



# T'ai chí

European School of T'ai Chi Chuan: Autumn 2008 newsletter

## CHILD'S PLAY

Many adults are now benefiting from the ancient wisdom of Yoga, T'ai Chi/Chi Kung and Meditation fused with modern techniques and exercise. Now there is an ever-increasing awareness that by introducing these concepts as a fun activity to children, we not only give them a strong foundation, we help to balance our highly technological world, providing them with the best possible start in life.

The tendency of our fast-paced society is to rush children into adulthood brought about by the desire for them to succeed. This makes activities supposed to be fun, hotbeds of competition with jam-packed schedules, leaving no time for play.

Teachers and parents can often feel inadequate in the face of this social climate and its demands. So rather than drawing from an exercise system taken from a particular manmade culture, learning can be based on the laws of the natural world, including how to manage and balance our energy as well as discovering how our inner organs can affect how we think, move, feel and behave.

By understanding the nature and skills of their organs, children can be shown how to unlock their inner powers and potential. Energy that is in excess or deficient, suppressed or repressed, will always find an alternative way to express itself. If blocked or misunderstood, energy can often take the form of a negative or inappropriate action. Or if directed inwards, it may compromise the health of the body. By learning to respond and balance energy appropriately, it can be released and redirected in a more constructive and life-enhancing way.

We live in a world where information is constantly thrown at us. The child in balance with solid foundations has more awareness of

what is good and what is harmful but their reasoning power is often not mature enough to distinguish between what is best for them and what is not.

We can, however, use carefully thought-out games and scenarios in a creative way to teach these necessary life skills. Exercises can be adapted to different age groups:

- 4 - 7 yrs: using movement, feeling, imagination, pictures, rhythm and creating stories around characters.
- 7 - 9 yrs: introducing different techniques, sports, arts, dance, use of written word and modelling. This is the ideal time to start teaching discernment of what is working for and against their true nature.
- 9 - 12 yrs: discovering how to incorporate these interactive skills in both school and home life.

From 12 upwards these same principles and skills can be used at school, university, and even in the workplace as a self-empowering foundation to maximise potential, improve social interaction, enhance self-confidence and maintain health.

So much of our modern lifestyle encourages imbalance in our body/brain integration. When we look at the typical school and home environment today, many activities and qualities attributed to the left brain emerge as dominant.

With an ever-increasing number of school assignments, coupled with the rapidly escalating stream of information into homes, instead of being a place of rest, the home becomes an extension of the school room.

Children often experience pressure to keep up which encourages a stress response - a left-brain activity. Even sports and music, both right-brain activities, can pressurise children to compete and perform. Add television and computers, there's little time left for developing right brain functions such as visualization, imagination, rhyme, rhythm and creative expression, which throws left/right balance out even more.

Children and adults alike don't always get adequate exposure to nature, movement, natural light or good-quality seasonal foods. This also encourages elevated stress levels in the body which again stimulates left-brain activity, sometimes leading to addictive behaviours to compensate for the imbalance.

Games and exercises can stimulate both sides of the brain. To empower social interactive skills, we need to encourage spontaneous rather than programmed games, use rotational and spiralling movements for body/mind integration and include art, music, improvisation, creativity and breathing exercises.

## *“our life force”*

Our life force, Chi or Prana is achieved through what we inherit from our parents and then, after birth, through what we eat and drink, the air we breathe and from the environment around us.

We need to teach children that maintaining a balanced flow of Chi relies on awareness of how and where our energy is acquired, expended and then restored. We can increase or waste this vital resource through how we think, feel and behave.

Chi flows through channels called meridians to nourish our organs and systems. Mental focus, movement, stretching and breathing can unblock these channels. Specific exercises can keep the Chi flowing, release accumulated tensions, improve posture and keep illness at bay.

## *“the five elements”*

The Five Elements system provides the groundwork in which learning takes place. It helps us to explore the different qualities of Chi in nature and ourselves; how these elements are expressed in our movements, our thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Five Elements training also has a deep influence on the organic function of the body as well as on psychological states.

As our Chi ebbs and flows, it gives us a rising energy to get us up, an outward energy to send us out plus energy to draw us back to our centre and re-group. There is also an energy to help us consolidate and focus as well as energy for resting and relaxing.

The true art of living for both adults and children is to have the correct energy for the time of day, season of the year, the work we want to do and games we want to play. Understanding Five Elements gives us all an invaluable tool to help balance, integrate and communicate constructively with others.

