Tai Chi Secrets Overview

This tai chi secrets report is packed with useful information for those already practicing or who are starting tai chi. I've included tons valuable information I wish someone would've shared with me when I started to learn tai chi.

My Background

When I started learning tai chi and qigong ('chi gung') many years ago, I was lucky to have found a few tai chi masters who were kind enough to answer questions. My own path led me to study in Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong and prepared me to study in China in the early 1980s with a Taoist Lineage Master, Liu Hung Chieh of Beijing.

I have been practicing and teaching tai chi now for over 40 years. On this path I learned all major styles of tai chi, with an emphasis on the Yang Style and the Wu Styles. In 1981 I was the first Westerner to be certified in Beijing by the People’s Republic of China to teach the complete system of Tai Chi Chuan

Tai chi has a special place in my heart because it has been the “cure” for me at various times in my life. I have been in seven car accidents that have severly injured my body and spine.¹ Tai chi is the main reason that I can still walk. In 2009 I turned 60 years of age and to this day I continue to use my tai chi practice to further heal my body.

If you have an interest in learning more about tai chi I invite you to out my blog at http://www.taichimaster.com (coming Jan 2010) and my company at http://www.energyarts.com to find products, events and instructors.

Let's jump into the report now...

¹ See chapter 1 of The Chi Revolution, © 2009, Bruce Frantzis
The Tai Chi Solution

While I was in China, I learned how that 3,000-year-old civilization applied their science and technology to the problem of aging and came up with a solution—tai chi. According to the US Census Bureau, in 2007, 45.7 million people in the U.S. (15.3% of the population) were without health insurance for at least part of the year\(^1\). Further in the US the Baby Boomers are crossing the age of 50 and America is now facing its own health crisis.

I would go as far to say that tai chi is the foremost preventative health care exercise in America and the world. Tai chi can help our younger generations to relax and release their nervous systems to directly mitigate the stresses of our age. Tai chi can help older generation live vibrant lives well past the age when most people’s health is declining.

In China there are three internal martial arts: tai chi, bagua\(^2\) and hsing-i\(^3\). Although they are called martial arts and are ways to develop internal power for combat, they are most often used for health. It also can be said that more and more people are using all of these internal arts as a moving meditations.

My sincere desire is this *Tai Chi Secrets Report* helps you improve your own tai chi or even to start a tai chi practice. Those who practice and teach are part of a larger tai chi community who are reclaiming their health and helping others do the same.

*Before we get to the 12 Secrets in this report, I first want to start by setting up the context by letting you know FIVE FOUNDATION CONCEPTS about tai chi:*

\(^1\) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Health_care_in_the_United_States#The_uninsured](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Health_care_in_the_United_States#The_uninsured)

\(^2\) [Bagua](http://www.baguamastery.com) - Even more ancient than tai chi, the circle walking techniques of Bagua were developed over four thousand years ago in Taoist monasteries as a health and meditation art. The techniques open up the possibilities of the mind to achieve stillness and clarity; generate a strong, healthly, disease-free body; and, perhaps more importantly, maintain internal balance. (see [www.baguamastery.com](http://www.baguamastery.com) for more info in the Spring 2010)

\(^3\) [Hsing-I](http://www.energyarts.com) emphasizes all aspects of the mind to increase its forms and fighting movements. It is an equally potent healing practice because it makes people healthy and then very strong. Its five basic movements are related to five primal elements or phases of energy--metal, water, wood, fire and earth--upon which Chinese medicine is based and from which all manifested phenomena are created.
Concept #1 Tai Chi Develops Your Energetic Fitness

A key takeaway is tai chi literally changes what happens deep inside your body on an energetic level. Tai Chi provides instant access to control of your inner ecology rewiring your nervous system moving it away from tension towards relaxation.

Tai chi develops what I call energetic fitness, which can be defined as your ability to feel, move and store chi. Chi (also known as qi) is also known as the vital, life-force in your body. Energetic fitness is your natural birthright.

