

The Churches of
St Margaret & St George
Lent course - 2017



Tai Chi as an aid to prayer?

In our busy lives noise seems to be everywhere, some of it joyful and precious, some of it intrusive and deafening. Traffic noise, mobile phones, piped music are seemingly a constant part of our lives.

Even in our churches it can be difficult to prepare for worship in quiet contemplation.

Initially doing tai chi was a way of keeping joints mobile, improving breathing and relaxing after a busy day's work and it did all of this. After many years of raising a family and working, an unexpected bonus was that it helped me to a better awareness of the pleasure of silence. This began to deepen and enrich my prayer life - to be in silence and meditation before God rather than it be mainly a time of petition.

I also conversely started to use a form of prayer called '*Prayer of the Heart*'⁽¹⁾ which is repetition of a short penitential prayer to Christ which with use becomes part of our very being. It's another addition to the rich variety our prayer life can have and is based on the verse from,

1Thessalonians 5:17, '*... to pray without ceasing*'.

I find also that this *prayer of the heart* becomes absorbed into my movements as I move with the rhythm of the tai chi '*form*'. The form is the series of movements most associated with tai chi and often practised daily by groups of people in China in outside spaces. '*Green*' spaces with trees, water and mountains are considered especially beneficial, so parks and gardens are used as much as possible. Depending on the style of tai chi, the form may be as long as 83 series of movements and so takes time and practice to learn, often classes will do a shorter version of the '*form*'.

My personal times of quiet prayer are very much based on **Psalm 46:10**,

"Be still and know that I am God ..."

and in thinking about our prayer lives I would encourage anyone who hasn't already, to find their own way(s) of achieving this sense of stillness and 'being' before the Lord.

Be still and know that I am God.
Be still and know that I am God.
Be still and know that I am God.

I am the Lord that healeth thee.
I am the Lord that healeth thee.
I am the Lord that healeth thee.

In thee, O Lord, I put my trust.
In thee, O Lord, I put my trust.
In thee, O Lord, I put my trust.

*Unknown, based on Psalm 46
Hymns Old & New, New Anglican Edition
(1996), Stowmarket, pub: Kevin Mayhew Ltd*

Tai chi is a form of exercise based on the ancient Chinese philosophy of Yin and Yang. Put in its simplest form it is based on opposites such as strength and gentleness, darkness and light, water and fire, deficiency and excess and the need to keep all things in harmonious balance, in all aspects of life.

Often this ancient philosophy is incorporated with breathing techniques and physical exercises as a way of keeping the body and mind as healthy as possible.

The gentle form most frequently taught in the West is a way of improving circulation, balance and concentration and has many health benefits. It can be practised into extreme old-age.

Concentrating on what your own body is telling you, be as gentle with it as necessary. Exercise without tension in the neck and shoulders; remembering to breathe evenly and gently. Many of the movements involve circular movements which can be as small as space permits.

As a short 'taster', which I hope you'll enjoy, we will try a few, *warm-up exercises/breathing techniques/a very short introduction to the 'form'/relaxation and a short meditation.*

Revd. Lorraine Cooke

(1) - From the book 'The Way of the Pilgrim', trans. by R.M. French, which tells the story of a wandering Russian seeking a way of ceaseless prayer)

If you are interested in learning more about Christian meditation, I would recommend the following website: www.christianmeditation.org.uk

I attend classes run by Dr Xianglin Li, 07500 827965, details of which can be found on www.taichiforlife.co.uk.