

Tai Chi and Chi Kung – The Balance

Most everyone has heard of tai chi and seen its gentle flowing movements. Both Tai Chi (from Tai Chi Chuan or the Grand Ultimate Fist) and Chi Kung (Energy Work) have been aptly described as moving meditation. Both are visually appealing because of their magnetically attractive, natural flow. Watching Tai Chi movements appeals to a higher sense of harmony and equilibrium that we aspire to, often unknowingly. We'll call it balance or homeostasis. The body, mind and spirit are always attempting to achieve balance. When we act out of concert with this natural directive, we pay the price in emotional, mental and physical disorders.

We live modern lives in a manner that upsets this natural order of things. Our poor diets, lack of proper stress management, sedentary lifestyles, personal attitudes and loss of our mind/body connection all lead to energy depletion, stagnation, and obstruction, opening the doorways to various emotional and physical ailments that plague contemporary Western culture. Western physicians are recommending that their clients take Tai Chi or Chi Kung classes because of the proven benefits of both. People of all ages and physical condition can experience the positive results of continued practice.

Chi Kung and Tai Chi are essentially the same thing. They both build internal energy through the regulation of breath and coordinated physical movements, allowing for more chi energy flooding the body. It is energy work that builds and enhances the natural or chi energy that flows along specific meridians or pathways in the body.

Before one becomes physically ill, there is a chi or energy imbalance of some sort. Tai Chi and Chi Kung practice address this imbalance. How is this accomplished?

We all breathe incorrectly as soon as we awake in the morning. If you watch a baby inhale and exhale while sleeping, you'll see the abdomen rise on the in-breath and deflate on the out-breath. Adults breathe the same way while sleeping. From the moment we open our eyes, we gulp insufficient amounts of air throughout the day by chest breathing, aerating primarily the top portion of our lungs. We rarely take a full breath. As we move into society and become stressed through the process of growing up, we resort to stressful behavior particularly in how we breathe.

These ancient arts teach us to go back to a natural state and enter a meditative zone that combines proper breath with specific movements. After learning the synchronicity of the breath and physical patterns, we transcend the body and the mind to promote true healing, joy and fulfillment by attaining that meditative state. The next goal is to sustain that state in our everyday lives.

There are many different styles of these arts, too numerous to mention here. In addition, there are many ways they are taught, varying from teacher to teacher. The basics are essentially the same.

It is best to avoid videos and books as the foremost way of learning these disciplines. Find a good instructor; one who doesn't just teach the forms or movements. It's not only about gentle exercise. It's much more than that!

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