

LIVING A T'AI CHI INFUSED LIFE

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How does T'ai Chi impact your day-to-day life?

It's a topic that comes up at Water Tiger during face-to-face reviews and in the monthly *Review Touching Base* missives, on the mat, and — when someone actually posts something — in the *VirtualKwoon*, Water Tiger's private community board online. Sometimes the discussion is about not having an answer, sometimes the discussion is about health benefits, sometimes the discussion is about the practice, and sometimes the discussion is about attitude shifts.

When we address whether or not we are living a T'ai Chi infused life, it's really "attitude shifts" that we need to consider. To help us understand how it is not the others, I'd like to attend to them first.

Not Having an Answer

I might suggest that everyone should be able to develop some sort of answer. I might not like, "T'ai Chi doesn't have an impact on my daily life. I come to class. I go home. Nothing has really changed." But, if it's an honest assessment of where you perceive you are on your journey, such is all that I can ask. My guess, however, is that T'ai Chi has actually leaked into your life and you haven't noticed. It might be such a small thing as coming to class is no longer simply that thing that you do on Thursday night. Someone recently told me that the knowledge that they'd be practicing later on a very tough day helped them to let go of the stress they were feeling. If you've been on the mat for a bit, I'd ask you to consider your before and your after. If I were a gambling man, I'd wager that there is a difference; and that the difference is a positive one. Is it possible to be unaware you are living a T'ai Chi infused life? Well, I've seen it happen; so, *Not Having an Answer* may actually not be any different than our topic at hand.

The Health Benefits

The list of health benefits that are possible with the practice of T'ai Chi is both long and varied. People that have joined the programs of Water Tiger School have supported many of the health claims that we read about in various publications and hear about on news. As we might consider whether or not these possibilities have become realities for each of us, we need to remember what I always say when we discuss such, "Mileage may vary." Folks have improved their balance, strengthened their lower bodies, increased their flexibility, lessened their pain, deepened their breath, fortified their immune system, developed their physical awareness, reined in their strong emotions, calmed their mind, etc. All of these things are quite wonderful. They are, however, the result of practicing T'ai Chi and can very well be a benefit from living a T'ai Chi infused life, but a result and a benefit do not a lifestyle make.

The Practice

Many folks in Water Tiger's different programs will readily admit in conversation that they do not practice as much as they believe they should. Others may have the tendency to draw stares at Pathmark as they play the *T'ai Chi Walk* while pushing their cart down the aisle. There is no argument that practice is how we deepen our understanding of the art of T'ai Chi. It is even through practice that we may first bring a taste of T'ai Chi into our daily lives. But, as with the health benefits, practice is practice and living is living.

The T'ai Chi Infused Life

Perhaps the best way to explain what it means to live a T'ai Chi infused life is to retell the story of the moment T'ai Chi first became more than an exercise — more than something to put on a resume — for me. It was when I was still in my initial studies at Black Dragon School. We were in the studio and Mesmer Sifu assigned a senior student to work with me on the martial application of the posture *Parting the Wild Horse's Mane*. I resisted, but the lesson unfolded anyway. As I was deflecting the student's punch down and away and striking up through the opening the deflection



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(Art by David C. Chen)

created, my perspective began to change from redirecting a punch to redirecting energy to redirecting a problem. Until that moment in my life, problems were always something to meet head-on and muscle through. That first inkling remains one of the most profound moments on my 20-year journey with T'ai Chi Ch'uan.

Like the health benefits of T'ai Chi, the list of how the art may steep into your life is as broad as it is deep. The next are just three examples.

A student recently shared in a *Review Touching Base* exchange that he has found himself turning to his lessons when dealing with contention in the office. I often describe the art of T'ai Chi Ch'uan as being the physical manifestation of proactive behavior. While the standard Western approach is to meet force with force reactively, T'ai Chi can open the door to understanding the benefits of power through deflection and redirection. Bringing the physical lessons of T'ai Chi into our personal and professional interactions is living a T'ai Chi infused life.

Regarding this topic, Mary Walsh recently shared on the *VirtualKwoon*, "Even though I don't view myself as a better person than I was a couple years back, people within my family... [say] that I am more responsible." As our understanding of T'ai Chi deepens, our own sense of responsibility can be deepened. We practice more because we recognize the benefit. We are more timely, because we appreciate that being late is stressful and demonstrates a lack of respect. Embracing the idea that our actions have meaning and repercussions is living a T'ai Chi infused life.

"A few years ago," Si-Suk Joel Valerio admitted the other day, "I never thought I'd be in a place to be able to defuse or deal with a situation." His placement of resolving a conflict non-martially before martially — having the ability to fight, but choosing not to — demonstrates one who lives a T'ai Chi infused life.

Are you living a T'ai Chi infused life?

