

Tai Chi



by Wesley Adams

Principles For Everyday Life

Tai Chi: *A traditional Chinese mind-body balancing, meditative exercise practiced in forms that consist of 108 intricate exercise sequences performed in a slow, relaxed manner over a 30-minute period. Tai Chi has martial arts origins and more specific requirements to proper practice than does Qigong, requiring more training and refinement.*

Are you ready for a change that will transform your life? If your answer is an emphatic “yes!” then I’m going to go out on a limb and say that you probably need to change the way you think about change.

Simply put, how you think about change may be holding you back from achieving the changes you would like to make in your life. For most of us, the new year signifies a rebirth, a new beginning, a fresh start, a tipping point at which we push aside negative thoughts, overcome self-defeating habits, shed weight, tone up, or finally get around to a dozen other critical “must-do” activities waiting for us on a plate that is already full. Before you start making that list of New Year’s resolutions, you should have a better understanding of the nature of lasting change. The following story illustrates two distinctly different ways of creating change, both ending in the same enduring transformation.

A Tai Chi Fable: The Nature of Change

A Tai Chi master wished to choose one of his students to assist him in teaching at his school, but was having difficulty choosing between his two top students. To help with the decision, the master devised a test for the pair.

Each student was given a wooded lot on some land the master owned, and asked to create the perfect environment in which to teach the beautiful art of Tai Chi. He gave them 12 months to complete the project, and asked that all physical labor be accomplished without help from others, because he wanted to discover what each of them knew about the nature of change. At the end of the year, the master would choose one of the two locations as his new training site, and the student whose site he chose would become his assistant.

The first student spent six months studying landscape designs and reading horticultural guides to aide him in planning an elaborate transformation for his

lot. The next five months were spent clearing, leveling and staking out the land using the latest excavating equipment. It was only during the last few weeks that the student actually implemented the plan he’d designed.

Meanwhile, the second student hardly seemed to be working at all. He would appear each day with pruning shears, a spade and a small wicker basket. When he arrived, he would first stand within the space in quiet meditation. Then he would practice one of the many Tai Chi or Chi Kung forms he had learned, pausing only long enough to snip a wayward branch, to pluck a weed, to admire a flower, to note the position of a tree, or to reposition a loose rock underfoot.

At the end of the year, the master visited the first student’s lot. He practiced in an expansive clearing surrounded by exotic flowers and shrubs, but since the lot had been cleared, there were few trees. The ones that were left were too small to provide shade, and the sun beating down was very hot. The ground was perfectly level and well suited for martial arts practice of all kinds, but without vegetation, the clay soil turned into a sticky bog when it rained and the master had to stop his exercise.

The next day, the master visited the second student’s site. At first glance, it appeared almost unchanged except for several stands of trees that had been strategically trimmed to create an expansive canopy of overlapping boughs high overhead. When it rained, interlocking branches, thick with leaves, sheltered the ground below, keeping it dry. A path, covered by bark fragments and leaves, meandered around the perimeter of the clearing, creating a naturally mulched walkway with the earth firmly packed by the student’s many steps as he carefully moved along the path each day.

The master, who’d waited these many months, at last had an assistant. He sat on a soft pile of leaves, listened to the birds and smiled.

Each student must learn to “admire the flowers as they pluck a few weeds.”

To the untrained eye, the practice of Tai Chi appears to be effortless. It begins and ends in a relaxed upright posture as one movement flows seamlessly into the next throughout the exercise.

Ask students what drew them to Tai Chi, and whether it was to learn the movements, to improve their health, or to study the martial side of the art initially, most will say it had something to do with Tai Chi’s beauty and simplicity. Ask them if it is as easy as it seems, and everyone will let you know that mastery requires dedication, practice, practice and more practice.

As a Tai Chi instructor, it is my job to help beginning students, who are usually in a hurry to “clear their lot” and swiftly transform into a refined Tai Chi practitioner, to change their mindset and refocus their goals. Each student must learn to “admire the flowers as they pluck a few weeds.” This is the principle of incremental change.

Most of us already use this principle without thinking about it. We use it while driving, by making small adjustments or “corrections” to keep the vehicle headed in the right direction, positioned correctly on the road, to change directions, or to stop. Beginning drivers work hard at mastering basic skills, but over time the adjustments necessary to be a good driver become more instinctive and one has to think about them. The same is true with Tai Chi, since it’s impossible for students to learn all aspects of Tai Chi at once, as is true of most things in life.

When people think of Tai Chi, what usually comes to mind is the sequence of movements known as the Tai Chi form. The form is but a single aspect of Tai Chi, and is accompanied by things like posture, breathing, focus, pacing and synchronization. As we move, we must maintain correct posture, coordinate the movements of arms and legs, shift our weight, step appropriately, and turn or steer the body using our core. Tai Chi is not only physical, however, and total synchronization includes both the body and the mind. During Tai Chi practice, we recall the sequence of postures from memory while imbuing the transition between each one with a sense of grace and lightness. We must also allow the breath to flow freely as we train the mind to remain clear and stay quietly focused on present activity rather than to drift toward thoughts of the past, the future or “spacing out” to nothing at all.

You have experienced a lack of focus if you have ever left work after a tiring day to find yourself sitting at a stoplight near your house only to realize you don’t remember much about the drive home, or you set out to a store located on a familiar route—perhaps the same one you take to work each day—and you end up at your job rather than the store. This is that feeling of being on “autopilot” as you move through the day, the opposite of being in the moment. Mindfulness, or being consciously present, helps us restructure our bodies and refocus our minds. Applying this principle as we make gradual changes, and then practicing those changes, allows them to become an organic part of who we are and how we move so that we no longer have to think about every aspect of Tai Chi practice.

So the question remains: Are you ready for a change? If you’re facing some of the same issues you’ve had in the past at the beginning of this New Year, don’t give up. Try using the principle of incremental change to transform your life!

Action Principle: *All change is a process. Lasting change is a gradual and continuous one.*

Affirmation: *This month I will be kind to myself and patient with my progress as I realize that many small changes along the way can get me to my goal.*

Wesley Adams owns and operates Columbia Tai Chi Center, located at 2910 Rosewood Dr. in Columbia. For more info, contact Wesley at ColumbiaTaiChiCenter@yahoo.com or visit ColumbiaTaiChiCenter.com. See ad page 4.



Why waste another year?
Start your new life today.

CALL NOW 30% off individual coaching sessions.

My mission is to support you in redirecting your life and moving forward. Check out my new FREE online workshops and newsletter.

Lisabeth Saunders
Medlock, PhD
803/960-1844
LifeByDesignCoaching.org





Redesign, Revitalize and Redirect your life

Your ad here could be as low as \$75 per month and reach 25,000+ readers.



Curious? Call 803-233-3693

Heartfelt Health Education



Master of Reiki, Muscle Testing and Forgiveness
Chopra Center Certified Yoga, Meditation & Ayurveda Instructor
Integrative Bodywork & Intuitive Healing

Joy Lee Connor, LMT sc #1229

Celebration Center
3830 Rosewood Drive
803-782-5539