



Beginning Your Tai Chi Training
Basic Information and Guidelines

WELCOME

It is with pleasure that we welcome you to the Golden Flower Tai Chi™ School. We hope you will experience not only the health benefits of Tai Chi, but also the support of the staff and instructors.

Our purpose is to make the deep knowledge passed down as the art of Tai Chi available to all of you who sincerely seek radiant health and natural wisdom. Founder, Master San Gee Tam, and Senior Instructor Annukka Holland, work to structure the school and classes to reach as many people as possible and to provide assistance and guidance as you begin your study and practice.

ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The Golden Flower Tai Chi™ School and International Association were established by Master San Gee Tam in 1980. The school was founded on the highest level of traditional Tai Chi and Taoist teachings. Master San Gee Tam trained over 30 years to acquire the knowledge and resources embodied by the school and he has personally trained and certified over 300 instructors worldwide.

Currently, there are more than 40 active Golden Flower instructors worldwide, teaching in nine countries. All Golden Flower instructors stay up-to-date with regular training from Master San Gee Tam and senior instructors with yearly evaluations and re-commissioning.

The Golden Flower School maintains the latest training in effective and enlightening business and interpersonal practices in order to manage the school in the best possible manner.

GETTING STARTED

Initially, it is essential to learn the basic principles and stances so this is the focus of the 10-week Foundation course. After that, students move into a regular beginner class where you begin to learn the movements of the Golden Flower form. It takes most people six months to a year to learn all the movements of the entire form.

Although the teaching has been adapted to accommodate some Western expectations, it is important to keep in mind that Tai Chi is an Eastern technique that requires patience and practice.

Your Tai Chi practice and development is ultimately your own responsibility. Most students begin to see results almost immediately but to get the full benefit of Tai Chi you must be consistent in attending class and consistent in your own practice.

Tai Chi is a continual process of learning and understanding. It is of no use to be in a hurry.

CLASS GUIDELINES

Wear lightweight, non-binding, comfortable clothing and flat shoes. Remove any restricting belts, watches, or jewelry that might interfere with your practice.

Tai Chi is a practice which involves awareness, so try to be aware of the following things:

- Attend class regularly. Tai Chi is progressive, not merely repetition, so it is important to be in class regularly so you can progress with the other students. Your presence or absence makes a difference to the quality and energy of the group so please call if you cannot attend class.
- Be a few minutes early to prepare yourself. Arriving before class begins gives you a chance to start “changing gears” and thereby receive the maximum benefits of the class time.
- Inform your teacher if you have any injury or illness that may interfere with practice. He or she may be able to give you specific guidance to help the healing process and prevent further injury.
- Pay attention and focus in class. As a student, you can be taught only what you are willing to learn. So it is helpful to keep an open and empty mind.
- Respect your teacher. It is important to comprehend the relationship between teacher and student. As expressed in the book, *Tai Chi Single Fan*, by Master Helen Wu and Master Wen-Ching Wu,

“Many years ago, the late Grandmaster Wang, Zi-Ping, told Helen Wu, ‘Teachers are like the tall mountain. Students are like the ocean. Knowledge is like the waterfall on the high mountain. The water falls and travels down to the ocean because the ocean is at a lower elevation than the mountain. All things in the world must follow this natural pattern. If the ocean is at a higher elevation than the mountain, the water from the mountain will not flow into the ocean.’ It is imperative that students are humble and diligent in their training, so that teachers can fully share all that they can to their students.

“...When students have a proper learning ethic, it will show in their actions. The students will respect the teacher, the teaching, themselves and other students. The learning process will then be a pleasant one. The result is a more beneficial physical and internal achievement for the student.”

- Develop at your own pace. Comparing yourself to others is un- helpful and counter-productive.
- If you have any problem related to Tai Chi, such as concerns about your progress in class, or problems with your ability to attend class, please communicate this to your instructor.

WHY IS THERE A MEMBERSHIP FEE?

The membership fee contributes to the general administration expenses of our school. The membership fee also supports your commitment—to yourself, your well-being, and your Tai Chi practice. It serves as a statement of intent from yourself that you consciously choose a practice that will benefit your health and well-being.

