

TAI-CHI

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Tai-Chi for health?

There is an old Chinese saying,

"When water flows, it creates life."

As living organisms we have to constantly exercise, in one form or another, to stimulate our vital metabolism. Yet as all forms of sport involve exercise, what distinguishes **TaiChiQuan**?

Indeed all sports activities do involve workouts with our outer muscular layers which the Chinese call **WeiKung** or "external" training. However, proper **TaiChiQuan** requires the exercising of our inner-self which is known as **NeiKung** or "internal" training. In addition, an essential part of **NeiKung** involves **QiGong**, the vital energy cultivation of one's life force.

Many **Tai-Chi** practitioners will be seen moving elegantly, softly and slowly with their bodies. There is absolutely nothing wrong with those body movements, as they are a way of exercising the body. However, to a good **TaiChiQuan** practitioner, that is far from the aim of the art. It is in fact only scratching the surface of the true importance of **TaiChiQuan**. In short, if one trains **TaiChiQuan** by just 'waving' one's arms and legs about, it can only be regarded as **WeiKung** or "external" training and is therefore no different from other kinds of physical exercise. If, on the other hand, one practices **TaiChiQuan** exclusively with one's "**Heavenly Pillar**" - spinal cord - then it can be accepted as **NeiKung** or an "internal" workout.

In order to progress, we must try to understand what the ancient Chinese have tried to tell us in classical terms such as "**Heavenly Pillar**". In layman terms, it suggests that there is a very sturdy pillar, strong enough to hold up the entire weight of the sky and heavens. Obviously, if this pillar is broken, the entire heaven will fall down with disastrous consequences.

Today, anthropology has shown that evolution has developed a much stronger spinal cord for Homo erectus and allowed our ancestors to stand and move about in an upright position. This vital change has distinguished us from the four-legged animals. The upright posture provides freedom for our hands, allowing us to create an unimaginable future. The newly adopted standing posture of our spinal cord holds up the major control component of our bodies - the brain.

The Chinese classical code is actually telling us that if the pillar collapses, the heavens will fall down, resulting in our bodies becoming ill. Crucially, the "**Heavenly Pillar**" -spinal cord - must be maintained and nourished at all times. Yet the moving of hands and legs can only exercise the muscles of the joints concerned and these motions do not focus on the spine.

Only genuine and special **TaiChiQuan** training can stretch and collapse each vertebrae as required. As a whole, unique "**internal**" exercises are being performed to manipulate and strengthen those inner muscle groups, which are used to hold up our spinal cord. In doing so, our supporting "**Heavenly Pillar**" will grow healthier and our back muscles will get stronger, allowing greater blood and Qi flow into our brains.

As a direct result of these **NeiKung**, "internal" exercises, our bodies are able to tolerate more daily punishing laborious activities for example long-hours of standing, sitting and lifting heavy loads. Furthermore, special **QiGong** breathing methods help to boost our life force, increasing diaphragm activity, 'massaging' our internal organs, stimulating the metabolic rate and nourishing the body to a healthier and stronger state, ultimately, enhancing our longevity.

From the healing point of view, this improved state of health can help us to combat common problems such as backache, frozen shoulders, migraines, sciatica, arthritis, rheumatism, stiffness of the neck and other sicknesses.

Thus only when one's practice of **TaiChiQuan** has reached such an intricate, delicate stage, can one hope to reach the level of enlightenment encompassed in this fine ancient Chinese art of physical health.

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