Concept #2 Energetic Fitness is Very Different from Physical Fitness

Tai chi’s approach of using conscious slow movements is a radical departure from the typical Western approach to fitness, which often focuses on repetitive movements and physical exerion, such as in fitness regimes like running, biking or weight lifting. Further, “success” in the many western sports and athletics is often determined by speed, distance, strength or when competing who “wins”.

Tai chi has a completely different set of markers and guideposts for success such as consciousness within body, proper body alignments and developing the smooth flow of energy. It is about generating peace within your entire being.

“Tai chi focuses on softening your body thus enabling you to put your mind inside your body to feel your chi.”

Concept #3—Tai Chi Arts were kept a “Secret” for a Reason

In ancient China the art of tai chi and its inner workings were considered secrets because they brought internal power to the practitioner. In the days of frequent wars and hand-to-hand combat, tai chi techniques were closely guarded secrets because they meant life or death on the battlefield. Further, the select families that owned the inner knowledge protected it because it gave them power and they supported their own families by teaching this information.
Obviously, much has changed since then—tai chi is now widely available in various forms and most use it for its incredible health benefits—not for battlefield techniques. *What can be said that what is not different from thousands of years ago is people have become even more disconnected to feeling their own body.* The result of not feeling our bodies has been an increase of stress and nervous system disorders.

**Concept #4 Tai Chi is an Antidote to Stress**

Stress has been linked to numerous illnesses and many of us live in a constant stress state that shreds the nervous system. If you want to take charge of your health through preventative practices then you have to have a practice that helps you deal directly with stress. Although we have had huge technological advances very little attention has been given to the effect those technologies have on our nervous systems. Computers, cell phones, invasive advertising and the general pace of modern life take their toll on our bodies.

> “Tai chi could be called the exercise for the new millennium because it helps you relax your nervous system—tai chi is an antidote to stress.”

**Concept #5 The Best Success Strategy is to Make Tai Chi a Daily Habit**

One of the challenges many who learn tai chi face is how to fit a practice time into their life because of family, work and other obligations. The people who have the most success integrate it as part of the fabric of their daily lives—it becomes a habit.

Developing a habit to do tai chi 20 minutes a day can have powerful results and benefits in your life. My experience has been that whatever time you spend doing tai chi will give you more back than you put in through better health, stress relief and inner peace.

*Now that we have some foundation knowledge lets move onto Tai Chi Secret #1…*
Tai Chi Secret # 1

Choosing the appropriate tai chi style is one of the most important decisions you will make/or don’t make.

Most beginners think of tai chi as just one artform rather than considering the many different styles. That being said, choosing the right style is a very important thing to consider. Even if you already are practicing a certain style it helps to know the differences because at some point you may also benefit greatly from learning another style.

Essentially, all tai chi styles have far more in common with each other than they have differences. All improve health, reduce stress and help you move more gracefully. All develop chi and use slow-motion, flowing, circular movements. For most practitioners, they choose to learn based on the quality of the teacher, the convenience of the school and other personal factors. Knowing about the styles upgrades your knowledge and guides you to make the right choices in the future.

Tai Chi’s Five Major Styles: Which Style Is Best for You?

Each style has a different syllabus, structure and flavor as regards how its specific techniques are applied. All five styles can potentially give you tai chi’s health benefits. Four of tai chi’s five major styles—all except the combination styles—derive their name from the founder’s surname. The Chinese talk about the tai chi of the Yang Family, Wu Family, Chen Family and Hao Family.

Each style takes a different approach toward the movements of their forms and each style has many variations or schools. Each school is composed of practitioners who follow specific leaders or teachers within the style. Each school emphasizes a specific approach to the art: their forms may have recognizable stylistic differences, trademark movements or develop specific self-defense training skills. Let’s look that the five styles:
The Yang Style
The Yang style is the most popular and widely practiced tai chi style worldwide. In England and America at least 20 main variations of the Yang style exist and in China there are even more. The various schools originated from the approach of a specific master or from a particular geographic region within China. Each variation has a distinct flavor, looks different from the others to a greater or lesser degree and may emphasize different technical points. All, however, will be called Yang style.

