Tapping into flow - that magical grace that brings us one step closer to total balance

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Tai Chi

• Often shortened to tai chi or taiji, t’ai chi ch’uan or tàijiquán is a Chinese martial art practiced for both its defense training and health benefits.

• Tai chi is often considered to be a form of “meditation in motion” that promotes serenity and inner peace.

• The practice of tai chi is rooted in the concepts of yin and yang - two opposing yet complementary aspects of everything in the universe.

Yin and Yang

• The concepts of yin and yang are usually expressed in a diagram known as the tai chi symbol.

• The meaning of the yin/yang or tai chi symbol relates to the flow of opposite energy that makes up everything in the universe – including our bodies.

Yin and Yang in our Bodies

• According to tai chi philosophy, energy (both yin and yang energy) flows through our bodies via meridians.

• Meridians are channels or pathways of energy that flow up and down throughout the entire body, with the energy flowing directly from one meridian to the next.

• Our vital life force or qi (chi) flows through this meridian network. If qi (chi) does not flow as required, the body’s organs will not properly perform their functions and imbalances may arise.

The Goal of Tai Chi

• The goal of tai chi is to cultivate focused movements, which allow for emptying the mind of distracting thoughts to be in the here and now.

• A primary goal of tai chi practice is to induce, develop, and improve flow, ensuring a continuous, harmonious, and synergistic practice.

Flow

• Ross (2013) defines flow as a state of complete immersion in an activity, “a magical grace that brings us one step closer to total balance”.

• Importantly, in tai chi, flow is considered to be a sixth component of fitness (in addition to muscular strength and endurance, flexibility, body composition, and cardiovascular endurance).

• Flow is basically movement (as opposed to obstruction).

• When a tai chi practitioner is flowing, time flies: every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one.

• Individuals with a high degree of flow achieve a heightened sense of wholeness and well-being in their lives.

Tai Chi’s Benefits

• Tai chi increases bone density and involves all of the various soft tissues in the body: muscles, tendons, ligaments, fascia, and skin.

• Tai chi improves sleep, balance, muscle strength, coordination, cardiovascular fitness, mood, confidence, self-efficacy, and flexibility; facilitates nutrient uptake and waste removal; and advances the circulation of blood and qi (chi), thus enhancing the body's natural healing capabilities.

• Tai chi decreases depression, anxiety, systolic and diastolic blood pressure, the risk of falls, and eases stiffness and pain.

Tai Chi and Meridians

• Of the 12 major meridians, 6 are predominantly yin and 6 are predominantly yang. Yang meridians (and energy) run predominantly in the back body while yin meridians (and energy) run predominantly in the front body.

• In tai chi, the body’s 6 yin and 6 yang meridians are represented by 1 major yin and 1 major yang vessel.

• In tai chi, the Governing and Conception vessels embody the body’s yin and yang energies.

• The governing vessel’s energy is predominantly up the back body (yang energy). The conception vessel’s energy is predominantly up the front body (yin energy).

• In tai chi, the tongue is placed behind the two top front teeth to connect the governing and conception vessels.

• This forms the microcosmic orbit. When this microcosmic orbit is complete, yin and yang energies are being balanced in the body.

• Hence, the practice of tai chi entails a sequence of forms (moving postures) that incorporate synchronized breath work to balance the yin and yang energies in the body, while visualizing the flow of the body’s qi (chi).