng Man-ch’ing or Zheng Manqing 37 form.

I am very motivated when teaching small groups. I am involved in teaching Tai Chi to private groups in rented studios, on the beach, in the parks, at Health centres, to employees in the work place, to individuals and couples in their home or at my home studio.
Section 2 - What is Tai Chi?

Tai Chi Ch’uan is often spelt, Taiji Quan, or t’ai chi ch’uan. Throughout this book, to be consistent I have standardized and use the terms Tai Chi Ch’uan or simply Tai Chi.

Tai Chi is a type of martial art very well known for its defence techniques and health benefits. This Chinese martial art has evolved over the years into an effective means of alleviating stress and anxiety. It has been considered to be a form of ‘meditation in motion’ that promotes serenity and inner peace.

Tai chi is extremely popular in China, where it is practiced daily en masse, often in large groups in the early mornings in parks and open spaces. Over the past 40 plus years, Tai Chi has become popular outside of China, as well.

The full scope of the training of Tai Chi Ch’uan involves the following five elements;

- Taolu - solo hand and weapons routines/forms
- Neigong – movement, awareness exercises and meditation
- Qigong – posture and breathing exercises
- Tuishou - response drills
- Sanshou - self-defence techniques, applications

The Chinese characters for Tai Chi Ch’uan, shown at the start of this section can be translated as the ‘Supreme Ultimate Force’ or "supreme ultimate fist", "boundless fist", "supreme ultimate boxing" or "great extremes boxing"

Whether Tai Chi is performed by martial artists or by Tai Chi champions it comes down to ‘what is Tai Chi?’ Once you truly understand Tai Chi then you will realize Tai Chi is unique and it can be quite complex, no one can know it all. It can be many things to many people. It is an art that embraces the mind, the body, and the spirit.

At the core of Tai Chi are the essential principles. No matter what style and what aspects of Tai Chi you practice, as long as the essential Tai Chi principles are adhered to, the unique effects of Tai Chi and the health benefits will be evidenced.

True Tai Chi movements are ones that incorporate the essential Tai Chi principles and include slow, controlled, smooth continuous movement, moving as though there is a gentle resistance, with the correct posture and good weight transference.
Tai Chi Styles

There are five major styles of Tai Chi Ch’uan, each named after the Chinese family from which they originated. The following information; 1 – 5 below has been taken from www.wikipedia.org

1. Chen-style of Chen Wangting (1580–1660) was a Ming Dynasty general who founded Chen-style the Tai Chi Ch’uan, sometimes called Chen Wang Ting or Zouting. He devised the Chen family-style of Tai Chi Ch’uan at his home of Chenjiagou, Wenxian County, Henan province, China.

2. Yang-style of Yang Lu-ch’an. Yang Lu-ch’an or Yang Luchan, also known as Yang Fukui (1799–1872), born in Kuang-p’ing (Guangping), was an influential teacher of the internal style martial art of Tai Chi Ch’uan in China during the second half of the 19th century. He is known as the founder of Yang style Tai Chi Ch’uan. This style is the most widely practiced in the western world, particularly the 24 Form also referred to as the Beijjing or Peking form.

3. Wu Chien Ch’uan or Wu Jianquan (1870–1942) was a famous teacher and founder of the neijia martial art of Wu-style Tai Chi Ch’uan in late Imperial and early Republican China.

4. The Wu or Wu (Hao)-style of Tai Chi Ch’uan is a separate family style from the more popular Wu-style of Wu Chien-Ch’uan referred to above. Wu Yu-hsiang’s Tai Chi Ch’uan is a distinctive style with small, subtle movements, highly focused on balance, sensitivity and internal chi development. It is a rare style today, especially compared with the other major styles.

5. Sun-style of Sun Lu-t’ang. Sun Lu-t’ang or Sun Lutang (1860-1933) was a renowned master of Chinese neijia (internal) martial arts and the progenitor of the art of Sun style Tai Chi Ch’uan.

Every one of the above styles has a variety of forms all varying in length and sequence e.g. the Yang style 24 Forms is performed in a sequence of 24 steps or movements. As for all Tai Chi styles many of the movements are derived from martial arts attack and defence techniques and from the natural movements of animals and birds. The way they are performed in Tai Chi is normally to soft music, slowly and gracefully with smooth and even transitions between the moves.

There are many, many, Tai Chi forms being performed today. To list them all would be of little value in this book. In my experience, particularly in the west, the following forms are more widely promoted and practiced.

- 24 Forms (Yang Style) also called the Peking or Beijing form
- 32 and 42 Sword forms (Yang Style)
- 42 Combined forms (Chen, Wu, yang and Sun styles) official competitions Forms
- 18, 19 36, 38, 74 forms (Chen style)
- Sun style 73 forms and other Tai Chi for Health forms.
Section 3 - Who can learn Tai Chi Ch’uan?

Tai Chi can be learned and practiced by anyone of any age, even those with conditions that may exclude them from other forms of exercise.

I teach Tai Chi to persons of all ages. I teach the forms and principles to experienced martial artists and Tai Chi practitioners, to the elderly, to persons with disabilities and to persons going through physical rehabilitation or recovering from serious illness or accidents.

The top reasons I enjoy practicing and sharing Tai Chi with others are;

- Tai Chi if practiced correctly offers many health benefits
- The benefits of practicing Tai Chi are very noticeable in a short space of time
- Tai Chi can be done indoors or outdoors
- Tai Chi does not require special clothing
- Tai Chi can be practiced in a group or alone
- Tai Chi can be practiced by young or old
- Tai Chi can be modified for persons with special conditions
- Tai Chi can be practiced in a very limited space
- Tai Chi is a vast subject and there is always something new to learn
- Tai Chi adds value to my martial arts techniques
- Practicing Tai Chi gives me a real “feel good” feeling
- Tai Chi is simply, good for me

I think it is important to note here, that the practice of Tai Chi Ch’uan is an ancient Chinese art and can take many, many years with the best teacher to attain a high standard, Tai Chi Ch’uan is popular today around the world not only for practitioners wanting to achieve medal status, but also as a means of safe, easy and relaxing exercise providing enormous benefits for anyone if practiced correctly and with the basic Tai Chi principles.
Section 4 - The Benefits of practicing Tai Chi Ch’uan

Practicing Tai Chi Ch’uan with slow controlled movements, the correct posture, proper breathing, techniques and a calm clear mind provides us with many health benefits. The Internet is awash with information on this topic based on scientific studies, personal accounts and historic teachings.

Over the years I have witnessed many of my students enjoy some of the more obvious benefits as listed below;

- Improved posture
- Improved balance
- Improved flexibility
- Improved levels of confidence
- Improved motor coordination
- Improved breathing
- Improved mobility
- Improved concentration

Two additional benefits from practicing Tai Chi are an improved flow of Qi through the body and an increased ability to calm the mind.

In Chinese philosophy and medicine, exists the concept of Qi (ch’i) or (chi) a vital force that animates the body. One of the aims of Tai Chi is to foster the circulation of this qi within the body. Qi circulates in patterns that are closely related to the nervous and vascular system. It is this qi that is core to the practice of acupuncture and other oriental healing arts.

Another aim of practicing Tai Chi is to foster a calm and tranquil mind, as we focus on the precise execution of the Tai Chi forms. Tai Chi is commonly referred to as moving meditation. The slow graceful movements can be used as a meditation to provide a peaceful focus, to quiet the mind and to engender a deep sense of relaxation that helps release inner tensions.

I try to depict stillness and serenity with the pic below.
Section 5 - The Way is the Goal

“The Way is the Goal” is the perfect expression to describe one’s journey when learning Tai Chi Ch’uan, there is always something new to learn, the journey never ends.

For years I did enjoy long distance running of marathons and ultra-marathons and I very quickly learned that ultra-events needed to be approached with the right attitude, focus had to be on the moment and every step and not on the finish. This is also very true for someone who is learning Tai Chi, not for reasons of endurance, but because as one slowly progresses on their Tai Chi journey and their awareness and application of essential principles and key concepts increases, so they learn to enjoy the moment, enjoy every step and naturally their Tai Chi improves and the benefits are reaped.

While a person learns the forms/sequence, one must also learn the basics, e.g. the stances, the Tai Chi method of moving both forwards and backwards, the method of weight distribution, proper posture and balance and the calming of the mind. Only after understanding and performing the basics well can one really perform the steps properly and then key principles such as correct breathing and maintaining ones central axis and then in the longer term, other associated principles and routines can be learned.

In the beginning, most students become very motivated by the idea of learning the full sequence of a form (all the steps). This can be a short lived approach, often with this attitude, as often once the sequence is learned the motivation diminishes and the student either gives up or his/her training stalls. The benefits and the real enjoyment of performing Tai Chi is not the completion of the form, but the learning and deepening the understanding of Tai Chi with all its associated principles and concepts.

For me, the next picture depicts the view from the Tai Chi journey is always special, but the “higher” one progress with their learning and training the greater the reward, like ascending a mountain pass, the better the panorama. During my years of teaching I have realized that students practicing Tai Chi for the long run need to be exposed to a “bigger picture” which includes the essential Tai Chi principles, other styles, forms, key concepts and drills so that they can visualise their journey and know that it is more than just the arrangement of all the steps and that, when they undertake to learn Tai Chi, they have embarked on a life long journey.

The Way is the Goal

Learning Tai Chi is like walking up a mountain road, whether you are a beginner or if you have a lot of experience, the higher you climb the fresher the air and the better the view.
Section 6 - Tai Chi Ch’uan an Instrument for Life

Tai Chi is a system of gentle physical exercise and routine, where every posture flows into the next without pause, ensuring that your body is in constant motion with low impact moves placing minimal stress on the muscles and joints, making it safer for all ages and fitness levels. Tai Chi is one of the few exercise forms that can be practiced irrespective of age.

I like to think that once a person has learned the sequence and no longer needs to think of what step comes next, he/she can start to focus on the deeper aspects of practicing Tai Chi. This to me is the “Instrument”.

Practicing Tai Chi is a life long journey and for this reason I think of Tai Chi as an “instrument” for life. A personal “device” to use for enjoyment and for improving health and general well-being.

Regardless of the Style, the form or the number of steps, practicing Tai Chi and incorporating the essential principles of proper breathing, correct posture with slow, controlled and coordinated movements, will allow us to enjoy the health benefits derived from using the Tai Chi “instrument”.

This “instrument” can be taken with you on holiday. It can be used in a Tai Chi group or when you are alone. It can be used when the space is very limited or outdoors in the forest or on a mountain pass. This wonderful “instrument” can be put to use for as long or as short as you choose, as little as a few minutes a day or up to hours per day, the choice is yours.

Deepening your knowledge of Tai Chi and improving your practice skills improves the life-long “instrument” and the better this device functions, the more we benefit from it and the more we will want to take it with us and use it regularly no matter where we are.
Section 7 - Learning Tai Chi Ch’uan

Of course there are many ways to learn Tai Chi Ch’uan and one cannot prescribe which way is the best for a particular individual, but I am convinced that the most effective way to learning Tai Chi if possible, is to have a good teacher.

Naturally, one on one lessons are obviously a great method, but often not affordable or easily available.

Learning in a group with a good instructor is, in my view an excellent way to learn Tai Chi. Practicing in a group comes with many advantages and is the way I would recommend.

Today there is so much learning material available in the form of videos, DVD’s and books. In my opinion instructional DVD’s have significant advantages over books especially when you are learning a movement based exercise like Tai Chi. DVDs, if well designed as virtual lessons can be an excellent way to learn, especially, because you can stop the DVD at any place, and repeat any part or section.

There are many schools and many teachers and one should be aware that with each teacher and each school there may be a variation to the teaching method and variations in the forms too. When I teach a form, I like to inform my students of the common variances taught by the different schools. I think they benefit from this if they see a form being performed differently to the way they have learned.

Tai Chi is a martial art and was originally created with this in mind. Because I have a martial arts background I sometimes show my students how the martial applications apply to the steps to give my students an insight as to why the step is performed as it is. Of course there are many applications to every move and it is also for this reason that differences occur among some Tai Chi schools. Some traditional schools believe and teach that a good Tai Chi practitioner should be aware of the martial technique to perform the form correctly, but many schools ignore this and teach only the forms.