The Wu Style
The Wu style is the second most popular style. It has three main variations with strong stylistic differences that derived from the founder, Chuan You, his son, Wu Jien Chuan and his grandchildren.

The Wu style was created directly from the Yang and as such is the largest variant of the Yang style. However, unlike most traditions in the Yang style, most Wu schools emphasize small, compact movements over large and medium-sized ones. The Yang and Wu, with all their variations, encompass the vast majority (80 percent or more) of all tai chi practitioners.

The Chen Village Style
The Chen village style is the original style of tai chi from which the Yang style was created. It is relatively hard to find Chen style teachers and adherents account for about one percent of tai chi practitioners.
Unlike most tai chi not all the movements of the Chen Style’s first level of training are
done in slow motion. The Chen style alternates slow-motion movements with short, fast,
explosive ones. It demands more physical coordination and may strain the lower back
and knees more than other styles; consequently it is difficult for the elderly or injured to
learn. The complexity of its movements, which include fast releases combined with
jumping kicks and stamping actions, makes it more athletic and physically difficult than
most other tai chi styles and, as such, is often more appealing to young people.

Click to see Bruce Frantzis demonstrating the Chen Style.

The Hao Style
The Hao style is exceedingly rare in China and almost non-existent in the West. Its
small frame movements are extremely small. Its primary focus is on tai chi’s more
internal chi movements with physical motions being much less important. As such it is
considered an advanced style that is hard to appreciate for practitioners without
significant background knowledge of tai chi.

Combination Styles
Combination styles are the third most popular styles after the Yang and Wu. These
styles freely mix and match movements from the four other tai chi styles as well as
movements from other internal martial arts styles, such as bagua and hsing-i.
Tai Chi Secret # 2

The choice of the frames can be more important than the choice of tai chi style.

Once you have chosen a style another factor comes into play. There is also the issue of the choice of frames.

Large, Medium and Small Frames: Which Frame Is Best for You?
Each style has versions with different frame sizes. Frame is used in the sense of the size of a picture frame. Smaller physical movement fits in smaller frames; larger ones need larger frames. A frame may be looked at from two basic perspectives.

1. **How large do you make your external movements?** In large frame styles you will do large, clean, obvious extended arm movements with large waist turns and long deep stances. Small frame styles condense the movements, using relatively small and subtly intricate arm movements, medium to small waist turns and shorter stances. These shorter stances usually stand higher although they can go as low as the most stretched-out large frame stances.

   In a large frame style movement your hand, wrist or elbow may move 30 inches in space, but only 5-10 inches in a similar small frame style. In large and medium frame styles your waist may turn a full 90 degrees completely to the side, but only half that amount, 45 degrees or less in a small frame style.

2. **How do you develop chi?** Large frame styles emphasize correct external movements and naturally focus your attention to the space outside yourself. The initial strategy is to focus your attention on the muscles, tendons and alignments needed to maintain your skeleton’s structural integrity. This is done in order to ultimately influence your deeper bodily systems and the creation of chi within
you. In tai chi this is called “the outside opens the inside,” or “from the external to the internal.”

Small frame styles use a more internal approach. They emphasize correct movement of chi through the deeper internal systems inside your body—including the spine, internal organs and spaces within the joints—to create correct and efficient physical movements and body alignments.

Some people and body types may prefer the long extended movements of large frame styles; others may find tighter, less extended, close movements of medium and smaller frame styles more appropriate.

It is slightly more common for long-limbed body types to gravitate toward the extended movements of large frame styles and for those with shorter limbs or a longer torso to prefer small and medium frame styles. Although all frame styles stretch the muscles and make the body more flexible, the large frame strategy is to focus on outer stretching. That is getting your hands and feet to extend farther and farther away from your torso. Just as in a leg split, the lower you go the more you stretch. However, deeper, longer stances may aggravate the knees and back.