Our school is your school. In joining the school you become a member of an extended family made up of students regularly attending classes in England, Holland, Belgium, the United States and even Russia!

INTRODUCTION TO TAI CHI CHUAN AND CHI KUNG

TAI CHI CHUAN

Daily practice and development requirements

The benefits

The benefits of Tai Chi are unique and many. First of all is to have more energy, as everything you do in your life is dependent on having the energy to do it. Notice that most problems are really problems only when you don't have the energy to deal with them.

When your vitality is high, you tend to view problems as exciting challenges. Having good energy means having good health and a good disposition (Happy Chi).

Observing your progress

Although there is no actual grading system in Tai Chi as in other martial arts – for instance, the colored belt grading system in Karate – the Golden Flower training is organized into stages so that you can set clear goals and know what you have accomplished. A principle in the traditional teaching of Tai Chi Chuan is that the student is not to be shown or concerned with the next step until the step he/she is working on is mastered. Bear this in mind when you find yourself in a hurry to progress.

Levels of Tai Chi study

Tai Chi is an extremely versatile practice allowing people to benefit even when their interest is just to be able to do the form for their health. The average student at this level can learn what they need to know to practice well, for their health and relaxation, in about a year. The student with a deeper interest may continue to study Tai Chi Chuan as a hobby indefinitely. The true adept, aspiring to master Tai Chi Chuan must be committed to a lifetime of intense study, inquiry and meditation. For this level of attainment, it is essential to study privately with a master as well as class study.

What is your level of commitment?

The basic reason for anyone to study Tai Chi should be that they enjoy it. Although you must learn from qualified teachers, how you practice and develop Tai Chi is ultimately your own responsibility. Remember that it is most important to relax, enjoy, and learn to listen to your body. There is always more to discover about working creatively with your own energies. While it is not appropriate for everyone to be a great master of Tai Chi, with an initial investment of time, everyone can learn to do Tai Chi masterfully for his or her purposes. You simply need to be clear on how much commitment you are willing to make. Then practice appropriately to your current level of interest. It is a common mistake for people to imagine that they have a great commitment to something only to find that they give up when they are called upon to do the work necessary to that commitment. Proceed slowly to give your interest and appreciation

time to develop naturally. For most people it will take several years of practice to understand that Tai Chi is for them. Often, a deeper commitment to Tai Chi is then realized.

Develop at your own pace

When you come to class you learn what to practice. However, the real learning of Tai Chi happens on your own, in your daily practice. Consistent daily practice over a long period of time is what will yield satisfying results. It is of no use to be in a hurry. Chi develops at a certain rate and no faster, no matter how much or how hard you practice. Also the body has very fixed limits to how quickly it grows and adapts. Simply be thorough in your practice and don't overdo it. Find out what works best for you. This is the way for optimum results.

Learn to enjoy your practice

For the first few months, it is enough to practice ten minutes of Chi Kung and whatever you know of the Golden Flower form. If you have more time and feel the inclination, practice other exercises that you may be learning such as the Taoist relaxation exercises (Golden Flower Warm up exercises, shaking & breathing) or sitting meditation. In this way you will learn to enjoy your practice.

Four basic levels

There are natural plateaus or levels by which we can determine our accomplishment. Simply, there are total beginners; advanced beginners who know many techniques and principles, but whose chi doesn't yet work; advanced students whose chi does work; and finally, one who has mastered and can demonstrate all the principles of Tai Chi Chuan. Most people will complete the first beginner level in six months to a year.

Final note about practice

To make a commitment to practice daily, however briefly, will steadily yield results. And to come to class, no matter what, is a very powerful tool to develop your inner strength, stability and integrity. Even when you feel ill, it may be better for you to come to class. If you are too ill to practice, then you meditatively watch the class. The chi that is generated by the class is one of the best healing medicines. By exercising such commitment and persistence you can begin to experience that your inner being is stronger than any external circumstance, while creating a basis for truly great accomplishment in any endeavor.

WHAT IS CHI KUNG?