To successfully learn Tai Chi Ch’uan, you will need to understand some of the principles and guidelines that have accumulated over the centuries by masters of this ancient art. These principles and guidelines are the foundation of Tai Chi Ch’uan. In this book I introduce some general theories behind Tai Chi Ch’uan, although I keep the introduction to these theories at a relatively high level.
Learning in Phases

Although there are many ways to learn Tai Chi all of which require a good deal of time, I refer to learning in phases because I think that while one progresses with their Tai Chi, this progression needs to be logical in terms of the students readiness to grasp and practice.

While I refer to three phases there could be more or less, this is just a way of providing a logical order of progression through different concepts and disciplines that, while not essential, can be learned to enrich our Tai Chi learning experience. That is why I also use the expression; “The way is the goal”. My phased road map gives my students and idea as to what they can expect to learn progressively under my instruction, a sort of “high level learning strategy”.

Certain concepts and or disciplines are best learned only after the “basics” and after introductory activities. The duration of each phase need not be defined, it is a learning process and the time one takes to learn depends on the individual, the teacher and of course the amount one is prepared to devote to practicing.

I must admit, not all of my students adopt this long term learning aspiration and are quite satisfied to simply practice the Tai Chi principles and the sequence of movements learned in the early beginner phase.

Below is the graphic that I created to those of my students who understand they have embarked on a life-long journey the “Big Picture” a learning road map.
Phase One - Learning the Basics

Phase one is the Beginner phase. It is in this phase that the student learns the form and the essential Tai Chi principles in terms of; posture, balance, weight-transfer, correct breathing and how to move slowly and coordinated. In this phase the learner is also introduced to the Chinese concepts of Qi and Yin and Yang.

Phase 1-Topic 1: About Tai Chi (History)

Often shortened to Tai Chi or t’ai chi, Taiji, in English usage, Tai Chi Ch’uan is an internal Chinese martial art practiced for enjoyment, for competition and for its health benefits. Though originally conceived as a martial art, it is also typically practiced for a variety of other personal reasons: competitive partner training in the form of Pushing Hands (Tui Shou), demonstration competitions. As a result, a multitude of training forms exist, both traditional and modern, which correspond to those aims with differing emphasis. Some training styles of Tai Chi Ch’uan are especially known for being practiced with much faster or much slower or a mixture of fast and slow than the usual slow continuous movements.

Today, Tai Chi Ch’uan has spread worldwide. Most modern styles of Tai Chi Ch’uan trace their development to at least one of the five traditional schools: Chen, Yang, Wu, Wu (Hao), and Sun. All of the above Styles trace their historical origins to Chen Village.

In my view, the style most widely practiced in the western world today is the Yang style and the most renowned and popular form from this Yang style practiced is the 24 Posture Simplified Forms also referred to as the Beijing or Peking form.

Phase 1-Topic 2: Learning the Basics

Learning Tai Chi can be very simple but it can also be quite perplexing. To properly perform a Tai Chi sequence of steps requires that you maintain the correct posture, that you move from your centre, that your weight is transferred at the right time and that your movements are slow, well controlled and continuous.

To do this one has to first learn the basics. I teach my students that the basics are:

Phase 1-Topic 3: Improving the Posture

Having the ideal Tai Chi posture can take some beginners a long time. The following notes are some tips to get you on your way, because having the correct posture when practicing Tai Chi is essential to enjoying the benefits of Tai Chi.

- One must maintain a relaxed upright posture, always keeping the body upright in a straight line without undue tension is important.

- For a good Tai Chi posture, stand upright with your feet parallel and about shoulder-width apart and bend your knees slightly so they are soft and not locked.

- Allow your tailbone to tuck under a little as you bend the knees. Don’t force it, your tailbone just drops slightly when you soften the knee joint. The curve in your lumbar spine (or lower back) will flatten a little.
Relax your chest and shoulders. Allow the chest to soften downward and slightly concave as a result of the shoulders relaxing and the shoulder blades rounding.

Imagine that your head is suspended as if a chord is attached at the top of your head and pulling it upward then tuck your chin in slightly.

Finally, let all your muscles relax, breathe normally and look straight ahead at about your eye level.

At a later stage of the Tai Chi journey I introduce my students to a stance taught in most Tai Chi schools, referred to as “the Post” or “Embracing the Tree”, see pic on the right below. Some schools teach this stance with the hands lower then shown in the pic, slightly above the dan tien level. A stance used in most Tai Chi schools to teach the student how to stand and sink with proper alignment. Teaching the Post at some schools can involve standing in the correct position at every training session for very lengthy periods as this posture can take a very long time to get right but when held correctly will reward the student enormously in the longer term.

Phase 1-Topic 4: Moving and Weight Transfer

When moving in Tai Chi the movement must be slow and controlled. When you move forward, you put your weight on one leg while maintaining an upright posture, touching down gently with the heel first, and then gradually placing the entire foot on the ground transferring up to 70% of your weight on the front leg. When you move backwards, while maintaining an upright posture, touch down gently with the toe of the back foot first, and then gradually place the entire foot on the ground, finishing with most of your weight on the back leg.

Phase 1-Topic 5: Controlled Movements

Do your movements slowly and continuously, without stopping. Make the movements continuous and smooth. For example, when performing the 24 forms, one must maintain the same speed throughout the entire sequence of 24 steps.

The above basics require time to learn and they are learned at the same time as one learns the sequence, but it is very important that the beginner practices the basics so that they become automatic and the sequence will be easier to learn.

Later when the basics have been learned there are other essential principles to be learned such as moving from your centre and the correct Tai Chi breathing.
Phase 1-Topic 6: Understanding the Kua(s)

Kua, pronounced kwa, what is it? I personally think of the kua as a hinge. A hinge that gives the pelvis, the leg and the connective tissues of the inguinal crease flexibility. To effectively open the kua you have to properly use the body parts around the kua. You have to use your hips and your thighs correctly, be mindful of the pelvic region and move your tailbone correctly. This is easier said than done and requires training and stretching.

In many martial art schools, the kua is thought of much more than simply the fold of the inguinal creases where the legs meet the body. Although teachers may start beginners with a simple understanding of this folding area between the leg and pelvis, it is often required that specific training of this important body part is revisited and well understood to ensure proper engagement of the kua(s). To move to and from the middle in Tai Chi, the correct body posture with the correct use of kua is key.

A basic exercise for stretching the groin creases (kua). "Transverse stretching" is a good routine to understanding and experiencing the movement of the groin/hip creases (kuas).

To do this exercise, adopt the basic Tai Chi horse stance, the feet being shoulder width or slightly wider apart and then very slowly move from one side to the other, making very sure that the top of the hips are kept absolutely level throughout the movement. The aim is to become fully aware of the opening, closing and twisting of the kua(s).

First, ensure that the body is upright, supple and grounded. The knees are bent slightly and are pointing forward. Move from one side the other side by transferring your weight from one leg to the other, keeping your knees facing forward at all times. Be aware not to collapse or tilt the hips. To ensure that you are moving fully to the each side, check, that when you are at the furthermost side that your foot, your knee, your hip and shoulder of the same side are in one vertical line. To open the kua a little more, once you have reached the side increase the stretch by turning your waist (dan tien) 30 – 40 degrees to the same side.

Don’t push it, or expect too much, just relax breath naturally and enjoy the movement, the benefits are many and your Tai Chi movements will only improve.
**Phase 1-Topic 7: Learning the Sequence**

Tai Chi forms can be relatively easy to memorize with sufficient practice and can always be refined and improved with more and more practice. The Yang style 24 Tai Chi form is comprised of 24 movements. I always recommend that a student focus on learning just a few movements at a time until they are very natural and comfortable.

I like to teach that we repeat every step until it is done reasonably well and smoothly with the correct posture before moving on to the next step. Every time I start to teach a new step, I repeat all the steps preceding the new one and so the students have many opportunities to repeat and practice the moves they have already learned. Learning the 24 forms in sequence can take from 20 - 40 one-hour lessons, depending on the instructor, the student's ability and most importantly, his or her commitment to practice, but as stated before, learning the whole sequence is not the primary goal, rather learning to do Tai Chi with the correct posture with well controlled, slow and continuous movements.

**Phase 1-Topic 8: The Dan tien**

The dan tien also referred to as dantian, or tan t'ien. The lower dan tien is loosely translated as "sea of qi", or simply "energy centre" is a point located about two fingers wide below the navel and about two fingers wide inwards toward the back. The lower dan tien is an important point of reference for meditative and exercise techniques like neidan, qigong, Tao yin, Qigong and Tai Chi Ch’uan.

For the beginner the lower dan tien is a most important focal point of breathing as well as the centre of balance. The term dan tien is often used on its own and usually refers to the lower dan tien. Taoist and Buddhist teachers often instruct their students to centre the mind in the navel or lower dan tien. This is also thought to aid control of thoughts and emotions.

Moving from your centre is a very important concept to learn. I tell my students about the dan tien and to be ever mindful of their middle, as it is the focal point of breathing as well as the centre of gravity.

As one advances in their Tai Chi training, they are exposed to the concept of the three dan tiens; the lower dan tien, the middle dan tien (Heart) and the upper dan tien (Chrystal Palace). The goal at a later stage of one’s Tai Chi journey is to allow the three dan tiens to become integrated and work together. This is often referred to as “training with an integrated mind”
**Phase 1-Topic 9: Tai Chi Breathing**

Dan tien breathing is the preferred way of breathing when practicing Tai Chi.

Like Tai Chi movements, the breathing should be relaxed and continuous when practicing Tai Chi.

The dan tien breathing method is based on traditional qigong and modern medical findings with good effect on the deep stabilizer muscles. It is useful in facilitating the sinking of qi to the dan tien and to enhance qi power and in turn improve internal energy.

The diagram below shows the qi flow via the Governor and the Functional channels.

![Qi Channels of Flow](image)

**Qi Channels of Flow**

Like Tai Chi movements, the breathing should be practiced in a relaxed and controlled way synchronised and in harmony with the movements.

Proper breathing techniques are important for leading the movements and for the storing and delivering of energy. Every Tai Chi movement is either gathering energy or delivering energy. When you inhale you are gathering energy. When you exhale you are delivering energy.

To practice dan tien breathing, sitting down or standing upright, put your right hand on your abdomen just below the belly button and your left hand above it. Concentrate on your lower abdomen and the pelvic floor muscle. When you inhale, expand your lower abdominal area, allow it to bulge out a little and let your abdominal and pelvic floor muscles relax. You should feel a slight pushing out of the right hand. As you exhale, gently contract the pelvic floor muscles and the lower abdomen. Feel the contraction of the muscle with your right hand, keeping the area above your belly button under your left hand as still as possible.

As a beginner, at first don’t spend too much time and effort worrying about coordinating breath and movements. Trying to synchronize your breathing too soon can be counterproductive and lead to tension and a lack of focus. Instead, relax and breathe naturally, enjoy your Tai Chi and later when the movements are more natural, almost second nature, work on improving the breathing.
Phase 1-Topic 10: Qi or Chi (Life Energy)

In China qi is the essence used in Acupuncture, Qigong, Tai Chi, and Reiki.

Qi cannot be seen or measured and it cannot be touched or captured. Because it cannot be seen or felt, qi is a difficult concept to accept.

Qi is more like something hidden within the air we breathe, a necessary element that the body receives through breathing. It is like oxygen, the substance that breathing is really all about. The body needs oxygen to burn the fuel in our cells to produce energy and the oxygen is hidden inside the air. We get new oxygen by breathing in, and get rid of the excess air by breathing out.

While qi and oxygen are not the same, the qi within the body is like power in a rechargeable battery, it needs to be replenished to maintain its effectiveness. When you replenish the qi within you, you feel healthy and vigorous. By energizing the body with qi, it is revitalized naturally, enabling it to fight off illness and maintain good health. The true secret to replenishing qi resides in our breathing.

Below is a Chinese pictogram of qi. The pictogram consists of two parts: It shows an equal relation to qi and air, as that of oxygen and air. One part is the sign for a wisp of steam, and inside of it is the sign for a grain of boiling rice.

The body can only digest the rice if it is boiled. Rice is the basic nutrition for all of East Asia and it has become the primary food of the Chinese and the Japanese through countless generations.
Phase 1-Topic 11: Yin and Yang

Tai Chi Ch’uan is often described as the principles of yin and yang applied to the human body.

In Chinese philosophy, yin and yang describe how opposite or contrary forces are actually complementary, interconnected, and interdependent in the natural world, and how they give rise to each other as they interrelate to one another.

