

## Rooting in Change: My Journey of Learning Tai Chi in a Virtual World

By Ian Lopez – Board Certified Health Coach, Tai Chi Teacher, & Social Entrepreneur

I think I was always drawn to the idea of Tai Chi — the yin-yang symbol, the slow, deliberate movements, the sense that there was something more going on beneath the surface. I never really understood it, but it was a seedling that grew quietly within me. Chinese tradition had always carried an allure. A kind of mysticism that hinted at something beyond the material world, a deeper intelligence that moved through life. That seed showed up in small ways over the years, but it wasn't until the world slowed down during COVID that I finally gave myself permission to explore it. For the first time in a long time, there was space to choose differently.

In April of 2020, I found myself signing up for an online Tai Chi class through *The Human Process*, a Chicago school that had boldly begun teaching virtually. Out of curiosity — and maybe a quiet sense of longing — I joined. At the time, I didn't know much about Tai Chi, or even that there was a structured path for teachers. I just knew I needed something that brought me back into my body.

My motivation ran deeper than curiosity, though. My dad had been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, and seeing his body change made something very clear to me: balance and coordination are never guaranteed. The mind-body connection we take for granted can fade — unless we nurture it. I wanted to set myself up for success, to learn how to stay connected before disconnection sets in. What I didn't know then was that Tai Chi would not only change my body, but also my way of being.

### Learning to Fail Gracefully

Those first months were humbling. My laptop was propped on a stack of books, my Wi-Fi was unreliable, and my reflection in the screen became my teacher. I stumbled through sequences, forgot movements, and wondered if I was getting any of it “right.”

But slowly, through patient guidance, the deeper principles began to take root — especially Professor Cheng Man-ch'ing's teaching that *softness overcomes hardness*. Each time I got frustrated, I realized I was holding tension — not just in my body, but in my expectations. Tai Chi began to teach me how to soften, not just in my stance, but in my attitude toward myself.

I learned that Tai Chi isn't about precision; it's about awareness. It's about showing up again and again with humility and curiosity. Over time, those lessons seeped into daily life. I noticed how often I resisted change, how easily I tried to force outcomes. Slowly, I began to meet challenges with less rigidity and more openness. I was learning not just to move differently, but to *live* differently.

## **The Power of Virtual Connection**

At first, I wasn't sure Tai Chi could be taught through a screen. Wouldn't it lose something essential? Wouldn't connection get diluted through pixels?

But what I found was the opposite. Through the Human Process and later through the Tai Chi Foundation, I discovered that energy doesn't need walls to flow. The qi that moves between teacher and student, between breath and awareness, can travel through any medium when the intention is clear.

Week after week, familiar faces appeared on Zoom — people from across the country and around the world. We practiced together, encouraged one another, and formed bonds that felt surprisingly deep. The virtual space became a modern-day temple: intimate, accessible, and alive.

This was Tai Chi's living philosophy in action — yin and yang adapting, form yielding to flow, tradition bending but never breaking.

## **Finding Ground in a Shifting World**

Tai Chi entered my life during a time of global and personal transition. Everything felt uncertain — where I was headed, how the world worked, what stability even meant anymore. But in each class, I returned to a simple truth: *root first, then move*.

The irony is that I learned to root while standing in my living room. The physical space didn't matter — the practice did. Each class helped me feel a little more solid, a little more present, a little more capable of meeting the world as it is.

That practice became my anchor. Rooting wasn't just about connecting my feet to the ground — it was about finding steadiness within. It was about learning how to be grounded in the face of change, how to respond rather than react, how to stay soft even when life felt hard.

This lesson became vital when my family and I decided to leave the United States and start our next chapter in Portugal. Our move forced us to maintain balance amid immense change — a new language, different culture, challenging bureaucracy, no community yet. On top of that, I was transitioning into a new career as a Board-Certified Health Coach, working with clients managing chronic stress and metabolic disease. Nothing felt stable — and yet, because I had learned Tai Chi virtually, the practice carried me through it all.

## **Softening Into Life**

Tai Chi has softened how I move through the world. It's changed how I respond to tension — in my muscles, in my thoughts, and in my relationships. When I meet resistance now, I remember what I've practiced: relax, breathe, and return to center.

The art has taught me that stillness isn't the absence of movement; it's the presence of attention – of listening. Clarity doesn't come from control; it comes from awareness. Though I'm still early in my journey, Tai Chi has already given me more than I could have imagined — a deeper sense of community, clarity, compassion, and trust in the unfolding process.

### **The Future of Tai Chi Is Rooted in Tradition**

Learning Tai Chi virtually has shown me that evolution is not a departure from tradition — it's its continuation. The heart of the art remains unchanged: to practice softness, to cultivate humility, and to harmonize with life.

Professor Cheng once said, “As you grow more relaxed, you become less afraid. As you become less afraid, you grow more relaxed.” In many ways, the virtual classroom embodies that spirit. It invites us to relax into change, to be fearless in how we share this art, and to trust that Tai Chi will always find a way to reach those who need it most.

The future of Tai Chi is here — rooted in its lineage, thriving in new forms, and alive in the hearts of students everywhere.

### ***About the Author***

*Ian Lopez is a tai chi teacher and [health coach](#) based in Portugal. He currently teaches online through the [Online Tai Chi School](#), a school he founded along with three other tai chi teachers. He also teaches online through [the Human Process](#), a Chicago-based tai chi school. One day, he hopes to open his own school in Portugal to continue teaching this art in person.*