

What is Taiji?

Taiji is an internal style of Chinese martial art, stressing the principles of relaxation and yielding both in application and in daily life. Taijiquan training develops inner strength and harmony through the co-ordination and relaxation of Mind and body. Externally, Taiji is the art of movement for health and self defence. Internally, Taiji is Raja Yoga, the science of Mind and internal energy.

Taijiquan is said to have been created over 700 years ago by the Daoist sage Zhang Sanfeng, as a practical method for attaining immortality or enlightenment through the cultivation of internal energy (Qi). Its principles were formulated 2,500 years ago by Lao Tzu, the founder of Daoism, in his book *Dao De Jing* and expressed a thousand years before that, in the book of the *I Jing*. There exists a small but concise set of writings known as the *Taiji Classics*. In these are preserved a complete outline of the ideas behind the Taiji method. Daoism provides the philosophy while Taiji provides a practical method for putting these Daoist principles into practice.

Taiji has evolved into a set of soft, slow, gentle movements co-ordinated with the concentration of the Mind and the breath. Initial practice in Taiji consists of learning to relax the body and quieten the Mind. All movements are circular — on reaching one extreme they return without stopping. This is achieved by using the will, not muscular strength. Consciousness produces the will, which moves the Qi. When the Qi moves, the joints extend like blowing into a rubber tube. So the Qi moves the body.

The internal organs receive a gentle massage and the blood flow, ligaments,

tendons, sinews and bones are strengthened. The Qi accumulates and circulates freely throughout the body. Time brings a depth of refinement from which the Spirit emerges, manifesting spring-steel strength and profound peace of Mind.

The application of Taiji is practised with a partner. Here the aim is to relax completely, yielding before the partner's force. The entire body is so light that a fly cannot alight without setting it in motion. This is not weakness. The feet are rooted to the ground and the centre is kept stable. Using the sense of touch, yield at the opponent's slightest pressure and follow them at their slightest retreat; respond quickly to fast action and slowly to slow action.

At every place the empty and solid — or Yin and Yang — must be distinguished. Advancing, the partner feels the distance incredibly long; retreating, they feel it exasperatingly short. Then, when the moment is right internal energy is released, throwing the partner through the air. This is the application of Taiji for self defence.

People of all ages and degrees of health are equally able to practise Taiji. It leads people from the everyday state to a position of inner knowledge, inner calmness and inner power. Practising inner calmness is most effective in dealing with emotional problems. Quiet concentration relieves mental problems while practising relaxation and energy circulation deals well with physical problems.

Success in practice requires an attitude of genuine enquiry, patience and perseverance, an openness to practise according to the teaching, and a willingness to constantly examine and refine our motives according to inner conscience. Once begun, Taiji should be thought of as a lifetime practice.