Many tangible dualities such as light and dark, hard and soft, expanding and contracting are thought of as physical manifestations of the opposites symbolized by yin and yang.

When performing Tai Chi slowly and continuously with limbs moving simultaneously but in opposite directions, this can also be described as yin and yang in motion.

Phase 1-Topic 12: Essential Tai Chi principles

Tai Chi is a sophisticated art with many different styles and forms. Despite the many variations of Tai Chi, its immense power for improving health and inner energy derives from a set of essential principles. The essential Tai Chi principles as I record them in this book have been impressed upon me often, but most meaningfully during the times that have spent learning Tai Chi with Dr. Paul Lam. Below I present these principles that I now believe are the most important ones for someone starting out to learn Tai Chi.

By keeping these principles in mind as you learn and practice, you will do your Tai Chi more effectively right from the beginning.

1. Do your movements slowly, without stopping; Make all of your movements continuous with the same tempo through the entire form.

2. Imagine you’re moving against resistance; Imagine you are doing Tai Chi in a room filled with honey and that every move you make is against a gentle resistance. This will also help cultivate your inner force (qi).

3. Maintain an upright posture and body alignment; Maintain the body upright keeping it well aligned in a straight line without undue tension. Imagine a line going vertically through your body as the central axis and always ensure that this central axis is vertically aligned. This can be more difficult than expected, especially when bending at your knees. Once done right, your Tai Chi will improve greatly because qi flows best in
the aligned body. Leaning forwards or backwards will upset the central axis, compromise your balance and will impede the flow of qi.

4. Be forever mindful of how you transfer your weight; This is important for improving mobility, coordination, and stability. Be aware when you transfer your body weight that your alignment (your central axis) is correct.

5. Loosen the joints; You should relax as much as you can when you do Tai Chi, but not let your muscles get limp. Instead, consciously and gently stretch your joints from within, almost like you're expanding your joints internally.

Relaxing the spine; Imagine your spine as a length of string and that you're gently pulling it from both ends. For the lower limbs, bend your knees with both kua’s slightly open to form a slight arch. Other lower limb joints will also gently expand from within.

6. Focus, avoid distraction by calming the mind; A key component when practicing Tai Chi and especially noticeable when practicing with a partner. When working with a partner one learns to listen to the incoming force, yield, absorb and redirect the incoming force, to achieve harmony. This is most useful for practicing your Tai Chi or when doing Tai Chi Push Hands with an “opponent” or a friend.

Calming the Mind - Avoiding distraction; in Tai Chi practice, there’s a concept called “monkey mind.” It’s the little voice in the back of your head that distracts you and keeps taking you back to your daily thoughts, for example; work, friendships, worries, uncertainties, expectations etc.

The mind is the next building block or tool you need to develop to prevent or reduce mental stress. The ancient Chinese describe it as having two minds: the monkey mind and the Integrated Mind (Yi)

The mental quietness of Tai Chi is different from that of other forms of meditation. While you are tranquil from within, you are should still be aware of your surroundings and able to assess the situation at any time – a must when you’re performing Tai Chi as a martial art.

One of the Tai Chi extended principles is called Jing, loosely translated means, “Mental Quietness”. Although Jing might be a more difficult mental state to achieve than, stationary, meditation because you are moving, once attained, it will help you to react better in a martial art situation and also with difficult situations in your day to day life. I remember once when practicing with a class of Dr. Paul Lam he said that “even just saying the word Jing quietly to your-self may eventually, with practice help to produce the Jing state”.
Phase Two - Improving the Basics and learning new Concepts

In the 2nd phase of my learning road map my students should know the whole form and have had adequate practice with the basics and the essential Tai Chi principles. In this phase they are encouraged to learn the Extended Tai Chi principles and how martial applications apply to the Tai Chi steps. Students in this phase also get a high level introduction to the very advanced techniques of Push hands, Silk reeling, Fa jin and Iron Shirt Qi Gong.
**Phase 2-Topic 1: Tai Chi Concepts:**

To improve your Tai Chi, it is essential to include in your progress the learning of the extended Tai Chi principles. I have learned there are four extended principles known as Song, Jing, Chen and Huo. These extensions of the essential Tai Chi principles were introduced to me while attending classes run by Dr Paul Lam the founder of the Tai Chi for Health Institute and creator of the Tai Chi for Health programs.

The following pictures are only my attempt to create and image to support what is implied in the text on each principle.

**Song** (pic above) Means relaxed and loose with open joints but also stretched out. Being Song helps your qi flow. Loosen or ‘Song’ the joints. You should relax when you do Tai Chi, but not let your muscles get limp. Instead, consciously and gently stretch your joints from within, almost like you're expanding your joints internally. Many people misinterpret the Chinese word ‘Song’ as relaxation, which is wrong. Song is both relaxed and loosened.

**Chen** (pic above) Chen is a Chinese word that means sinking. When you progress your Tai Chi you will become more aware of sinking your qi to your lower dan tien. The dan tien is central to everything we do in Tai Chi. Proper breathing facilitates sinking qi to the dan tien, which in turn keeps the mind Jing, loosens up the joints and helps with being rooted. Chen enhances stability, song, and qi cultivation.
**Jing** (pic above) loosely translated means “Mental Quietness.” Being Jing improves relaxation and activates our parasympathetic nervous system. When doing Tai Chi we need to avoid distraction.

**Huo** (pic above) in Chinese means agility. Agility comes from regular practice with proper body posture, loosened joints and improved internal strength. Once the concepts of Song, Chen and Jing have been learned one is able to enjoy the state of Huo.

These four extended principles complement each other, so you don’t need to be completely proficient in one before moving on to another. It is OK to work on one principle for a period of time and then move on to another. But come back to each one regularly, as the more we are able to execute these principles automatically the better and more enjoyable will be your Tai Chi.
Phase 2-Topic 2: Understanding the Martial Applications

Tai Chi Ch’uan was created as a martial art. The term “Tai Chi Chuan” means “Supreme Ultimate Fist or Boxing.

Over the years, more and more Tai Chi practitioners are learning and investigating the benefits of training and practicing aspects of hand and weapon forms together with aspects of partner work, including the martial applications. Often there is a perception, that fighting applications are violent and not the realm of those who may have accessed the art for qualities such as relaxation and wellbeing. However without knowledge of the purpose of the various movements and postures in the Hand or Weapon Forms there could well be a lesser understanding of the fuller aspects of the art.

Learning the martial applications can return many benefits including: increased confidence, improved body awareness, better reflexes and ultimately developing the ability to remain calm in times of conflict.

Tai Chi Martial Applications are not about attacking others but more about reacting effectively when physical, psychological or emotional threats are presented. Through training these aspects you will learn to understand the exchange of Yin/Yang in a practical sense whilst maintaining a strong and connected centre with flowing, effective movements.

Because I have a good and varied background in martial arts, I find it easier to understand the applications and I like to show some of my students how the martial applications apply to the steps to give them an insight as to why the step is performed as it is. Of course there are many applications to every move but the idea is not to learn all the applications, but rather to help the student visualize the martial application, often it helps learning the step. Some traditional schools believe and teach that a good Tai Chi practitioner should be aware of the martial technique to perform the form correctly, but many schools ignore this and teach only the forms.

As stated previously in this book, I am fascinated by the origins and connections of different martial arts, whether they originate from Japan, India, Israel, Thailand, China, Okinawa or any other country. The history and the deeper similarities of one system to another intrigue me, as do the basics of all of these systems, the fundamentals are so connected and the basics to these fundamentals are always the same.

While I enjoy sharing the added dimension of the martial applications with my students, I don’t think it is appropriate for all Tai Chi students and I don’t think it is a pre requisite to effectively learning Tai Chi.

Pic above of me while practicing a drill with the Bo

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Phase 2-Topic 3: Introduction to Push Hands (Tui Shou)

In the internal Chinese martial arts such as Tai Chi Ch’uan and Baguazhang, Pushing Hands or Tuishou is the name for two-person training routines. Push hands is thought to have been created by Chen Wangting (1600–1680), the founder of the Chen-style Tai Chi Ch’uan, and was originally known as hitting hands (da shou) or crossing hands (ke shou).

While I learned Push Hands some years ago, I do not practice it enough to have attained a high level of competition proficiency, but I like to introduce Push Hands to my students in the 2nd phase to give them a taste of how they can improve their Tai Chi skills by training with a partner. By practicing the Tai Chi Push Hands solo form the student learns to work with a partner while remaining balanced, focused and relaxed while in motion. Once the Tai Chi student reaches my 3rd learning phase, Push Hands becomes a regular training activity.

Pushing hands is said to be the gateway for students to experientially understand the martial aspects of the internal martial arts (nèijiā) such as leverage, reflex, sensitivity, timing, coordination and positioning.

Pushing hands works to undo a person’s natural instinct to resist force with force, teaching the body to yield to force and redirect it.

Push hands allows students to learn how to respond to external stimuli using techniques from their forms practice.

In my view the benefits of routine practice of Push Hands can be summarised as;

One, training with a partner allows a student to develop listening power, the sensitivity to feel the direction and strength of a partner’s intention and works to undo a person’s natural instinct to resist force with force, teaching the body to yield to force and redirect.

Two, students learn to generate, coordinate and deliver power to one another and also how to effectively neutralize incoming forces in a safe but competitive environment to better understand the martial aspects of the internal martial arts (nèijiā) such as leverage, reflex, sensitivity, timing, coordination and positioning. This aspect of Push Hands requires in depth teaching and considerable practice to achieve a high level of competence.

For more information on this topic see Push Hands in Section 13.
**Phase 2-Topic 4: Introduction to Silk Reeling (Chan Ssu)**

Silk reeling refers to a set of neigong (internal) movement principles expressed in traditional styles of Tai Chi Ch’uan, but especially emphasized by the Chen and Wu styles. The name derives from the twisting and spiralling movements of the silkworm larva as it wraps itself in its cocoon. In order to draw out the silk successfully the action must be smooth and consistent without jerking or rapidly changing direction. Too fast, the silk breaks, too slow, it sticks to itself and becomes tangled. Thus silk reeling movements are continuous, cyclic and spiralling, performed at constant speed with the "light feel" of drawing silk. Silk reeling is trained in solo fixed and moving forms and in pushing hands with a partner.

I introduce single-handed Silk Reeling to my students in the 2nd phase as it teaches them effective co-ordination between the movements of the arms, body, dan tien and breath and improves their Tai Chi skills. Once the Tai Chi student is in my 3rd learning phase they will learn eight different Silk Reeling drills after which Silk reeling becomes a regular training activity.

For more information on this topic see Silk Reeling in Section 13.

**Phase 2-Topic 5: Introduction to Fa jin**

Fa jin, fajin, or fa chin is a term used in some Chinese martial arts, particularly the neijia (internal) martial arts, such as Bājíquán and Tai Chi Ch’uan.

This technique originates from the Chen-style Tai Chi Ch’uan. In the Yang style and other styles, fa jin is also added to techniques to release stored energy, however, the release of the energy is almost invisible unlike when demonstrated in the Chen style forms.

I introduce the Fa jin technique to my students in this 2nd phase so as to make them more aware of the importance of using the dan tien and how effective it can be if energy is correctly stored and delivered from the centre. Once the Tai Chi student is in the 3rd learning phase they will be encouraged to learn and practice two basic Fa jin practice drills.

For more information on this topic see Fa jin in Section 13.

**Phase 2-Topic 6: Introduction to Iron Shirt Qi Gong**

It is recorded that this old Qigong discipline was practiced to strengthen the body and the internal organs to create a protecting "iron shirt" to keep away inner and outer injuries.

Nowadays, martial artists and Tai Chi practitioners use this exercise to improve breathing techniques, posture and grounding and to strengthen the immune system.

I introduce Iron Shirt Qi Gong to my students in this 2nd phase so as to provide them with another way of learning how to establish and maintain a correct posture with proper grounding. Once the Tai Chi student is in the 3rd learning phase they will learn at least two of the 8 Iron Shirt Qi Gong postures and the related breathing techniques.

For more information on this topic see Iron Shirt Qi Gong in Section 14.
Phase Three - Practicing Tai Chi and Advanced Routines

In this phase I consider my students to be quite experienced Tai Chi practitioners. They should be practicing the entire form, incorporating the basic Tai Chi principles and to some degree the extended principles.

