



...Those new to t'ai chi AND those wanting to continue their t'ai chi practice are WELCOME to join this community event. In each session we will focus on our breath, engage in gentle movement, learn t'ai chi basic exercises and over time explore t'ai chi postures (movements).

T'ai Chi: A Mindful Practice

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A PDF of handout is located at communityevents.mononaterrace.com under Health/Wellness Programs, T'ai Chi at Monona Terrace.

The art of t'ai chi requires us to be mindful and in the present moment. As a beginning student we need this mindfulness in order to learn the movement, connect the breath with the movement and let go of tension. As we become more experienced, we recognize this art is more than beautiful movements. T'ai chi is all that we engage with (before, during, after) our practice. In other words, the art of t'ai chi is – the process. It is the anxiety we manage as we move into the unknown. It is the ability to slow down and let go of 'multi-tasking.' It is seeing ourselves as both individuals and connected/bonded to a larger group. It is whatever comes up for us as we stay with the 'here and now.'

In watching others, I'm often reminded of my own early years of practice. Initially I tried to use my mind to memorize the movements, with my thoughts often stuck in the past and/or constructing the future. When I began allowing my mind to simply watch what was happening, my understanding of t'ai chi deepened. With continuing practice I started noticing changes in my daily life. My mind started recognizing unwanted/disruptive thoughts more quickly and was able to move away from these thoughts more easily. In addition, when startled by something unexpected, I used the experience as a measure of how quickly I could quiet my body/mind and reconnect with my breath. All things I learned through practicing t'ai chi movements.

Keeping oneself in the present moment (regardless of the activity) can be facilitated by the following:

- Soften the eyes
- Relax the space between the eyes
- Put the mind in the dantian (lower abdominal area)
- Breathe

We also use these same principles to settle into our body, quiet the mind and return to the present, should we find ourself anxious about the past/future.

Brush Knee/Twist Step

In 2012 May/June rooftop t'ai chi, we practiced the following movement. In doing so, we used the mind to connect breath with action. Mindfulness at its best. The posture starts with a spiral up movement. We turn the waist and circle the hands/arms towards the back leg, while staying weighted on that back foot/leg. It ends with a spiral down movement. We turn the waist forward, transfer the weight to the front foot/leg and use our arms/hands to push/brush.

- Start by putting the weight on the back (L) leg; foot is at 45 degree angle. (R) leg/foot straight ahead with no weight on it.
- Turn waist to the (L) towards the back leg and let your gaze follow. The right hand comes up vertically in front of the face (palm toward the face) & then circles back dropping to the midline with palm facing outward.
- At the same time, your left hand drops and circles back rising up to the midline with the palm facing inward.
- When the two hands are in the midsection, palms facing each other, turn your gaze forward, start turning the waist to the right (towards the starting position).
- With the front leg, step a little to the right & then start transferring the weight to the right leg/foot.
- Simultaneously do the following three things - (1) Continue transferring the weight to the front (right) leg/foot; (2) the left hand comes up and passes by the left ear; and then pushes forward at chest height; (3) the right hand drops down and brushes in front of the knee.
- When solidly on the front (R) leg/foot (squaring the hips and weight in the heel), sink the body and bring the weightless back foot (L) behind the (R).