

# Natural Step School - Newsletter 22.1

Tai Chi, why do we start and why do we stop?

As a Tai Chi teacher I am naturally curious as to why people start Tai Chi and just as curious as to what it is that makes people stop Tai Chi once they have started. There are many reasons why people start. These are most often related to health issues or there is a calling from the quiet inner voice for inner peace, balance & harmony in life ; a yearning for something more. We have at some time all shared that inner feeling that says, 'there must be more to life than this', & there is, but we become so separated from life that these quiet inner, more 'intimate callings' get overlooked. We end up just running on our survival instincts from day to day to day & fail to appreciate the mystery and magic that surrounds us & is us. Reflecting on his life Stephen Hawking replied, "*who could wish for anything more*".

In the years I have been teaching I have never heard an invalid reason for starting Tai Chi. You may have heard me describe Tai Chi as a diamond with many many faces. Each face represents an individual invitation to whoever chooses to stand in front of it. Touch its surface, accept its invitation & be guided by the energy of its wisdom. My sense is that its the energy of many Tai Chi lineages created over years & years & years of Tai Chi players & masters that continues to create this energetic diamond. Meditate on a diamond or any 'thing', let go of all your perceptual ideas about it and you'll discover that the truth of it abides in absolute stillness & complete mystery. The journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step. The journey of a 'true spiritual practice' starts with a step that will orientate us towards absolute stillness & complete mystery.

All the benefits of Tai Chi for mind, body & spirit are related to what we were searching for when we started. Something healthy & wholesome attracted us to Tai Chi, so why stop?

Occasionally it is for health reasons arising from existing conditions that prevail, like a bad knee that would mean the practice would be painful & there is no soft limit found in continuing. There is the 'practice issue'. I can't find the time, I can't find the room or I'm not good at this. This is an issue created in the mind. Yes naturally practice will be challenging at times & its easy to fall back on the resistance arising in the mind as an excuse. Then of course Tai Chi isn't everybody's cup of Tea, but there are times when we just don't give ourselves wholeheartedly to something new & so we lose out

before ever really getting going.

Inevitably the reasons for stopping arise either in the body or in the mind.

When its the body it makes sense to stop, when its the mind do we look carefully enough before acting on 'mind speak'?

The path of Tai Chi is an inward journey, we are not concerned with the outside appearance. When we begin to turn inwards & inevitably towards stillness what are we going to find, see, notice?, what is going to be in our face perhaps more than ever before? - its going to be the content of our minds.

As we become more comfortable moving below the speed of habit a space starts to open up between consciousness & that which consciousness is conscious of. So the content of mind can begin to show up as a pretty random, uncontrollable nuisance. That's not to say it can be incredibly helpful of course but often, unless it gets your undivided attention it can become more of a distraction than a handy friend.

The mind doesn't 'do' stillness very well at all, it does busy. Thoughts, ideas, beliefs, feelings, judgements, likes, dislikes, drama & so on all pass through it without any control. We can't control the next thought, it just comes, if we did have control we would presumably only have good happy thoughts or no thoughts at all. And for some reason we are conditioned to actually believe the thoughts in our head are true. How often do we actual ask, 'is there any truth in that thought'. Yet the reality is they are just thoughts which arise & go, sometimes quickly, sometimes too slowly for comfort & sometimes they just lead to more thinking.

Unfortunately we often decide to 'stop' Tai Chi because of a thought in our mind which we don't question. We don't realize that to stand in front of that thought & question its validity is related to the process we engaged with when we started Tai Chi. This is the true nature of the inward journey revealing itself. The moment when we are about to 'give up' is actually the moment when we probably need Tai Chi the most & yes patience & persistence are needed

Are we worth the time it takes to care for ourselves & evolve. Is it worth stepping back to question the content of the mind & the world we perceive to allow the chance of reality to touch us? These are significant personal questions.

My thought was to reassure and reveal how the practice of Tai Chi may unfold in your system. Meditation, be it moving or sitting present challenges because they both will inevitably bring us up close & personal to our 'mind speak' & this is not always what we are comfortable with or hoping for. We come to Nirvana by way of Samsara.

*'The mind makes a good servant but a poor master'*  
with love

Colin