Chi Kung for Internal Energy Development

Of all the exercises related to the practice of Tai Chi Chuan, the most basic and possibly most difficult is “Chi Kung.” The science of Chi Kung has come through thousands of years of development in Chinese Taoist natural studies, medicine, meditation and martial arts. “Chi Kung” means internal energy work and is the foundational “grounding” process for Tai Chi. “Grounding” refers to the process of relaxing tensions that disconnect the body, such as chronic tension lifting one’s shoulder around one’s ears. When relaxed, all the limbs can reconnect and function as extensions of the torso. The body can then move in unity directed from the gravitation point of the body, which is located in the lower belly about three finger widths below the navel. This center is referred to as the “tantien” in Chinese or the “hara” in Japanese, and is the central point from which the body can store and issue energy. The initial purpose of Chi Kung is to generate and store increasing levels of internal energy in the body.

Discover and cultivate your natural power

The purpose of this article is to generally inform you about Chi Kung and encourage you to use the practice of Chi Kung to develop to your fullest potential. With Chi Kung, the best results are attained steadily, day-by-day, over the years. There are no short cuts to natural growth; however, there is also no need to be in a hurry. With Chi Kung you can discover real power by standing on your own feet and burning through the distractions related to living in the world and having a body, emotions and a mind. Chi Kung is action through non-action; it generates power without effort and creates space in your-self for Life to be.

Your body is an energy transformer

The science of Chi Kung – as a result of thousands of years of concerted natural studies of man in his environment – arrived at the understanding of the body as an energy transformer/generator. Gross earth energies such as food, water and air and subtle energies such as light, bioelectrical fields, planetary and cosmic influences are transformed internally by the body into human thought, energy, form and actions. The more subtle energies of the body flow along channels similar to the pathways of the nervous system and the blood as demonstrated by the science of acupuncture. To have these channels for one’s energies open and clear is essential to the functioning of the mind and body. When this flow is interfered with, one becomes increasingly more ill. And when one’s energy is “flowing,” one can feel a streaming sensation throughout the body accompanied by a certain lucid quality of mind. Whether chi actually exists will be dealt with in another discussion. Chi Kung is a study and cultivation of the inherent natural power of the energy structure that allows you to exist in a body.

Immediate results

For the beginner to intermediate student, the results will be seen in a relatively short time as: increased energy; feeling physically balanced with an increasing sense of strength and stamina; more happy, stable and self-confident; and noticeably more clear-minded. One's resistance to disease, environmental stress and foul weather conditions will begin to improve. Years of body tensions will gradually "melt" as Chi Kung softens one's energies. Chi kung practice is also an excellent method for relieving the tensions and stress that accumulate from participating in sports and other physical disciplines. Generally, one's performance in almost any sport or physical activity improves remarkably.

Healthy persons of any age can practice Chi Kung

Any normally healthy person of any age can take up the practice of Chi Kung. However, if you are in a state of questionable physical or mental health you must discuss this with the instructor. While Chi Kung can speed recovery from many diseases it can possibly aggravate certain other conditions. Chi Kung is especially good for older people and may restore them to a state of relative youthfulness. For pregnant women, Chi Kung can make the birth easier while making both mother and baby healthier. Once again, be sure to bring any questionable situation to the attention of your instructor. Occupationally, the vitalizing practice of Chi Kung is particularly appropriate for all athletes, martial artists, dancers, massage/body workers, singers, performers of all types, sedentary workers, body builders, students, anyone who works with people or anyone who requires extraordinary energy and recuperative powers.

Many forms of Chi Kung

To beginners we teach the most simple, static form: standing in a fixed position, knees bent, arms raised in front for a period of ten minutes or more. There are, however, many different schools and styles of Chi Kung, utilizing a variety of forms, both, static and moving, standing or sitting and even lying down. The addition of coordinated breath disciplines, visualizations and various processes with the mind/attention may also be integrated into the method.

Martial Arts "Secret"

Almost every martial art uses some form of Chi Kung practice—which they usually treat as one of their "secrets." The practice of Chi Kung is quite a diverse and complicated affair and, without expert instruction, can have unhealthy or even damaging effects. Any method for altering or increasing the vital energy can be dangerous if incorrectly practiced or abused in a desire for quick results. To safely effect change in the body is a slow process and must proceed at the rate your body grows and repairs itself. The simple, static positions that we teach allow the body to develop in harmony with natural growth and gives safe, reliable and yet very powerful results.

