

How to Improve Your Tai Chi? By Caroline Demoise, July 2004

Having good instruction is essential to tai chi development; however, the biggest ingredient in improvement is you and your practice. Practicing with precision, with patience, with perseverance, and with passion, having made tai chi a priority in your life is a good way to begin improving your tai chi. Tai chi is a journey inward. It is your journey and yours alone. When you do practice regularly, progress unfolds like a process of transformation.

On the physical level you may experience a transformation from stiffness to flexibility. There is often a gradual evolution to better health. Notice how all your movements are becoming more coordinated. On the mental level mindless movement becomes "intention" directing your movements. A calm still focus replaces the noisy mind. On the spiritual level your reality is much less judgment based. Clarity, awareness and compassion increase. You replace unconscious movement with being present in the body to fully aware of how it feels to move.

Focus is very important in improving your tai chi. Bring your focus inward. Internal development comes after you learn the shape and sequence of movements and feel very familiar and comfortable moving through the form. Focus on breathing in a relaxed, deeper abdominal way. Use intention to direct your movements. Focus on being present in your body to feel your movements from the inside outward. Be aware of your orientation in space and feel proper alignment in your body. Consciously be aware of the heel touching down weightless at first. Then notice the transference of energy and weight as you complete the movement. Notice the relaxation of each muscle in your body. Develop the thread that connects each movement to the next. Feel energy move in your body and become fluid during movement. Follow the energy of your movements allowing it to carry you from one to the next. Feel grounded. Feel your connection with nature.

To improve your tai chi find a teacher you resonate with and train with him or her. Begin teaching tai chi to other people. I have learned so much more about tai chi during the time I spend contemplating how to explain it, how to facilitate another's progress, how to coach and how to inspire a class. And practice with beginner's mind. When you think you know it, there is no room for new awareness. Look beyond the external form. Develop the inner qualities of stillness, awareness, non judgment, acceptance and courage. Make abdominal breathing your normal breathing pattern. Read, study, contemplate and follow tai chi principles. Identify your tai chi goals, because "energy follows intention" When your goals are specific, you are more likely to achieve them than when they are vague or unclear. Taking the time to write down how you want to improve your tai chi helps to clarify goals and make them specific. And, of course, most importantly, have fun.

For more information on tai chi visit www.innerpathtaichi.com. Caroline teaches Sun Style Tai Chi classes in Chapel Hill, North Carolina and instructor workshops around the country.