In this phase they will be encouraged to practice one or more new Tai Chi forms, the basic routines of single Push Hands, Silk Reeling and Iron Shirt Qi Gong.

Phase 3-Topic 1: Practicing the Basics

Regardless of the experience of the student or the “phase” that we are in, I always find time to practice the basics. No amount of training or experience will ever be sufficient to ignore the basics.

The basics in my classes are;

- Maintaining the correct posture (increased practice of the “Post” / “Embracing the Tree” posture)
- Proper and effective weight transfer
- Slow and controlled movements
- The correct breathing so as to compliment the tempo of the movement and the intent of the movement
- Using the Dan tien
**Phase 3-Topic 2: Practicing Advanced Forms**

How does one decide what is an advanced form. I consider advanced for my students when the form touches upon one or more of the following;

- A new form from one of the other Tai Chi styles.
- Moving from an open-handed Tai Chi form to a weapons form. E.g. one of the Fan forms, the Sword forms or the Spear form.
- Learning a longer form for example, 36 or 73 steps or even longer.

Of course, not all students aspire to learning an advanced form or have the physical ability to learn a more challenging form and may choose to continue with the form they know best. In this case I try to encourage that student to learn to practice Tai Chi with a partner, for example; single handed, fixed step Push Hands or fixed step Silk Reeling, or to learn another less challenging but new fixed-step Qi Gong form such as the short Wu Xing Qi Gong form or the 8 Brocades Qi Gong form. I am convinced that we need to continuously challenge ourselves through learning and advance on our Tai Chi journey.

**Phase 3-Topic 3: Practicing Push Hands**

In this 3rd phase the student practices Push Hands. The routine practice of Push hands works to undo a person's natural instinct to resist force with force, teaching the body to yield to force and redirect it. Push hands allows students to learn how to respond to external stimuli using techniques from their forms practice.

Among other things, training with a partner allows a student to develop listening power, the sensitivity to feel the direction and strength of a partner's intention. In that sense pushing hands is a commitment between two students to train in both the defensive and offensive movement principles of their martial art: learning to generate, coordinate and deliver power to another and also how to effectively neutralize incoming forces in a safe environment.

For more information on this topic see Push Hands in Section 13.

**Phase 3-Topic 4: Practicing Silk Reeling**

I introduce the single-handed Silk Reeling to my students in the 3rd phase to improve their Tai Chi skills and teach them effective co-ordination between the movements of the arms, body, dan tien and breathing.

In this phase the student is encouraged to practice one or more of the eight different Silk Reeling drills introduced to them in the 2nd phase of learning.

For more information on this topic see Silk Reeling in Section 13.

**Phase 3-Topic 5: Practicing Fa jin**

Fa jin means to issue or discharge power explosively or refining the explosive power, and is not specific to any particular striking posture or method.

This technique originates from the Chen-style Tai Chi Ch’uan. In the Yang style and other styles, fa jin is also added to techniques to release stored energy, however, the
release of the energy is almost invisible unlike when demonstrated in the Chen style forms.

In this 3rd phase, students will be encouraged to practice Fa jin drills on a regular basis to continuously improve their focus on the middle, moving from the dan tien and the proper engagement of the kua(s).

For more information on this topic see Fa jin in Section 13.

**Phase 3-Topic 6: Practicing Iron Shirt Qi Gong**

This old Qigong discipline was practiced to strengthen the body (including internal organs) and to create a protecting “iron shirt“ to keep away inner and outer injuries.

Nowadays, martial artists and Tai Chi practitioners use this exercise to improve breathing techniques, to improve posture and grounding and to strengthen the immune system.

In this 3rd phase, two of the eight Iron Shirt Qi Gong postures will be practiced on a regular basis to reinforce the practice of good posture, good grounding and essential breathing techniques.

For more information on this topic see Iron Shirt Qi Gong in Section 13.

As previously stated, while I refer to three phases there could be more or less phases, this is just a way of providing a logical order of progression through different concepts and disciplines that, while not essential, can be learned to enrich our Tai Chi learning experience.

I run many different Tai Chi classes to a very wide and diverse spectrum of students and the teaching of all phases and concepts is simply not always appropriate. In many of my classes we only learn the form/s and the basic principles. I know people who have spent many years enjoying the practice of Tai Chi and its basic principles and who have no knowledge of some of the more advanced concepts I teach and this is for those students just fine.
Learning Tai Chi can be simple and complicated. It is easier to learn Tai Chi in small parts and then build up once you have learned the small components.

Over the years I have adjusted and tweaked my teaching methods as I have gained experience and learned how to train with a real diverse range of students. Through my involvement with Dr Paul Lam and my certification as a Senior Trainer with the Tai Chi for Health Organization I learned the “Step by Step Progressive” teaching method and today it is only this method that I use.

Dr. Lam, the founder of the Tai Chi for Health Institute developed and refined a highly effective stepwise, progressive system for teaching Tai Chi. A method that I am absolutely committed to.

The beauty of Dr Lam’s teaching method is that it is inherently safe and it works equally well for teaching any other mind-body, movement, or complex skill set. I am always amazed by how quickly my students learn and retain what they learn as they are guided through three distinct, yet simple, teaching steps: Watch Me, Follow Me, and Show Me.

In the Watch Me phase; the students are told what movement they will learn and then the movement is demonstrated while facing them. This has appeal to Global learners as they can see the entire picture, including the coordination of the arms, footwork and hands. The Visual learners enjoy the demonstration, the Reflective and Analytical learners will start to break down the overall Tai Chi form into individual movement components and the Kinaesthetic and Active learners may start following the movements during the demonstration. This simple demonstration sets the stage for all effective learning.

In the next, Follow Me phase; the whole movement is broken down into small, manageable segments. For me, either breaking the entire movement into sequential segments or separating the upper body from the lower body movements is most effective. To preclude issues that some people have with following mirror-image instruction, I turn my back on my students to improve their ability to learn while following me. This appeals to the Auditory, Visual, and Kinaesthetic learners. I repeat this Follow Me segment at least three times and gradually increase to a normal speed while reducing how much I talk during the move. This empowers the students to become responsible for their own learning and it promotes self-correction, and encourages participants to “listen” to their own body and to foster their internal awareness.

Finally, in the Show Me phase; the students are asked to demonstrate what they have just learned. I prefer to ask students to try it at their own pace to see how it feels as this will complement their particular learning style and portrays the Show Me phase as individual practice rather than an evaluation.

Another useful teaching tactic I like to use is to ask my students to practice what they learned at class at least once on returning home after class. This serves well to reinforce the most recent learning.
Section 9 - Finding the right class for you

Finding the right teacher or school can make a big difference to how quickly and smoothly you’re able to progress in Tai Chi. Here are some pointers that you may consider:

Find an instructor with solid Tai Chi skills. In addition to being able to do the form with good body alignment, an instructor should move smoothly with a lot of relaxed energy. Their movements should be unified and connected, as well as smooth and fluid.

Find an instructor with good teaching skills - A good instructor should be knowledgeable enough to be able to demonstrate and to discuss the basic and the essential principles of Tai Chi. He or she should have a good understanding of the different learning capabilities of students and should have a consistent teaching method. Ideally the instructor’s teaching style should be able to accommodate your particular learning style, which could be for a visual learner, a reflective learner, an analytical learner, a kinaesthetic learner or an active learner.

Visit the School - If possible, check an instructor out in person. Check to see what the instructor can do, and not just what they or others say they can do. Take a moment to reflect after watching the instructor do a form. Were you inspired by the performance to want to do those movements? Satisfy yourself that the learning environment is a good one, one that is safe and conducive to learning Tai Chi.

Does the instructor teach the aspects of Tai Chi you want to learn? Find an instructor whose focus can accommodate your aspirations. It could be frustrating to practice with a group of avid martial artists when your main goal is improved health. Be sure that the Tai Chi style and form taught at that school are the same as the Style and form you want to learn.

Finding the right school is particularly important if you think about travelling overseas, for example China to learn Tai Chi. I learned this the hard way on my first visit to China by attending a school where there was absolutely no English spoken and I was unable to clearly articulate what I wanted to learn and I was equally unable to understand how and what the school was intending to teach. While the time spent at the school was of great benefit to me and my Tai Chi, I definitely did not learn what I travelled to China to learn.

Finding a good instructor is critical to get you going in the right direction on your “life-long” journey of learning Tai Chi Ch’uan!
Section 10 - Practicing Tai Chi Ch’uan

I am lucky that I am a fairly disciplined individual and an all-weather person when it comes to physical training and I enjoy getting up very early every day and training for a few hours on my own.

For many years I have enjoyed an early training routine, running, practicing my karate katas and techniques, training Tai Chi, Qi Gong, Silk Reeling, Iron Shirt Qi Kung and other associated and relevant routines for improving my Tai Chi. When I was working full time as a business consultant, often late in the night and often required to travel extensively, I was always able to keep my training regime as I could take this Tai Chi instrument with me. Regardless of the location or the type of accommodation, if time or space did not allow me to train the whole form, I could always take out certain elements of my Tai Chi and karate training and maintain my practice routine.

Often I tell my students that, to benefit from practice, one does not have to repeat the whole form every time they practice, but sometimes simply practice a single stance or step, or a few steps, or a short routine. This can be done anywhere, any time. Room space, location or weather and level of skill need never be an issue. Correct breathing, the correct posture with slow, controlled and coordinated movements is all that is required to reinforce ones learning and at the same time enough to enjoy the health benefits and to give one that “feel good” feeling.

To achieve the maximum benefit from Tai Chi practice, it is said that you should practice twenty-four hours a day. This doesn’t mean that you need to do the Tai Chi Ch’uan sequence all the time, but you need to include the practice of the Tai Chi principles into your way of life.

Routine and frequent practice will not only provide a general wellness workout, but it will also cultivate the energy within your body, increase your mental awareness and build good habits for proper breathing and good body alignment.

When you have accomplished these goals in practice, you will automatically carry these good habits into your daily life. You will gain a greater awareness of yourself, keeping your physical body properly aligned while walking, standing or sitting. This is what is meant by practicing Tai Chi Ch’uan for twenty-four hours a day, making it a way of life.
Practicing Tai Chi with a Partner

I am a firm believer that practice, practice, practice is the best way to improve, whatever it is you are learning and solo practice of your Tai Chi with a calm clear visualisation is a wonderful powerful tool, however, practicing with a partner can add new challenges and new dimensions to your learning and to your Tai Chi skills.

The ideal situation is to find someone who shares the same love of Tai Chi as you do and who has the same determination to improve. Having a partner will not only help you understand movements more deeply by applying them on a real person, but it will also help build up your commitment to practice routinely.

Of course we can't always find a consistent Tai Chi training partner, but I do urge you to have a training partner even if it is not consistent. Remember, it is common knowledge that we retain 10% of what we hear, 20% of what we read, 50% of what we do, and 90% of what we teach. So, if you can't find a partner, just teach a friend, or a family member enough to practice a specific concept you're working on, the act of teaching itself is likely to help you remember a movement much more.

I teach Tai Chi five days a week and every teaching moment for me is effectively training with beginners or with people who are less experienced then I am, but still I learn from them.

I learn from explaining to them, I learn from showing them, I learn from watching them and I learn from their mistakes and their improvements. Sharing has an infinite amount of depth.

Tai Chi Warm-Ups

Warm ups are basic to both Eastern and Western physical disciplines but the purpose and objectives are somewhat different.

The Western View of Warm ups are geared to optimizing performance while minimizing physical injury. Depending on the sport the warm up goals could include aspects of agility, flexibility, balance and strength.

The Taoist view of warm ups, while also geared to optimizing performance, must provide a transition from our every-day mind and bodily state to one that is conducive to
calming the mind to enable the slow meditative movements of Tai Chi. The Taoist believe that strength, balance and stability come from the body, mind, chi and dan tien all working as one and therefore any warm up should include the awakening and merging of the three dan tien. The upper dan tien (Chrystal Palace), the middle dan tien (Heart) and the lower dan tien should all be awakened and connected so that they can operate as one “the integrated mind”

Before doing any type of exercise, it is always advisable to do some simple warm-up exercises and stretching. It is not only important to get your physical body ready, but your mind must also be ready to exercise. This is especially true for Tai Chi Ch’uan, since the intent of your mind leads the movements of your body.

