



## Tips for Practising

*Learning is like sailing a boat;  
If we are not going forwards, we are going backwards.*

Confucius

Tai Chi is a trained skill; in Chinese, a “kung fu”. As with any other skill, practice makes perfect.

Little will be gained by simply attending a class once a week and doing nothing in between times. Training should not, however, be seen as a chore but rather as a chance to improve one’s skill, state of mind and physical well-being.....and thus as a way of getting more enjoyment from learning and becoming more skilful. Eventually, one becomes more aware, more relaxed, and the movements themselves become more meditative.

Knowing *how* to practise can help to speed up the process and make your training more productive for the time invested in it.

### General advice.

- **Incorporate your practice into your daily routine.**  
Decide which time of day is better for you; morning or evening - if it is not practical to practise twice a day. Tai Chi is about doing what is natural; know yourself and train when you are most receptive. Get into the habit of practising each day.
- **Focus.**  
Pick a place where distractions are at a minimum. Put the answering machine on for 10 minutes and switch the phone off.
- **Concentrate on the principles.**  
Always be mindful of the Tai Chi principles, and practise in accordance with them.
- **“A little and often” is the watchword.**  
Ten minutes once a day is better than a half-hour session every three or four days. But remember the principle of being “natural”. If things are going well on any given day and you are enjoying your training, keep going.
- **Practise new moves very briefly after the class to embed them in your mind.**  
As soon as you get home, run through a new move.

- **Remember: Tai Chi may look easy, but it isn't.**  
Don't get cross with yourself if you are having difficulty. A key tenet of Taoism is not to force things. In time it will come and then you'll wonder why you ever had problems. The more annoyed you get, the harder it will become.

### *When time is short.*

1. Concentrate on just a few moves at a time, selecting a different part of the Form to work on each time. Spend what time you do have to polish the Form one piece at a time. The form contains much repetition so practising in small sections will also help with later ones where individual elements re-appear.
2. Recognise that Form training is about developing mind/body connections rather than memorising a sequence, and do some of the Silk Reeling exercises from class.

A good 5-minute Silk Reeling session will do you more good than seeing how much of the Form you can scamper through in the same time. Remember: mindfulness is very important. Focus on the movement not the clock. The fewer the movements, the more time is available for each one.

### *When space is limited.*

In many modern houses, and even gardens, space is often at a premium. Suggestions for dealing with this are very similar to those for dealing with a shortage of time. For example, static Silk Reeling takes up less room than large sections of the Form, whilst practising the whole form in discrete sections allows us to re-position ourselves in between times.

However, there are one or two suggestions which are particularly useful if space alone is the constraint:

1. Step on the spot. *Cloud Hands*, for example, lends itself to this approach.
2. Practise elements from the Form, such as stepping forwards and backwards around one leg at a time. Alternatively, practise short sequences, such as Brush Knee & Push + Play the Lute in a continuous loop.
3. Hold postures, either as an alternative to *Zhan Zhuang* (Standing Pole), or as part of a small section from the Form which you perform very slowly as a few static postures linked by slow transitions. Concentrate on both postural integrity and co-ordination.

***When your energy is low.***

One way to address this is, of course, to avoid those times of day when you are not at your liveliest. This may not always be possible, so:

1. Adopt higher stances.
2. Avoid *fajin*.
3. Spend more time warming up and / or longer on each exercise. Select simple breathing exercises and gentle patterns, not vigorous ones.
4. *Knock at the Gate of Life*.
5. Include a vigorous self-massage to end with.
6. If mental tiredness is the problem, take frequent short breaks, whether you are physically tired or not, but keep moving. Walk around to keep the body loose.
7. Train at your normal time to keep the habit, but finish when you have had enough.