

Tai Chi – The Universe - You
By Sifu Frank Versagi

Seems like a lot to connect; doesn't it, Tai Chi, the Universe and you? But it's really not. Here's why: the continuous slow flowing motions of Tai Chi mimic the always moving sun, earth, moon, stars and air of the universe, which are then duplicated by your body's constant moving of blood, breath and energy. As you do your circular motions of Tai Chi, you are in essence moving as does the universe moves, as does your circulation moves around your body, all under the eternal umbrella of The Tao. You are following the ways of Nature. You achieve these beautiful and natural connections as you do your Tai Chi. Tai Chi shouldn't be viewed as merely a physical exercise. You should place yourself at the center of your own universe as you circle around, you expand your body and your mind outward, upward, back and down as too the universe expands in all directions, as does the blood and breath in your body travels throughout the complete you. Dr. Jwing-Ming Yang states that the ultimate goal of Tai Chi is to harmonize our energy with that of the natural universe. Tai Chi should be thought of as a long,

fulfilling journey to physical health and mental calmness, enjoying the trip for many years, not just an eight week course at the local rec center. Just as the universe has lasted for many years, so too will your body; Tai Chi, the universe, and you, are connected.

Let us be Western about this connection for a bit: Dr Larry Altshuler, an internist at Saint Anthony Hospital in Oklahoma City and author of *Balanced Living*, has long touted the health benefits of Tai Chi for his patients, commenting that his patients who practice Tai Chi have reduced stress in their life, boosted immune systems and even recover from surgery quicker than other patients who don't practice Tai Chi, returning them to the natural flow of their body, breath, and universe connection sooner than expected. As the sun is the center of the universe, one can connect the heart with being a central part of your body. A research study done at the University of California, San Francisco, reported that Tai Chi practitioners had better cardiovascular function than patients who did not practice Tai Chi, once again helping us to make the connection between Tai Chi, the universe and you. Under the Tao, the natural

energy of our universe is divided into two extremes, Yin and Yang. This same polarity is also found in our body's own electromagnetic field, we need the positive and negative charges within us to allow our body to function properly. The universe needs its soft and hard opposites to keep itself aligned properly. When you practice your Tai Chi, you're balancing the flow of Yin and Yang along your meridian and governing energy channels so you too may keep yourself "aligned" properly.

There was a study conducted in 2004 at the University of Liverpool of women ages 33 to 55 that showed those who did Tai Chi three times a week for 12 weeks had improved balance and lower blood pressure. Tai Chi creates better balance in the practitioner, the universe is balanced, you are balanced by doing Tai Chi, and it's all connected once again. Touching upon the East again, Waysun Liao's translation of The Tai Chi Classics, the bible on Tai Chi, states that in Tai Chi meditative movement practice, relaxation means to give yourself up completely, both mentally and physically. It means to yield, yield totally to the entire universe, and yield to the infinite. When you are able to yield yourself totally to the

infinite, you will be able to relax and merge into the unity which the Taoist philosophy describes as the "integration of the sky and human." The Tai Chi practitioner should do a great deal of meditation to relax body and mind in order to be able to combine with the universe. When you achieve this level, you will flow as the universe flows, move as the universe moves. Additionally, Traditional Chinese Medicine states that only when the Yin and Yang of the body balance each other harmoniously can we then realize the feeling of real health. Tai Chi has been around for thousands of years in some form or another, not quite as organized in moves the way it is now, but the blending of slow body movement with breathing has existed for quite some time. Certainly we realize so too has the universe been around for quite some time, as have we. Tai Chi is not something new that has just hit the horizon; it is just fairly new in this country. Tai Chi was fashioned out of the natural ebb and flow of The Tao, connecting the internal motion of energy and the external motion of your extremities as you circle around, gliding across the floor effortlessly doing your Tai Chi. Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong found

that postmenopausal women who practiced Tai Chi five days a week for a year had stronger bones than those who didn't. A South Korean study found that osteoarthritis patients had less pain after 12 weeks of Tai Chi. Tai Chi was once known to us as the granny martial arts for senior citizens, but recent studies show it's anything but age specific. On a personal note, when training in China I witnessed people of all ages, literally 5 to over 100 years of age practicing Tai Chi. Can you imagine in this country we spent just a third of the time we now waste watching TV doing Tai Chi instead, think of how much better would we feel; you just need to make the connection for yourself. The Chinese have long known that Tai Chi does wonders for the individual: physically, mentally and spiritually. It is good to see the East and West meeting on this plane. The connection is there: Tai Chi, the universe, and you. Tai Chi is the link. Tai Chi is also portable, that's right, you can take it anywhere and you can practice it anywhere, no equipment, no fancy gym, just a little space to circle around in. Tai Chi is as infinite as The Tao, as are the infinite goals the "you" in this connection can achieve once you embark on the

road of Tai Chi. Pick up the Yellow Pages, go on-line, find a good teacher and start your Tai Chi today; become part of that beautiful, harmonious connection that lies with the practice of Tai Chi, our wonderful universe, and your untapped body's resources and energy. Tai Chi is like dancing with the universe, a dance partner that will never let you down or step on your toes. May your Tai Chi bring you better mental clarity, peace, and harmony.

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