There are so many possibilities for an effective warm up, but I am convinced that a good warm up should include aspects of both the western and eastern routines. What for me is also important is that a warm up sequence includes all joints and limbs from head to toe or visa-versa, toe to head and has an element that enables the class to calm their mind and prepare mentally for the training.

The warm up routine in this book includes some stretching. In China stretching is a very important component of effective preparation for practicing Tai Chi. Without going into too much detail on the topic of stretching I would like to outline some basic tips for stretching that I teach.

- Stretch after your warm up - It is better to stretch when the muscles have been slightly warmed and with a calm mind because the intent of your mind leads the movement.
- Don’t bounce, hold your stretch for 20 – 30 seconds and don’t aim for pain
- Stretch major muscle groups such as your calves, thighs, hips, lower back, neck and shoulders
- Stretch muscles specific to the activity you are going to perform.

Whenever you start an exercise program or a warm up sequence, be very sure not to exceed your range / limits, gentle stretching and warm ups are adequate. The concept of “No Pain No Gain” does not apply in this context.

I illustrate on the next three pages a typical routine that I enjoy and use in part or in full with my general classes, although I do tailor the warm up to suit the class participants, for example, if I am teaching elderly persons, or students with disabilities or persons undergoing rehabilitation, I tailor my warm ups to suit their limitations.

The illustrated warm up routine shown on the next few pages can take anything from 15 minutes to 30 minutes to complete, depending on the number of repetitions and or sets per exercise included.

I am very flexible and often change the length of the warm depending on how much time is available for a class, so that there is a proportionate amount of time to practice Tai Chi too.
A Typical Warm-Up Routine

1. Neck x 7 back & forth, half circles, left & right gaze, left & right tilt

2. Shoulders x 10 forwards and backwards

3. Arms, wrists and fingers x 3

4. Waist Loosening x 30 repetitions
   Let arms hang loose and turn from the hips. Allow the spine to respond as well and be aware of the gentle twisting in the knees and ankles.

5. Back - Opening the Door of Life (Ming Men) x 15 left and right
   This exercise works the pelvic floor muscles and the anterior abdominals to enable the opening of the “Governor” channel. Feel the extension from the lower back “Door of Life” not from the shoulders.

6. Spine - Windmill exercise (opening the spinal joints)
   a. Outer and inner extensions x 3 (slow)

7. Spine Side Bends
   b. Side extension left and 3 right x 3 (slow)

8. Pelvic Region
   Dan tien hitting with the left and right hand x 20
9. Opening the Kua

9a. Side to Side x 1
9b. Side to side with a twist x 10
9c. Waist rotations left and right x 10

10. Hips

10a. Side stretch left & right x 5
10b. Leg ext’n back and front
10c. Leg circles left & right x 5

11. Legs

11a. Lunges left and right x 5
11b. Free squats x 10

12. Knees

Knee rotations x 10 left, right and open and close

13. Ankles

13a. Ankle rotation x 10
13b. Ankle flexion – heel/toe and inner and outer sole x 10
Remember!

Before doing any type of exercise, it is always advisable to do some warm-up exercises combined with stretching.

It is not only important to get your physical body ready, but your mind must also be ready to exercise.

This is especially true for Tai Chi Ch’uan, since the intent of your mind leads the movements of your body.
Section 11 - Hand Gestures and the Basic Stances

The 24 Form of Tai Chi, sometimes called the Beijing or Peking form because of its place of origin, is a relatively short version of Tai Chi composed of twenty-four unique movements.

The 24 form was developed by the Chinese government in 1956 to standardize tai chi and is based on traditional Yang style moves. This was partly for use in official competitions putting an end to performing ad-hoc personal styles, but also to make Tai Chi and its health benefits more accessible for beginners. Today this form is one of the more, if not the most well known and most practiced short forms derived from the Yang family style.

The Yang 24 form is the entry point for most into the world of Tai Chi. There are over 20 variations of the Yang style, with corresponding deviations.

Tai Chi Hand Gestures

Different styles can also have different hand shapes. Chen uses a almost closed palm. In the Yang style the palm is open. The hand postures used in the Yang style as I teach them are shown below.

- The Palms, are slightly curved inwards, relaxed with the fingers aligned and naturally open.
- The Straight Fist, is made with the four fingers are slightly touching the palm and the thumb is bent over the middle and the index fingers.
- The Inverted Fist is the same as the straight fist, but the palm faces upwards.
- The Hook, sometimes called the Beak has the four fingers and the thumb touching as if you were holding an apple by its twig.
- The Tai Chi Greeting

With the Tai Chi Greeting the left palm (with 4 fingers) symbolizes Virtue, Wisdom, Health and Art which are also called the "4 nurturing elements", symbolizing the spirit of Martial arts. The left thumb is slightly bent to mean that one should not be arrogant and show respect. The right fist symbolizes rigorous practice. The right fist is clenched, it means a form of 'attack' but with the left palm wrapping it, it means, "discipline" and 'restraint or control in order not to abuse the martial practice".
**Basic Stances**

Tai Chi stances are designed to enable power, agility and health benefits.

**Health**: Tai Chi stances always ensure that the joints are soft and open, allowing the blood and qi to flow freely and continuously.

**Power**: Good posture is the key to ensuring a strong, stable Tai Chi stance. By keeping the joints open, the head upright, back straight and the coccyx slightly tucked in. With adequate training you can enjoy the full advantage of all of the mechanical forces.

**Agility**: is ensured by having the correct stance and an important component of this is to have both kuas (or at least the rear kua) kept open. If you look at the Chen masters you will always see the soft lower back, open rear inguinal crease (knee pointed out) with slightly bent knees providing optimal stability and agility.

Different styles have different ways of moving the feet. For example, in the Yang style, you move forwards by lifting your foot slightly off the ground and touching down on the heel and when moving backwards you lift your foot slightly off the ground and touch down toe first. While this is also the case in the Chen style, with some of the forward steps in the Chen style you step forward by lifting your foot higher and brushing the side of the sole or the side of the heel along the ground.

**Basic stances used in the 24 Forms illustrated**

1. **Basic Stance** (Beng Li). Completely relaxed with feet and or heels together, toes can be pointed slightly outwards and finger tips resting lightly on the thighs.

2. **Opening Stance** (Kai Bu). Feet parallel and about shoulder width apart with the knees, shoulders and arms relaxed.
3. **Bow Stance** (Gong Bu). The bow stance is the most well-known stance in most all martial arts and all Tai Chi styles, although, with some small variations it is performed with a 80% to 20% or 70% to 30% weight distribution. The forward knee should not extend beyond the front toes, which should be pointing forward and the back foot is at about 30 - 45 degrees.

4. **Empty stance** (Xu Bu) or Cat stance (Su Bu) performed with 90% or more of the weight on the back leg and 10% or less on the front leg. Sometimes referred to as the “false” stance. Like the golden rooster standing on one leg stance the Empty stance is often used with kicking attacks. While most of the weight is on the back leg, the front leg lightly touches the ground (heel or toes). In a combat situation it is also used with other stances for evasive techniques.

5. **Horse Stance** (Ma Bu). A 50:50 stance with the feet more than shoulder width apart and the lower back straight, both kua open, and the coccyx slightly tucked in. This stance is a very common stance found in most of the styles of Tai Chi Chu’an, although in some styles (e.g. Chen style) the stance will be much wider and much lower. During combat this stance can also be used in transition from one stance to the next. This is
also a posture used at varying widths and depths in practice for exercising the upper leg and building up knee strength.

6. Lower stance (Pu Bu) or Posture of Reverence, sometimes called, Tame the Tiger (Fu Hu Bu). To assume this position one squats on one leg until the thigh is parallel to the floor and extends the other leg out to the side. Before rising from this stance the foot of the extended leg should be turned out in the direction that you are intend to move to. The Lower stance is used for both attack and defence. A common application of this stance is a defence against a high kick or a jump kick or a deep lunge to assume a position of attack below the attacker. In some traditional weapon forms the stance is used to pick up a weapon or an object from the floor during combat.

7. **Golden Rooster Standing on One Leg** (Jin Ji Du Li) or (Tulipu)

The golden rooster standing on one leg stance (yang style) is similar to the Empty stance and serves the same purpose, to enable a speedy kick. To assume this stance lift the leg up with the toe pointing down (i.e., the ankle is relaxed naturally). In the form, the elbow of the bent arm is almost directly above the raised knee.

8. **Four Six Stance** (Si Liu Bu)

The four six stance is a defensive stance in Tai Chi chu’an and often performed in transition from one stance to another. In weight distribution, the front leg supports 40% of the weight and the back leg supports 60% of the weight. The back leg is bent, with the knee and toes turned inward. The front leg can be closer to the back leg or at the opposite the back leg or in the front as shown, but is held loose, slightly bent, relaxed and ready to move.
Section 12 - The 24 Posture Simplified Form

The 24 Form of Tai Chi, sometimes called the Beijing or Peking form because of its place of origin, is a relatively short version of Tai Chi composed of twenty-four unique movements.

The 24 form form was developed by the Chinese government in 1956 to standardize tai chi and is based on traditional Yang style moves. This was partly for use in official competitions, putting an end to performing ad-hoc personal styles, but also to make Tai Chi and its health benefits more accessible for beginners. Today this form is one of the more if not the most well known and most practiced short forms derived from the Yang family style.

The Yang 24 form is the entry point for most into the world of Tai Chi. There are over 20 variations of the Yang style, with corresponding variations.

The 24 Steps Illustrated

Below, I provide some information on each of the steps. In some instances the information provided is more detailed because I think it is interesting and useful information for the beginner. Each step has multiple names. The names I prefer and use in my classes are the names I use in the Step Title and the Chinese words pronounced in English are shown in brackets.

Step 1 - Opening Stance (Qǐshi)

Common name variations are, Opening Stance, Standing Quietly, Reconnecting with Oneness and Emptiness, Quiet Standing Mediation, Beginning, Commencement, Starting Posture, Movement, and Preparation Form.

Transfer weight to the right leg and then step out to the left to about shoulder width. Gently raise both arms up to about shoulder height with palms facing down. Pull the hands back slightly sinking the elbows, sinking by bending at the knees and lowering both arms until palms are down to about the dan tien level.

The primary focus when performing this move should be to cleanse the mind of tension and anxiety, removing all negative thoughts. In some Qi Gong forms this opening move is called "Awakening the qi" as it is in this move that one prepares mentally and allows the qi to ready for the rest of the form.
**Step 2 - Parting the Wild Horse’s Mane (Ye Ma Fen Zong)**
Variations of names for this movement include: Parting the Wild Horse's Mane and Wild Horse Waves the Mane.

![Images of a person performing Parting the Wild Horse's Mane](image)

This is the first step where the direction changes. Moving slowly and continuously, keep the movements rounded, move without effort although imagine the resistance of moving through honey, relax, keep the head up, let the mind direct the movements, don't bounce and maintain an upright posture. This move is made to the left and then to the right and to the left again.

**Step 3 - The White Crane spreads its Wings (Bai He Liang Chi)**
Variations of names for this movement include: White Crane spreads its Wings, White Stork Spreading Its Wings, White Crane Lifts Its Wings, White Stork Cools Its Wings.

![Images of a person performing The White Crane spreads its Wings](image)

In this move the body turns at the waist slightly to left and then back to the right before it settles to face directly ahead. The subtle turn comes from the internal rotation of the dan tien.

**Step 4 - Brush Knee and step forward (Luo Xi Ao Bu)**
Variations of names for this movement include: Brush Knee and step forward, Twist Step, Brush Knee with Palm Strike, Brushing Your Knees and Stepping and Brush Knee and Twist Step.
Important when doing this step to ensure that the palm brushing the knee finishes to the outside of the knee it brushed and that the palm is flat facing the floor at the finish. The strike palm finishes at about solar plexus height with the pushing arm straight but not fully extended.

**Step 5 - Playing the Lute (Shou Hui Pi Pa)**

Variations of names for this movement include: Playing the Lute, Playing the Pipa, Play the Guitar, Strumming the Lute and Hand hold the Lute.

Below left is a picture of Master Yang Cheng Fu in the “Playing the Lute” stance and below on the right is a pic of a Chinese woman playing the Pipa.

Master Yang Chengfu or Yang Ch'eng-fu (1883–1936) is widely considered as one of the most well-known teachers of the soft Yang-style Tai Chi Ch’uan martial art.