Based on natural principles

General principles for Chi Kung are: alignment with gravity; unobstructed chi flow (not blocking or wasting energy); persistence; allowing the chi to sink (grounding); relaxation; internalizing external energies; internal expansion; balancing internal energies; self-integration; and awareness (centering). There must be no unnatural effort involved, such as forced breathing, awkward positioning, or tensing the body. Any practice that puts unnatural pressures on the mind or body produces distorted and unhealthy results. For example, forcing or holding the breath can cause many internal problems such as hemorrhoids, internal bleeding, headaches and a variety of mental/emotional disturbances. Uncorrected standing in misaligned positions over a period of time can produce organic dysfunction, nerve problems, muscle tension, joint degeneration, energy congestion and many other unhealthy manifestations. Since serious effects usually occur when an incorrect practice is repeated over a period of time, the beginning student's imperfect form is not a cause for concern, as the instructor will make the necessary corrections in due course.

Expert teaching is essential

To progress satisfactorily with one's chi development, two conditions must be fulfilled: First, one must have the guidance of a competent, fully trained instructor who has mastered the positions. The instructor will observe the student's development over time and "mould" the student's position and gradually adapt it to be in alignment with the forces of gravity. To guide one's own development is practically impossible since you don't have any experience of what you are trying to achieve or what the correct position is supposed to feel like inside the body. Although one observes many beneficial effects from chi kung at the beginning, to achieve a basic integration of the body takes seven to ten years of consistent daily practice. One slowly understands as each particular section of the body, at its correct time, "sinks" into place: the chi sinks to the tantien, the shoulder girdle loosens, the pelvis and the joints open, the spine straightens, the breath begins to circulate freely to the extremities. The body becomes whole and begins to move as a unity, internally powered by the breath. There is no way to speed up this process without causing harm to the body. This brings us to the second point.

Results according to what you actually do.

The second condition is that one must make the commitment to practice, and then follow through on that commitment. In the beginning, chi kung practice may be experienced as having to stand still and trying to relax, in what seems like a painful position, for eternally long minutes. With a little persistence, however, this ordeal is soon replaced by a much more acceptable and even enjoyable experience. Also, the idea of practicing anything daily for the "rest of our lives" is received with something less than enthusiasm by most of us. Having this attitude will certainly make the practice seem more difficult at first. Despite these initial resistances, standing in chi kung quickly becomes a revitalizing, and enjoyable "healthy habit" that one begins to anticipate with pleasure. Commitment then comes naturally, and one begins to observe steady development of one's body and energy as well as some very practical results

in one's daily life. The direct connection between commitment and results becomes very obvious.

"Difficulty" in the beginning

The most difficult aspect of chi kung practice to master is the reaction of the mind. The beginning postures in chi kung require the student to be silent, that is, to stand still, neither talking nor moving and as much as possible, to even stop thinking. For many people, this will initially be uncomfortable and difficult to maintain. Normally, after a few moments, our minds are already chattering away, busily planning what to do next while watching the clock to see, "How much longer do I have to stand here?" and thinking of every excuse to stop and do something different!

Also related to the mind, fundamental to the practice, and somewhat difficult for the student to master is the principle of relaxation. Energy cannot flow well through tensed muscle since the energy is used up to maintain the tension. While standing and holding the correct position, one will unavoidably learn to relax; otherwise, it will be too difficult to remain in the same position for very long. Relaxation, correct form, stillness and circulation are essential principles of chi kung. Here, the body follows the mind. If the mind is relaxed then the body can also relax. The mind may also exaggerate one's feeling/perception, sometimes creating a very real illusion of pain which is little more than feeling unconscious body tensions challenged by continued standing in a static position. This is "illusory" pain because it is the result of the mind's conversation rather than any actual stress to the body. Beginners may also be distressed by their legs starting to shake uncontrollably. This is normal and will soon pass as the deeper tensions in the legs dissipate.

