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CHALLENGES OF LEARNING TAI CHI

Tai chi has been popularized in recent years by coverage on TV and in the movies. By now, most people have at least caught a glimpse of it. Tai chi's graceful and flowing movements clearly evoke a sense of calm and relaxation. Without a doubt, regular practice of tai chi is one of the most life enhancing things we can do for ourselves. What is not so evident when watching someone moving through the tai chi form is the very challenging nature of it.

Finding a Class

The first challenge is finding a class and then committing to attend it. In our very busy lives, this by itself can be enough to stop us. Good for you: you've done that part!

Learning the Sequence of Movements

Once enrolled in a class, you will soon meet the second challenge: learning the sequence of movements can be a daunting experience. Some people might be frustrated enough in the first few weeks to stop coming to class altogether. As with anything new, learning the sequence of the tai chi form will take more than a couple of weeks. Daily practice at home is essential to bring coherence and clarity to the sequence of movements.



Enjoying Yourself while Meeting Challenges

If you accept that it will take some weeks of practice to get to the point where your mind can relax beyond "what comes next" in the form, then you should be able to start enjoying the grace and ease of the movement itself. Right? The answer to this question is not simple. Nearly everyone will find some aspects of tai chi quite enjoyable from the very first class, as they find new ways to move, breathe, think and feel. However, your tai chi experience will likely be challenging in some ways. Here is where some of the real growth lies: there are physical, mental and emotional challenges. When you meet them, you will find great benefits to your health.

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Physical Challenges

One challenge you may meet is the physical challenge. Tai chi is a weight bearing exercise. You must use your legs to support your body while you move very slowly from posture to posture. It doesn't take long to realize that slow movement is more demanding than fast movement. Tai chi exercises your joints—feeling the relaxation and opening of your hips, shoulders, knees, wrists and other areas is one of the joys of tai chi, and this opening takes time. In the early going you may tend to "bump into" yourself as you encounter the resistance and limitation of your present physical state. Remember that this will change for you.

Mental and Emotional Challenges

Other challenges are the mental and emotional challenges, which have many faces. One aspect might be an internal self-criticism about your perceived inability to pick this up as quickly as you expected to, or as quickly as others seem to be able to. Another aspect might be a fear of failure, or a belief that your body will not be able to move that way. On subtler levels, you may experience flashes of emotion as you, consciously or not, work into and through places in your body where you have stored powerful life experiences. It is often at these points of uncertainty and unfamiliarity that we find our breakthroughs.



Learning tai chi will be a healthy balance of work, fun and self-discovery that is well worth your time and effort.

Boundless Rewards Await

At its best, the learning of tai chi will be a healthy balance of work and fun and moments of self-discovery that will be well worth your time and effort. It's tougher than it looks, but in the end it's a fruitful undertaking, and the rewards are boundless. Though learning tai chi is challenging, meeting those challenges is what practice is all about. Treasures await all who apply.