Playing the Lute is performed in the “Empty Stance”

This form starts after the last Brushing Knee form by rotating the hands so that the left hand is forward and the right hand is back. The left hand finishes its movement a little above shoulder height set with a bend in the elbow. The right hand is open and finishes its movement opposite the left elbow. The right hand is turned inward slightly so as not to be parallel to the left hand. Once you have transferred your weight to the back leg with the foot at 45 degrees, sit back, rotate the dan tien back to face the front and very slightly tuck in the coccyx. At the same time, the right foot advances with little or no weight (finishing with only the heel or toes touching the floor). The heel or toes of the left foot and both hands are set in their final positions at the same time as you face the front and commit to sitting on the back leg. Shoulders and the upper body should be relaxed to ensure that you are “sitting down while standing” tuck in the tailbone (coccyx) simultaneously with your outbreath while maintaining a good Tai Chi posture.
There are numerous applications to demonstrate this form the most frequently used is probably the arm break or the arm lock, although Playing the Lute is also a stance used to demonstrate “combat readiness

**Step 6 - Repulse the monkey (Dao Juan Hong)**

Variations of names for this movement include: Repulse the Monkey, Fending off the Monkey, Step Back to Drive the Monkey Away, Repulse Monkey and Step Back, Step Back and Swirl Your Arms, Reverse Reeling Forearm and Step Back and Drive Monkey Away.

![Step 6 - Repulse the monkey (Dao Juan Hong)](image)

Turn your right hand palm up and let it drop down so that your arm moves downwards in an arc and continue bringing your right arm back until your hand is about level with your right shoulder. Simultaneously turn both your left and right hand palms slightly upwards.

Bring your right palm closer to your head before starting to push the hand forward and at the same time place your left foot (toe first) behind your right leg on the floor, exhale with the hand pushing forward and start the same move on the left side. This move is repeated to the left, to the right and again to the left before returning to start the next form, 7, Grasping the Sparrows Tail.
Step 7 - Grasping the sparrow's tail left and right (Zuo Lan Que Wei)
Variations of names for this movement include; Grasping the Sparrow's Tail, Grasping the Peacock's Tail, Grasp the Bird's Tail, Four Gates, Grasp the Sparrow's Tail to the Left Side, Hold the Peacock's Tail and Grasp the Bird's Tail Left.

![Step 7 Images]

Step 8 - Grasping the sparrow's tail left (You Lan Que Wei)
Variations of names for this movement include; Grasping the Sparrow's Tail, Grasping the Peacock's Tail, Grasp the Bird's Tail, Four Gates, Grasp the Sparrow's Tail to the Right Side, Hold the Peacock's Tail and Grasp the Bird's Tail Right

![Step 8 Images]

Traditionally, “Grasping Sparrow's Tail” is said to be composed of four of the eight fundamental Tai Chi Gates and that it why it is sometimes called “Four Gates”, namely; ward off (peng), roll back (lu), press forward, (ji) and push (an) The Chinese terms are in brackets.

Grasping the Sparrow's Tail is also considered important, because this step incorporates the fundamental techniques of Tai Chi Ch’uan, including; attack, defence, various stances, footwork, waist movement, body turns, hand movements, weight transfer, balancing, storing energy, developing internal force and releasing energy.

Grasping the Sparrow's Tail is the most frequently occurring movement in the original Yang Style Long 108 Form (it occurs eight times). If you can perform “Grasping the Sparrow's Tail” well, performing all other Tai Chi Ch’uan forms with grace, elegance, balance and internal energy will be relatively easier. When using the dan tien, the legs, the body and the hands correctly with proper breathing techniques, one will, over time, be able to cultivate the three internal harmonies of; essence, energy and mind.

Practicing “Grasping the Sparrows Tail” will increase understanding of the real character of push-hands. When practicing push-hands one utilizes applications attained from practicing this form. It is recorded that Yang Lu Chan the creator of the Yang style practiced “Grasping the Sparrow's Tail” hundreds of times a day.
Step 9 - Single Whip *(Dan Bian)*

Single Whip is a common posture found in most forms of Tai Chi Ch’uan.

Single Whip is historically a change of the posture’s original name, which is thought to originate from the Chinese representation of carrying two baskets on a pole or a yoke and therefore named as "Carry Baskets" *(Dān Biăn)*.

![Image of Single Whip](image1)

Typically at the end of the posture the left hand is in a palm outward push and the right hand held most commonly in the form of a hook or closed fist. A notable exception is the Single Whip in Sun-style Tai Chi Ch’uan which finishes with both hands open, palms outward.

Wu style hands are similar to that of the Chen and Yang styles with the hook, but the stance in Wu style is horse stance and the hands are less wide apart.

![Image of different styles](image2)

There are many interesting and varied applications for the single whip such as, striking with the back of the bent wrist, striking with the finger tips, performing arm breaks with the wrist turn and breaking free from holds with the turning of the hook.

The commencement of the Single Whip posture varies from form to form, for example, in the 24 form it Single Whip starts after the “push” in the Grasping the Sparrows Tail form. Above I show the different postures and write the name of the Chen master that is well noted for this form.
Step 10 - Cloud Hands (Yun Shou)

A variety of names for this movement exist, for example; Cloud Hands, Wave Hands, Moving Hands like Clouds, Waving Hands like Clouds, Cloud Built Hands and Wave Hands in Clouds.

Wave Hands is one of the most popular movements of Tai Chi Chuan, because of its graceful, flowing movements of the upper body and the hands making circles in front of the body. If performed slowly and correctly it can be very meditative and relaxing.

In the 24 Forms Cloud Hands is repeated three times. There are many different martial applications for each of the three steps, each requiring a slight variation to the posture.

There other also a number of variations to this form within the Tai Chi styles. A well know variation is how the palms are positioned. For example, Yang style Tai Chi has soft hands where the hands alternate and turn to face the body and the Sun style Tai Chi has palms that always face away from the body, bent at the wrist so that the fingers tend to point upwards. Another variation within the Yang style is the direction of the 7 steps. They are either in a straight line to the left or taught as a combination of 4 steps forward and 3 steps left to the side, the latter providing more variations to the martial arts applications.

The pictures above show “Wave Hands” performed in a straight line, starting and ending in a bow stance and “Single Whip”

Wave Hands is likened to a basic form of Silk Reeling (Chan-Ssu Chin) generated by alternating the arms whilst rotating the upper body leading with the dan tien. Wave Hands is also a great form to improve the balance of Yin and Yang and to experience how to effectively use the kuaas and the dan tien. As with Silk Reeling, this form requires spiral movements from the dan tien, a well-rooted stance, slow controlled movements without stopping and good proper Tai Chi breathing. Practicing Wave Hands can give you a good sense of “flow” and can result in a positive, calming and “feel good” effect.
**Step 11 - Single Whip (Dan Bian)**

Single Whip is a common posture found in most forms of Tai Chi Ch’uan.

Single Whip is historically a change of the posture’s original name, which is thought to originate from the Chinese representation of carrying two baskets on a pole or a yoke and therefore named as "Carry Baskets" (Dān Biàn).

Typically at the end of the posture the left hand is in a palm outward push and the right hand held most commonly in the form of a hook or closed fist. A notable exception is the Single Whip in Sun-style Tai Chi Ch’uan which finishes with both hands open, palms slightly outward.

Wu style hands are similar to that of the Chen and Yang styles (with the hook in one hand) but the stance in Wu style is horse stance and the hands less wide apart.

There are many interesting and varied applications for the single whip such as, striking with the back of the bent wrist, striking with the finger tips, performing arm breaks with the wrist turn and breaking free from holds with the turning of the hook.

The commencement of the Single Whip posture varies from form to form, for example, in the 24 form it Single Whip starts after the “push” in the Grasping the Sparrows Tail form. Below I pose for the postures of the different styles and state the name of the Tai Chi master that is well noted for that particular style.
**Step 12 - Pat on high horse** *(Gao Tan Ma)*

There are so many variations to the name of this form, such as; Pat on high Horse, High Pat on Horse, Pat the Horse on the Back, Saddle the Horse, Stroke the Horse from above, Patting the Horse's Neck While Riding, Patting the Horse on the Back, Asking for Directions While Riding a Horse, High Hand Pats the Horse.

In the 24 Forms this posture starts after the second Single Whip and precedes the right heel kick. In most forms that have this move “Pat on High horse” precedes a kick as it is a very good defence/attack move.

In the Yang style 24 forms it starts with Single Whip by slightly turning the head and waist as you look back over the hand with the hook, opening both hands (the hook hand opens and fingers point slightly upwards to prepare for the strike). At the same time a half step is taken with the right leg, placing it closer to the left leg with the right foot at about 45 degrees resulting in the waist turned out slightly. Turning the waist back to the front is done simultaneously with the right hand strike generating more force when you bring the right hand over to “pat the horse”. The left hand is inverted (palm facing upwards) and is pulled back to about hip height in front of the left hip. This form ends in Empty stance with the toes of the left foot lightly touching the floor.

Like all forms there are a few variations of the Pat on High horse. The variations in the Yang style 24 forms as taught at different schools are,

**Left foot** - Some schools teach that the empty stance is formed with the heel of the left foot touching the floor.

**Left hand** - Some schools teach that the left hand remains at chest height opposite the right elbow and some teach that the left arm responds as a strike by pulling the right arm back with the left hand palm facing upwards finishing in front of the hip at waist height as shown in the last of the above pics.

This form “Pat on high Horse” is used in many forms within the Chen, Wu, Sun and Yang styles but can appear quiet different for e.g. in the 73 form sun style this form is performed similar to “Playing the Lute” in the 24 form Yang style, except that in the 73 form, the right hand is leading the move. In some of the more well-known Chen forms the stance is a four six stance with the left hand finishing in front of the lower dan tien with the palm facing upwards.
Step 13 - Right Heel Kick (You Deng Jiao)
Common variations of the names for this movement are, Right heel kick, Kicking straight right mode, Kicking with the right heel.

To perform the right heel kick be sure to bring the kicking leg up so that the knee is higher than your waist line and then slowly extend the leg making sure that the striking surface of the foot is the heel while simultaneously opening the hands. Be sure to keep your back straight. Do not compromise your posture to kick higher than you can.

A low heel kick is quite acceptable. After the right heel kick the right arm and hand are directly above and in line with the kick.

The Right Heel Kick also occurs in other forms for example the 42 Combined form.

Step 14 - Double Punch to the Ears (Shuang Feng Quan Er)
Common variations of the names for this movement are; Punch ears with both fists, Box ears, Box opponent's ears with both fists, Strike to ears with both fists, Strike to temple with both fists.

After the kick, draw both arms and the leg back to form a block and then drop the arms and circle them up and forwards to direct both fists towards the ear level of an imaginary opponent and at the same time you should be landing on the right leg in a good bow stance keeping the back straight.
**Step 15 - Turn body and left heel kick** *(Zhuan Shen Zuo Deng Jiao)*

A common name variation for this movement is, Left heel kick, Turnaround and kick with left heel.

![Step 15 images](image1)

After the double punch turn to the left and prepare for the left heel kick. At the end of this move you should have all your weight on the right leg with the right hand forming a hook and the left hand close to the right wrist or the right elbow.

To perform the left heel kick be sure to bring the kicking leg up so that the knee is higher than your waist line and then slowly extend the leg making sure that the striking surface of the foot is the heel while simultaneously opening the hands with the left hand finishing directly above the left leg. Be sure to keep your back straight. Do not compromise your posture to kick higher than you can.

In the Yang Style 108 form this step occurs twice, both times following Brushing Knee left.

**Step 16 - Snake creeps down & Rooster stands on left leg** *(Zuo Xia Shi Du Li)*

Common variations of the names for this movement are: Snake creeps down and Rooster stands on one leg, Lowering move, Squat Down on Right Leg, Snake Creeps Down Left Leg: Crooked Whip to Right Side: Squat on Right, Climb Down Left; Golden Rooster Stands on One Leg and Left Down One-leg Stand.

Below I show pictures of the complete form and a picture of the Chinese master Yang Cheng Fu performing Snake Creeps Down.

![Step 16 images](image2)

To perform this move, extend the left leg to the side and squat down on the right leg with the foot of the left leg pointing in the direction you intend to move. Draw the left arm down along the inside of extended left leg brushing the hand past the shin or ankle. (Snake creeps down). Draw the right leg up until level with hip with the right elbow over the right knee and the palm of the left hand at about hip height parallel to the floor. (Rooster stands on left leg). Lower the right foot to the floor and turn to the left and start Step 17 by extending the right leg and repeat. While it looks impressive to sink very low
the depth of this form must not be so deep that the upright body posture is comprised by leaning forward too much.