Distinguishing between real and 'mind' pain

Unfortunately, there is not much consolation in knowing that pain is an illusion when it is there. And it is impossible to avoid all pain when practicing chi kung or any other exercise for that matter. However, one can well use this pain as an indicator to find and correct the errors of one's posture. The knack is to carefully examine the painful sensation to find out exactly where it is located in the body and how it is being produced. One will almost always find that the pain is a result of holding muscular tensions and misaligned posture. By consciously relaxing that body part and realigning the posture one will usually disperse the discomfort. If at any time the pain becomes extreme, one should relax from the posture and gently shake and loosen the body for a moment before continuing. If the pain persists one should not continue the position at that time. To distinguish between mind-produced pain, or pain caused by the mind wanting the body to move, and real pain being produced from traumatic circumstances is usually easy. However, if you are unsure, then consult with your instructor. The correct way to treat any real pain is to stop the practice until the source of pain can be discovered and healed. It is counterproductive to force or overdo your practice. "More" and "harder" is not better. Relax and learn to enjoy chi kung. Always remember, when in doubt about correct practice, consult your instructor.

Purges disease

As one progresses, during a particular stage of development, one will experience the purging of stagnant energies and latent disease states. The symptoms accompanying eliminative processes may frighten someone who does not realize that the effect is beneficial. These symptoms are only temporary and are followed by a greater state of health. Some of the things one might experience are increased sensitivity to all sensory impressions; general body pain; headaches; flu-like depressions; diarrhea; sweating; nausea; etc. Actually, the cause is not chi kung; it is the practitioner's state of disease and tension which is being circulated out of the body and mind by improved energy flow. The healthier one is, the less of these effects will occur. If you find yourself in this situation, seek the advice of your instructor. There are many natural treatments such as acupuncture, cleansing dietary disciplines and nutritional supplementation that can support this healing process and minimize discomfort. Moreover, it is certainly far better to suffer the discomfort of the elimination than having it surface later in life as active disease.

Balances emotions

As the body comes more into harmony, the emotions also become more balanced. At first, this process may manifest as a flood of exaggerated moods and thoughts. One may suddenly feel like weeping or perhaps become explosively angry. These experiences also last only for a short time and are part of a temporary phase one passes through. As with the eliminations of the body, these emotional states are not caused by chi kung but are the release of the individual's suppressed energies. If this sort of experience were to continue or seem too extreme, one should not hesitate to discuss it with the instructor. Chi kung will help one become more naturally positive and less dominated by negative emotional states in general.

Clears the mind

Along with the purge of emotions will come the thoughts in the back of one's mind that one has been trying to avoid. This is a necessary clearing of the mind and the content should not be taken seriously or allowed to distract one. Simply watch these thoughts as they come and go. Once again it is important to remember that all these phenomena, when they occur, are the effects of energy release, the effects of one's body and mind clearing out years of accumulated debris.

Positive benefits increase over the years

Now let's look at the positive benefits which can be expected from chi kung practice. Over the years, as one practices chi kung, the benefits steadily increase. The more highly developed practitioners often display seemingly super-human powers of strength and endurance. And all practitioners, over a period of time, possess patience and calmness; a relaxed state of body and mind; simplicity of mind and action; excellent health and vitality; greater resistance to stress and disease; youthfulness and resistance to aging; an enhanced ability to learn; balance in eating, sleeping and other natural functions; the ability to easily fall asleep and sleep deeply; the ability to stay awake and concentrate; a natural sense of balance in all activities; more

energy in general and less pain; much greater endurance for work and play; a naturally meditative state of mind; clearer thinking; more power as an individual; a natural sense of self-preservation; greater sensitivity and clearer senses; revitalized sexual energy; an emotionally positive outlook; a pleasant disposition; natural psychological balance; and concentration in mind and spirit

Practice in the morning and evening

The best times to practice chi kung are in the morning soon after arising. Take a few minutes to wake up, stretch, maybe have a cup of tea, then practice. You will find that this improves the quality of your whole day. And, in the evening after the day's main activities, chi kung will revitalize you to a state of feeling even better than you felt when you got out of bed, so that you complete the day with a feeling of great peacefulness and fulfillment.

Good luck in your practice. May you find the treasure. And if I may be of assistance, please don't hesitate to call on me.

Your friend,

Master San Gee Tam