

Everyone eats and drinks but few people really savour the experience. Most of us become increasingly robotic in our movements and thinking patterns. Life lived at this level lacks depth and vibrancy. This state of mind creates many health issues and leads to suffering. It is because we are unable to feel how certain things affect our body and mind. Perhaps we are not eating well and skipping exercise. When we become sick, we do not see the connection. We tend to blame it on someone or something else instead.

Becoming more aware is the start of taking responsibility and the beginning of living a richer and happier life.



When we practise Tai Chi or any of the internal arts, we realise how little we know about the body and mind. **These arts are age old tools for investigation and discovery of the power of the mind and body** and eventually, for realising more of their hidden potential.

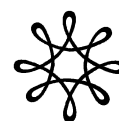
“Why do we practise Tai Chi slowly?” is a common question. The main purpose is to enable us to **bring our mind or attention to what we are doing**. In Chinese, the word, “**yi**” (**intention**), is used to identify the role of the mind in internal training. It refers to a calm and clear awareness, not the frantic or strained mind we may apply in our everyday lives. By practising slowly, we learn to direct our mind or yi on what we are doing. When we practise with attention, we begin to feel what is happening inside our bodies. We can feel our tension and pain. We can feel how the joints move or don’t move. When we are asked to relax our shoulders, we notice how tense they are. We notice that the neck is also carrying tension and that the spine, chest, waist, abdomen, legs and even the internal organs are holding tension. Finally, we realise that the tension seems to begin in the mind itself. **Moving with awareness gives us a different picture of our body and mind**. It enables us to see and feel how much tension we are holding. At first, this may come as a shock. Without being conscious of it, we may do many things to numb this tension, such as having a few drinks, smoking, taking medication, eating a lot, sleeping a lot, talking a lot, The list goes on. It has become our way of life.



The role of Tai Chi is to relieve tension at its source. Its gentle flowing movements encourage relaxation. It is similar to water flowing down a mountain. It finds the path of least resistance. This is what we are learning to do in the Tai Chi form. As we relax, blood vessels and joints become less constricted, allowing blood and qi (energy) to flow freely. **The slow movements facilitate a state of calm where we feel energy flowing within our body.** We sense that we are resonating with our environment, that **we are being in the moment**. Like a fish in the water or a willow tree in the breeze, we move effortlessly with joy as opposed to the unconscious and unfeeling way most of us move. When we experience this state of moving calm, energy is flowing like water nourishing the whole body

and calming the mind. This has many beneficial effects.

With awareness, regular practice and guidance from a knowledgeable teacher, you can overcome many weaknesses within the body, including postural alignment. In our Tai Chi and Wu Dao Gong internal martial arts classes, it is obvious that many students have benefitted from the training. The way they stand and move reveals the rewards they have gained from their consistent effort. Their eyes are clear, their posture is naturally straight and they move with a certain power and grace. These are the real benefits of the practice. If you want these results, you must practise with mindfulness, that is, pay attention to what you are doing. As you develop your practice further, you can feel whether or not your movements are on the right track. It is almost as if you can auto-correct. This is when the body knows what is good or bad for it instinctively.



The movements are part of a system of knowledge that is governed by certain principles, such as spine straight, shoulders relaxed, turning the waist, round the back, sink the qi, distinguish the solid and empty, coordinate the body like moving a string of pearls, generate whole body power and so on. These principles have evolved over thousands of years and demonstrate a deep understanding of the body, mind and spirit. They are more than just physical movements. They work on many layers from the physical to the mental, emotional and energetic and finally, the spiritual.

In order to embody the principles of the internal arts, you need to practise them. **Part of this process is becoming aware of your tension when you sit or move in daily life.** Is your spine straight when walking or sitting in front of a computer? Are your shoulders tensing up when driving or typing? Is your breathing in your belly or in the chest? How long does it take to settle your mind when practising Quiet Standing? Do you take a few moments to settle down and focus before dealing with challenging tasks? Perhaps you could visualise yourself performing the task in a calm and relaxed manner. When you lift something, try to feel the weight (whether it is too heavy for you) and adjust your body accordingly. When you eat, taste and savour your food. These are just some suggestions. I am sure you can think of many more. In the Zen Buddhist tradition, an old adage says, “When you eat, just eat and when you sleep, just sleep.” In other words, do not split your mind. In Tai Chi and the internal arts, we say “**One mind, one body.**” **No matter what you do, make sure your mind is there.**



Both Tai Chi and Wu Dao Gong internal martial arts are remarkable systems of knowledge and can transform your mind, body and spirit. However, they need your regular and mindful practice to achieve this. Many of the principles are deceptively simple. When you can feel these principles and they become part of everything you do, you will then truly be an expression of these internal arts.

– Chief Instructor Brett Wagland