**Step 17 - Snake creeps down & Rooster stands on right leg (You Xia Shi Du Li)**

To perform this move, extend the right leg to the side and squat down on the left leg with the foot of the right leg pointing in the direction you are intending to move. Draw the right arm down along the inside of right extended leg brushing the hand past the shin or ankle. (Snake creeps down). Draw the left leg up until level with hip with the left elbow over left knee and the palm of the right hand about hip height parallel to the floor. Below I show pictures of the complete form and a picture of the Chinese master Chen Man-Ching performing Snake Creeps Down.

![Snake Creeps Down](image1)

**Step 18 - Fair lady works the shuttles right and left (Yu Nu Chuan Shuo)**

Common variations of the names for this movement are: Fair Lady works the Shuttles right and left, Throwing the Loom to the Left Side and Right Side, Shuttle Back and Forth, Two Corners, Work at Shuttles on Both Sides and Jade Maiden Works the Shuttles.

*In the yang style 24 forms and the 42 Combined (Wu, Sun, Chen and Yang) forms* the blocking and striking arm movements mimic a woman using a loom as shown in the two pictures below left.

![Fair Lady works the shuttles right and left](image2)

In the 24 forms these moves start by a defensive move 45 degrees to the right with a right forearm block and a left palm strike and then the 2nd part moves defensively 45 degrees to the left with a left forearm block and a right palm strike. Both steps finish in a bow stance.
In the Sun style 73 forms, “Fair Lady Working at the Shuttles” shown above, the arm movements also mimic a woman using a loom but the movements are repeated four times turning through a range of 225 degrees and each time including a short follow step with the back leg. The first three times the move is performed with the striking palm held very close to the chest and the 4th time the striking palm is extended when making the strike.

Another example of how the step Jade Maiden Works the Shuttles shown above and below differs from Fait Maiden Works the Shuttles as performed in the Chen style 18 forms (Grandmaster Chen Zheng Lei) and 36 forms (Paul Lam).

These forms are a more complex series of movements beginning by a jump and pumping the hands down, a jump strike and a kick or a strike and a 180-degree turn for a 2nd reverse strike.

As shown above, in the Chen style 36 forms, Jade Maiden Works the Shuttles ends with a forearm rising block in horse stance and in the Chen style 19 forms (Chen Xiao Wang) quite similar but the last step progresses to the the 2nd last step of the form Budha’s Warrior Attendant Pounds Mortar.
Step 19 - Needle at Sea Bottom (*Hai Di Zhen*)

Common variations of the names for this movement are: Needle at sea bottom, Pick Up Needle from Bottom of the Sea, Needle at Bottom of the Sea, Find the Needle at the Sea Bottom and Reach for the Moon in the Lake.

To my knowledge, Needle at Sea Bottom occurs in other forms but not in the Chen Style forms.

Needle at sea bottom also occurs in the 95 steps Shanghai Wu-style Tai Chi Fast form and some single Fan forms and the 25 steps Essence of 5 Families Double Fan form.

The martial applications associated with the Needle at Sea Bottom posture are too numerous to detail here, but it is taught by some schools that the original applications to this step were quiet brutal and potentially lethal, striking the attacker in the throat and the groin. Common applications for this step taught today are more defensive and less brutal.

The general direction of movement is in directly ahead. From the last posture of "Fair Lady Works the Shuttles" begin by stepping forward a half step with the right leg placing the right foot at 45 degrees. The right hand moves back and up the right side until it is drawn up to between shoulder and face level. The left hand moves down in an arc until it comes to stop parallel to the floor slightly below waist level to the side of the left leg. The toes of the left leg finish lightly on the floor, forming a left empty stance. Most of your weight is on the right leg. Exhale and thrust downwards with the right hand, fingers pointing downward, until the right hand is below the waist.

The depth of the spear hand (strike downward) does vary, but much deeper then below the waist is not essential to this move. If you want to thrust the hand closer to the floor be sure not to compromise your posture by placing too much weight on the front leg as you lean forward to reach the floor. The left hand should remain parallel to the floor slightly above and opposite the left knee.
**Step 20 - Fan through back** *(Shan Tong Bei)*

Common variations of the names for this movement are: Fan through the Back, Flashing the Arms, Fend Off and Push Away with Arms, Unfolding Arms like a Fan, Flashing the Arms and Shunting with Both Hands Fanned.

![Step 20 - Fan through back](image)

**Step 21 - Turn, deflect parry and punch** *(Zhuan Shen Ban Lan Chui)*

Common variations of the names for this movement are: Turn, deflect, parry and punch; Turning Around, Warding Off, Punching; Turn, Intercept and Punch; Turn Body, Shoulder Strike, Back Fist, Deflect, Parry, and Punch; Turn to Deflect Block and Strike and Step Forward, Parry Block and Punch.

![Step 21 - Turn, deflect parry and punch](image)

As the form name implies the step is made of different moves, turning the body, deflecting, inverted punch, parry and ending with a straight fist punch

The turning of the body can be in response to an attack from behind.
Step 22 - Apparent Close (Ru Feng Si Bi)

Common variations of the names for this movement are: Apparent close; Clearing Cross Block and Pushing; As if Blocking and Closing; Appears Closed; Withdraw and Push; Closing a Door and Apparent Close Up.

After the straight fist punch with the right hand, the left hand sweeps under the forearm of the right hand and both hands lift to about shoulder height when they open to shoulder width and pull back to prepare for the downward push.

Step 23 - Cross Hands (Shi Zi Shou)

Common variations of the names for this movement are: Cross hands; Crossing Your Hands in Front of Chest; Close the Door; Cross Hands and Cross Your Hands.

Turning back to the right with both hands at about shoulder height turn the right foot to prepare for the final scooping of both hands forward and then as you prepare to step back, transfer the body weight to the left leg and place both feet parallel with equal weight distribution and at the same time cross hands, raise them to in front of your chest before commencing the final form.
**Step 24 - Closing Form (Shou Shi)**

Common variations of the names for this movement are: Closing form; Conclusion; Concluding Posture; Taiji Ending; Ending Posture; Closing Posture of Taijiquan; and Closing.

Opening the crossed hands, slowly lower them down with flat palms while slowly exhaling out and straightening the legs so that they are only slightly bent (soft) at the finish. Place your feet together or with the heels touching and your fingertips resting lightly against your thighs.

Whenever I complete this form, or any other Tai Chi form, I tend to stay in the final position for some seconds to savour the calm meditative feeling.
Section 13 - Advanced Routines

While the following advanced routines form part of my learning road map, they are not fundamental or essential to learning Tai Chi. I believe one can attain an extremely high level of Tai Chi without practicing these advanced routines, but I include them for some of my students who, like me, want to explore new forms that serve to improve, flow, posture, moving from the middle and other key aspects of a good Tai Chi performance.

If you are reading this book and you wish to learn these routines or simply include these practice drills into your training regime, I would encourage you to find an experienced teacher as these routines are advanced and not easily self-taught.

Push Hands ((Tui Shou)

Push Hands (Tui Shou) is an exercise performed by two people who are attempting to improve their Tai Chi skills. Practicing the Tai Chi solo form also teaches one to remain balanced, focused and relaxed while in motion.

Only through the practice of Tai Chi Push Hands does one improve these specific physical contact abilities with another person. To be balanced and relaxed while in contact with another person who is moving can be difficult. Learning this improves our martial skills through Tai Chi Ch’uan.

Push Hands provides Tai Chi practitioners with a format to test and improve upon their flexibility, timing, balance and relaxation while in contact with another person and also shows the student where there is room for improvement in their Tai Chi practice. The student can often get away with improper flow, incorrect posture and inadequate moving from the middle while practicing the form, but when doing Push Hands with a partner these flaws will be exposed very quickly.

Push Hands also provides a safe way to “compete” with other Tai Chi practitioners.

Tai Chi Ch’uan pushing hands is used to acquaint students with the following principles:

1. Eight Gates of Movement
   - Ward off (Peng)
   - Roll back (Lu)
   - Press (Chi)
   - Push (An)
   - Pluck or grasp (Tsai)
   - Split (Lieh)
   - Elbow strike (Chou)
   - Shoulder strike (K’ao)
2. The Four main Contact Skills
   - Connect (Lian) continually connecting and paying attention to your opponents intent
   - Follow (Sui) obeying your opponents movements
   - Sticking (Nian) maintaining light contact without breaking
   - Adhere (Zhan) getting your opponent to follow you.

3. The Four main Energies
   - Listening (Ting)
   - Understanding (Dong)
   - Neutralizing (Hua)
   - Issuing (Fa)

Four of the Eight Gates of movement listed above, Ward Off, Roll back, Press and Push can be found in steps 7 and 8 Grasping the Sparrows Tail of the Yang style Tai Chi 24 forms as shown in the 5 pics sequence below.

![Five pictures showing Tai Chi movements](image1)

Ward off    Roll back    Roll back    Press    Push

A basic practice method of the 4 Gates, Ward off, Roll back, Press and Push are shown in the 6 pic sequence below.

![Six pictures showing Tai Chi movements](image2)

The 4 Gates routine should be practiced both left and right until the step forward and the arm and body movements are light, smooth and flowing. The routine can be practiced in a large circle or forwards, but always alternating left and right. Stepping forward is an important step to learn. In the Chen style Tai Chi Push hands the step forward is called “Little ghost pushes millstones”
The Chen style Tai Chi Push Hands as promoted by Grand Master Chen Zheng Lei is performed as double hands or single hand and as, fixed step and moving steps and comprises five different postures.

1. Wanhau (single hand fixed step)
2. Push Hands standing (Double hands fixed step)
3. Push hands follow step (Advance and retreat)
4. Push hands follow step with lower movement (Advance and retreat)
5. Push Hands with multi steps and multi directions

**Posture 1 - Wanhau (Fixed step single hand)**

These beginner routines are initially performed as fixed step as a basic introduction, but can also be performed with moving steps to advance and retreat for variation.

Wanhau double hands fixed step with right feet opposite moving in clockwise circles, anti-clockwise circles and reeling upper lower and lower upper always changing the lead.
Posture 2 - Push Hands standing (double hands fixed step)

A slightly more advanced version of posture 1, using both hands, fixed step (without stepping) and with both right feet opposite one another.

Posture 3 - Push Hands advance and retreat follow step.

A much more advanced version of posture 2, but starting with the left foot opposite the partner’s right foot and stepping backwards and forwards as the lead is changed.

This form should only be practiced after the basic postures 1 and 2 have been learned and can be performed smoothly and flowing.

Postures 4 & 5 - Push Hands follow step with lower movement and 5 - Push Hands with multi steps and multi directions.

While I have learned Postures 4 and 5, the Push hands follow step with lower movement (Advance and retreat) and the Push Hands with multi steps and multi directions I do not elaborate on them here as I do not get much opportunity to practice them so they do not form part of my teachings.

The benefits of Learning Push Hands

As stated in an earlier chapter, I am of the view that the benefits of routine practice of Push Hands can be lightly summarised as;

One, training with a partner allows a student to develop listening power, the sensitivity to feel the direction and strength of a partner's intention and works to undo a person's natural instinct to resist force with force, teaching the body to yield to force and redirect

Two, students learn to generate, coordinate and deliver power to one another and also how to effectively neutralize incoming forces in a safe but competitive environment to better understand the martial aspects of the internal martial arts (nèijīā) such as leverage, reflex, sensitivity, timing, coordination and positioning. This aspect of Push Hands requires in depth teaching and considerable practice to achieve a high level of competence.
Silk Reeling (Chan Ssu)

Silk reeling (Chan Si or Ch’an ssu) refers to a set of internal movement principles expressed in traditional styles of Tai Chi Ch’uan, but emphasized by the Chen and Wu styles. The name derives from the twisting and spiralling movements. The action must be smooth and consistent without jerking or changing direction sharply. Silk reeling movements are continuous, cyclic, spiralling patterns performed at constant speed with the “light touch” of drawing silk. Silk reeling is trained in solo forms and stances as well as in pushing hands with a partner.

Whenever I prepare to practice one of the eight Silk Reeling drills, I like to start in the basic “embracing the tree” (Zhan Zhuang) posture, as shown below on the left of the two pics. Another posture performed before the start of Silk Reeling is “Standing Post” (Zhan Zhuang) as taught by Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang.

