

Ideas for Beginners

This is an offering of ideas for independent activities to help beginning T'ai Chi students develop a personal practice. The philosophy is: T'ai Chi Ch'uan is a great gift which we all deserve and can benefit from, and we benefit most from this gift by making it part of daily life. And, as your practice increasingly benefits you, you will be increasingly able to be of benefit to others. This is why you signed up for class, right?

Suggestions for How to Start

- start slowly, and just do a little at a time
- build up slowly, but gradually
- expect and embrace imperfection: you may sometimes find it impossible to practice twice everyday, even for just one minute in the morning and evening. Persevere and keep it positive: as Jack Kornfield says, "it's no use beating ourselves up for being human."

Basic Beginnings

Things to learn:

- 5 principles (1. Relaxation; 2. Uprightness; 3. the Center leads; 4. Differentiate substantial form insubstantial; 5. Keeping open Energy Gates (Beautiful Lady's Hand)
- The two Safety Rules: 1) stay within your Comfortable Limit, and 2) keep the knee of the weighted leg aligned with the corresponding foot.
- the Bear
- how to make your feet parallel and to create a shoulder width stance
- what 50/50, 70/30 and 100/0 stances are, and what they feel like
- the 70/30 stance
- The postures Stillness, Preparation and Beginning
- The Breathing Exercise
- two lines from the T'ai Chi Classic writings: "Stand Like a Mountain, Move Like a Great River," and "One Thing Moves, Everything Moves."

Things to do:

- do the Bear & simultaneously review and embody the principles, one at a time.
- follow the principles and safety rules while practicing
- the Breathing Exercise
- Ice Walking--imagine you are walking across thin wet ice; step empty, shift slowly and carefully; remain upright and relaxed as possible. Use a "helper" for balance if you need one; you can gradually use it less as you improve.
- do anything you remember of the form, even if it's impressionistic
- stand in Preparation for at least three breaths w/ mind in the tan t'ien

A Sample Plan for growing your practice:

Week 1: give yourself 1-3 minutes daily in both the AM and PM

3 simple minutes for new Beginners:

1 minute of the bear (while reviewing the basic 5 principles)

10 reps of the breathing exercise

3 breaths in Preparation

Anything else you do or remember is gravy.

Weeks 2&3 - give yourself 3-5 minutes daily in both the AM & PM

you can always start with the "3 simple minutes" described above

expand upon this as you like; add to it anything else you remember

Weeks 4-and on - give yourself 3-10 minutes daily in both the AM & PM

start with the "Ideal 3 minutes" described above

do what you can remember of the first third (Beginners Set); an entire first third takes about 3 minutes

finish with 3-5 breaths in Preparation

You can do more than this if you like, but please be gentle with yourself.