**SUE WOODD**

Sue's BodyMind classes consist of a warm up, exercises for health, fun-themed classes, partner work and interactive games. They end with relaxation, visualization and breathing techniques.

For UK training and workshops please contact: [susan.woodd@virgin.net](mailto:susan.woodd@virgin.net)  
[www.suewoodd.com](http://www.suewoodd.com)

For Europe and Scandinavia, please contact: [tina.hedren@tele2.se](mailto:tina.hedren@tele2.se)  
[www.bodymindconcepts.se](http://www.bodymindconcepts.se)

Themed calendars for parents & children entitled “Morgan's Organs” are available via these websites. A share of the proceeds goes to the Mercy Centre in Thailand.

## STILLNESS

Poems written during a silent  
retreat at Baan Por in Thailand

The orchid opens  
On a perfect day  
The day stretches out  
With a yawn

Time moving gently by  
Surrender oneself in it  
A luxury  
To taste

Tense, itchy, eyes close.  
Open mind, open heart  
Gathering in  
Finding the position, bliss

Anxiety manifests from fear  
Fear manifests from thought  
Thought is inevitable

Dogs howling  
As Spirits descend  
A gentle breeze  
Marks the end of a day

Drinking in the day's beginning  
Mist hangs over the hills  
Jasmine scents the air

Perched emblazoning  
Its glory  
Takes flight  
With no hesitation

Sun moving gently over mountain  
Light fades into dusk  
Mountain silhouettes  
The still sky

Thirty minutes of bliss  
Sitting in the company of another  
No words to describe the beauty  
Of silent watching,  
As the sun sets

TRACEY UNDERHILL

## NEWS

Fundraising for the Mercy Centre

Links between the school and the Mercy Centre grew even stronger this year. The first steps were taken to set up a UK branch of the charity with a fantastic fundraising event in Oxford.

The next fundraiser is a musical evening on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2009 at the Jacqueline du Pre Concert Hall in Oxford. Produced by Dave Bowmer, entertainment will be provided by local musicians.

Father Joe Maier, co-founder of the charity, is also due to attend with staff from the centre. All money raised helps provide refuge for children and adults living with AIDS in the Klong Toey slums of Bangkok.

For details contact Louanne at:  
[louannerichards@yahoo.com](mailto:louannerichards@yahoo.com)

### Gathering the threads

This year our practice was enriched with retreats led by Juanolo Gutierrez and Tew Bunnag at Springhead in Dorset. Our next gathering will be 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> February 2009 at a non-residential venue in Farnham, Surrey where we hope to build on Tew's work with the 'Paramis'. The AGM will take place on the Saturday. Details to be confirmed.

## WEBSITE

The school's website is now on-line. The site, which includes details of teachers accredited by the school, upcoming retreats and a selection of articles, has been designed to compliment the simplicity and stillness of our practice.

[www.metta-taichi.org.uk](http://www.metta-taichi.org.uk)

## RETREATS IN 2009

**Farnham, Surrey:** *Gathering the threads & AGM*  
7&8 February

**Springhead, Dorset:** *T'ai Chi, Chi Kung & meditation*  
5-7 June & 9-11 October

**Girona, Spain:** *T'ai Chi & push hands with Juanolo*  
16-18 January; 20-22 March; 30 April-3 May & 26-28 June

**Wolvercote Village Hall, Oxford:** *Sabre Form with Louanne Richards*  
Sunday 17 May 10:00-17:00

**Lesbos:** *T'ai Chi & Calligraphy with Louanne Richards & Jos Hadfield*  
Week retreat late August/early September

**Casa Lucia, Corfu:** *Tai chi, QiGong & Sword Form with Caroline Merry & Val Androutsopoulos*  
24-31 August

**Rural Wales:** *Pulsation massage, Chinese Calligraphy & Mandarin Chinese with Glyn Jones*  
On request

## ESTCC CLASSES

Sodge Adams – Hampstead

Louanne Richards – Oxford

Jos Hadfield – Farnham

Chris Sadler – Inverness

Saskia Handley – Corfu

Richard Siviak – York

Georgina MacLaurin –  
Isle of Man

Kamal Thapen – Balham

Sue McAlpine – Islington

Tracey Underhill – Sway, New Forest

Caroline Merry – Oxford

Sue Webber – Egham

Jane Muir – Tooting

Julia Webster – Farnham

Valerie Osborne – Corfu

Sue Woodd – Farnham & London