The Post or Embracing the tree as I teach it is performed standing up-right, with the feet shoulder width apart or slightly wider, knees slightly bent and the arms held in front of the body, at about shoulder height or slightly above the dan tien to form a circle. This provides the structure for the two movements of the dan tien to direct the qi about the body.

In this steady stance, the spine is upright with the head, shoulders, dan tien and feet in vertical alignment. All the joints are slightly bent and loose. It is vital that the whole body is still and relaxed.

There are many practice drills taught, but I list below eight, which I have learned and encourage my students to learn in some of my classes.

1. Left - Front coiling silk (Zheng Mian Chan Si)
2. Right - Front coiling silk (Zheng Mian Chan Si)
3. Right - and left transverse step (Heng Kai Bu)
4. Right - Side coiling silk with 2 hands (Shuang Shou Chan Si)
5. Left - Side coiling silk with 2 hands (Shuang Shou Chan Si)
6. Right - Advancing step (You Qian Jin Bu)
7. Right and left - Withdrawing step (Hou Tui Bu)
8. Left - Advancing step (Zou Qian Jin Bu)
With the body relaxed, the movement of the dan tien is able to spiral out from the centre to the periphery of the body in a logical way.

![Image](165x490 to 277x595)

When silk reeling as shown in the pic above, the lowest I allow my arms to travel when moving in a circle with the hands is just in front of and slightly below the dan tien. The highest is at about eyebrow level. The highest stance is with the legs slightly bent and the lowest is with the legs bent to almost 90 degrees but always a more than shoulder width apart or at the most one and a half times shoulder width. The spiralling movements require that the left and right legs alternatively flex and lean to compliment the spiral movements.

The correct and regular practice of Silk Reeling exercises is one of the most efficient methods of improving the coordination required for the movements of the Tai Chi forms. Through Silk Reeling we can learn smooth, flowing co-ordination between the movements of the arms, body, dan tien and breath.

From a health perspective, Silk Reeling exercises loosen up the joints, enabling freedom of movement, improved circulation, strengthening connective tissues, and increasing the secretion of synovial fluid, which lubricates the joints. From a martial perspective, the movements help to appreciate the spiralling energy within the body.

In my view, while practicing Silk Reeling will most definitely compliment your Tai Chi practice, but it is not a prerequisite to achieving a good level of Tai Chi.

As with the other advanced forms I would encourage the reader who wants to practice silk reeling to find an experienced teacher to properly learn the basics in terms of posture, moving from the middle and breathing.
Fa Jin

Fa jin, fajin, or fa chin is a Chinese term used in internal martial arts (neijia) such as Bājíquán and Tai Chi ch’uan. Fa jin translates to the discharge of power explosively and is not specific to any particular strike. This technique originates from the Chen-style tai chi ch’uan. In the Yang style fa jin is also added to techniques to release stored energy, however, the release of the energy is almost unseen unlike when demonstrated in the Chen style forms.

In the practice of Tai Chi Ch’uan, Fa jin is a description of a technique, to suddenly release energy obtained by harmonized movement of the entire body. Many techniques can express fa jin, not just kicks and punches. The Fa jin released during the out breath is almost unconscious. For Fa jin to exist, there is a combining of speed, timing, coordination and breath.

Fa jin is commonly used in competitive Push hands where the explosive reaction is used to off balance the opponent. To generate the Fa jin, it is necessary to first create a spiral from the lower Dan tien towards the limb or body part, e.g. shoulder, head or hip that will perform the push or strike with explosive force. There are a few basic exercise routines I use to develop and practice moving from the middle in a relaxed but powerful way, although the development of Fa jin is a much deeper concept requiring years of practice under the guidance of very experienced practitioner.

One routine that I share with my students is shown below performed by blocking with one arm while standing in a horse stance and then punching and completing the punch in a wide bow stance and then again back to the horse stance. The block is performed before the punch to trigger the spiral movement. The leg, waist, and pull back arm drive the power of the striking fist. Breath is exhaled on the punch and inhaled on returning to the pull back and block in horse stance on the other side.

Another practice routine, da qiang that I have learned is performed using a spear or a long staff. When doing this exercise with the long bo or staff hold it with both palms up and turn it left to form a block and strike and then strike to the left and change into a wide Bow stance and then repeat to the right side. All routines are first practiced in slow motion, slowly increasing in tempo until it can be performed very fast to issue the power. The legs, waist, and pull back arm drive the power of the strike or push.

Like the other advanced routines in this section of this book, in my view practicing fa jin will compliment your Tai Chi practice, but it is not a prerequisite to achieving a good level of Tai Chi Ch’uan.

As with the other advanced forms I would encourage the reader who wants to practice fa jin to find an experienced teacher to properly learn this concept.
Iron Shirt Qi Kung

This old Qigong discipline was originally practiced to strengthen the body (including internal organs) and to create a protecting “iron shirt” to keep away inner and outer injuries. Nowadays, martial artists and Tai Chi practitioners use this exercise to improve breathing techniques, to improve posture and grounding and to strengthen the immune system.

Master Mantak Chia is the authority and creator of the Universal Tao System and the director of the Universal Tao Centre. He is the author of many books, one of which is, “Iron Shirt Chi Kung I. The Universal Tao System is now being taught throughout the world.

The benefits of practicing Iron Shirt are physical, emotional and spiritual. When practicing Iron shirt the physical benefits are a gradual increase in the stress on the fascia connective tissues, organs, tendons and bones.

Improved Breathing - Iron Shirt uses the “Energized breathing” and the “Packing breathing” techniques that create an inner “Qi pressure” in the lower abdomen and in turn put pressure on the fascia layers and organs. These techniques also improve our abdominal breathing.

Improved Body Posture – practicing the Iron Shirt postures corrects bad body posture. Iron Shirt training strengthens the tendons and bones and also helps to open the “Kua” (groin area) and develops the psoas muscle group.

Improving the Immune system – Through correct and effective Iron Shirt practice we increase our vital energy and detoxify and strengthen our organs and promote self-healing.

The eight Iron Shirt postures

The eight Iron shirt postures that I have learned are;

- Embracing the Tree (Also known in Tai Chi schools as „The Post“)
- Holding the Golden Urn (Yang)
- Holding the Golden Urn (Yin)
- The Iron Bridge
- The Golden Turtle immersing in water
- The Water buffalo emerging from the water
- The Golden Phoenix washes it’s feathers
- The Iron Bar

The two Iron Shirt postures that I have continued to practice and now share with some of my students are shown on the next page:
Embracing the Tree Posture

Holding the Golden Urn posture (Yang and Yin)

**Basic Iron Shirt Qi Kung Principles**

- Assume one of the eight postures e.g. Embracing the Tree.
- Sink the energy down to the lower navel area.
- Sink down as comfortably as you can, and open the groin by slightly separating the knees (almost as if you were straddling a horse).
- Turn the the toes slightly inward with a gentle locking of the knees
- The hands are at shoulder level, the elbows sunk
- Line up the shoulders, joining the scapulae with the spine by rounding the scapulae and sinking the chest.

Rooting can also be practiced by assuming the Embracing the Tree posture with the above principles and having a partner gentle push against you to allow you to understand where you are rooted and where not. Repeated practice will eliminate the weak spots and increase your rooting power.

I would encourage the reader who wants to practice Iron Shirt Qi Kung to find an experienced teacher to properly learn the basics before attempting to perform these routines. Like the other advanced routines in this section of this book, in my view regular practice of one or more of the Iron Shirt postures with the correct breathing techniques and principles will compliment your Tai Chi practice by improving your posture and your ability to be rooted, but it is not a prerequisite to achieving a good level of Tai Chi.
Section 14 - My Choice of Tai Chi Music

For me, a big part of the enjoyment while practicing Tai Chi is the background music.

I like slow meditative music, music that is energising but non-intrusive. Music that promotes relaxation and that conforms to the form. Sometimes I do practice without music allowing my breathing to provide a rhythm and flow.

I have favourite music that I use depending on the style of Tai Chi I practice, music that captures the spirit of the movements.

Over the years I have collected hundreds of tracks of my preferred Tai Chi music, enabling me to change the selection I use in my classes from time to time.

I list below 10 tracks to give the reader an idea of the sort of music I enjoy with my Tai Chi practice.

- A Moment shared – Tony O’Conner - Dreams and Discoveries
- Dreams of Youth – Tony O’Conner - Dreams and Discoveries
- Tibetan Singing Bowl – Yoga Music 101 – Top Meditation
- Graceful Heart - The Silk Orchestra and Pat Clemence
- Tai Chi Sun Style – Dr. Paul Lam – Tai Chi Music, Vol. 2
- Tshe-Pak-Me – Dechan Shak - Dagsay
- River of Qi - Dr. Paul Lam and Jenny Ly – Eternal Waters
- Öpha-Me - Dechan Shak – Dagsay
- Tai Chi for Arthritis Parts 1 and 2
- Unvergängliche wahre Liebe
Section 15 - Conclusion

To achieve the maximum benefit from Tai Chi practice, you need to make Tai Chi a way of life. Routine and frequent practice will not only provide a general wellness workout, but it will also cultivate the energy within your body, increase your mental awareness, build good habits for proper breathing and body alignment.

When you have accomplished these goals in practice, you will automatically carry these good habits into your daily life and you will gain a greater awareness of yourself.

Humans are people of habit. That in principle makes it easy to follow a routine of regular practice. If you set a daily regular time for practice and try hard to maintain your practice routine, it will become like a habit, you'll find that your mind and your body will demand it.

It's challenging but enjoyable to strive to improve your Tai Chi, but it's important to understand, that no single person knows all there is to know about Tai Chi, and there is no perfect Tai Chi.

No matter whether your goal to reaching a higher level means that you will continue to improve what you've already learned or that you will learn a new set of forms or a new style, it is most important that you make regular practice a top priority. It is only through regular practice, of your form(s) and the essential principles, will you truly come to understand the inner meaning of Tai Chi and receive its great benefits and enjoy your new way of life.

Here are some guidelines that would help you to progress,

- When possible try to have a “calm mind” during your practice
- Routinely and regularly practice the Tai Chi forms that you have learned
- Learn the names of the steps of your form(s)
- Follow the basic principles and the essential and extended principles
- Always strive to improve
- Never forget that your Tai Chi practice must be enjoyable

I have always enjoyed learning, practicing and teaching Tai Chi and I can honestly say that I really believe, that “the way is the goal” and I am enjoying the way. A real life’s journey and one that I hope you will learn to experience and enjoy as much as I do.

Good luck, keep practicing enjoy your Tai Chi journey and thank you for reading my book.
Learning Tai Chi Ch’uan

A complete and practical reference and learning guide for the Tai Chi Beginner, or anyone who is learning Tai Chi Ch’uan. This book is a collection of notes compiled by the author over a number of years to support his teaching of Tai Chi Ch’uan and the fundamental Tai Chi principles and key concepts.

The Author, Lester Heath is an experienced martial artist and a qualified and registered Tai Chi Instructor who is passionate about the practice of Tai Chi Ch’uan.

Lester has studied Tai Chi and attended courses with some of the most acclaimed teachers, namely, Dr. Paul Lam, Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang, Grandmaster Chen Zheng Lei, Master Mantak Chia and the late Master Lim Lai Leong of Penang, Malaysia.

While Lester teaches different forms of Tai Chi from the different Tai Chi styles, in this book, he goes into more detail on the Yang Style 24 forms and also provides:

- Theory to give the reader an overview of the basic history of Tai Chi Ch’uan
- Basic information as taught by the author on fundamental Tai Chi principles
- Snippets of interesting and useful information about the Tai Chi Ch’uan 24 forms relative to other Tai Chi Styles and forms.
- An outline of typical Tai Chi warm-up exercises used by the author for safe and effective Tai Chi practice and other related training routines and concepts.
- Step by step illustrations and explanations of the Tai Chi Ch’uan 24 postures

Tai Chi Ch’uan

Tai Chi Ch’uan or tàijīquǎn often shortened to t’ai chi, taiji, or tai chi. Tai Chi Ch’uan is an internal Chinese martial art practiced for both its defence training and its health benefits. Though originally conceived as a martial art, it is also typically practiced for a variety of other personal reasons, such as demonstrations in competition, health improvement and general well-being.