Small frame styles focus more on inner stretching—releasing internal organs and ligaments while increasing the spaces between your vertebrae and within your joints. All this occurs simultaneously without extending your hands and feet very far away from your torso. Small styles have an inner orientation and tend to release bound or stagnant energy faster. They make it easier for you to focus on the inner emotional realities you live with on a daily basis, consciously or unconsciously.

*Let’s look at tai chi secret #3 that has to do with the length of the form.*
Tai Chi Secret # 3
Choosing the right tai chi form length can help you stick with your tai chi practice.

Long, Medium and Short Forms: Which Form Is Best for You?
Forms within each style are of different lengths—short, medium and long—and these forms may be similar or radically different. Within each individual style forms have fewer or greater numbers of movements that may differ slightly or dramatically from each other. Each style contains a number of individual or repeated movements (postures) called a form or set. All of its moves are strung together with smooth transitions in a seamless continuous flow without starts, stops or jerky movements.

Medium and short forms originate from their style’s long form. Short forms usually have 15 to 40 movements; medium forms between 40 and 70, and long forms 80 movements or more. After forms reach a certain number of movements, specific moves repeat with each repetition counted as a separate movement within the total number (for example 88, 108 or 128).

For health and stress reduction most forms are done at various slow-motion speeds. Although the overwhelming majority of tai chi schools only teach slow-motion forms, a few from all tai chi styles teach forms that alternate slow-motion moves with fast ones. Generally, the longer a form, the deeper it works its benefits into your body and the greater the commitment it demands. Shorter forms require less commitment from you in terms of practice and learning.

Short Forms
It is my opinion after having taught thousands of tai chi students worldwide, that most beginners are better served starting off with a short form. It is more likely you will finish a short form than a long form. After a little grounding in the art, it is more likely you will acquire the interest and desire to learn longer forms.
Short forms provide most of the essential broad benefits tai chi can offer although not to the same degree as the long forms. The perk is that you obtain the real experience of doing tai chi without having to make a major commitment. Short forms take less time to learn. And, the sequences are easier to remember, which is ideal for older people who may be beginning to experience memory problems.

**Medium-Length Forms**

Medium-length forms of between 40 and 70 movements are most commonly found in the Yang and Chen styles. They tend to contain most, although not necessarily all the postures (moves), of a long form. They don’t repeat specific postures as many times as long forms do. Because they have significantly more individual movements than short forms, they challenge your physical coordination skills more. However, they require less stamina and time than long forms.

“In energetically, each new and different individual posture also provides added benefits to your whole body’s chi circulation.”

Medium-length forms are better than short ones in terms of the number of different postures, which reach deeper into the body. As you go deep into the body you stretch, more specific soft tissue—tendons, ligaments and fasciae—and increase different ranges of motion for specific parts of your body.

**Long Forms**

Long forms provide tai chi’s maximum benefits. Long forms are designed to exponentially increase the flow of chi at regular intervals during the form. Unlike short forms, the long forms of the Yang, Wu and combination styles are broken into three clear sections.
At the end of each movement phase your energy revs up to a higher level. In other words, the more movements there are the bigger volume of energy you accrue per minute of your practice routine. There is an even bigger jump experienced in energy accrual when you do a long form’s second and final sections.

Long forms require the most work, commitment and perseverance and are initially more difficult to learn. Some find it hard to remember what move comes next, especially if they do not have someone to follow in front of them or have not practiced for a while.

**How Long Does It Take to Do a Form?**

For health and stress reduction the forms are done at four degrees of slow-motion speed. From start to finish, using a standard baseline of a 108-movement long form, a moderately fast degree of slow motion would need 15 minutes; slow motion, 25 minutes; very slow, 45 minutes; and a super-slow speed, an hour or more. A short form can range from between three and twenty minutes to complete, depending on the number of movements and your practice speed.

**So then, which style, frame and form-length should I choose?**

**The Best Style for Improving Health and Managing Stress**

For healing the styles that are done in slow motion tend to be more effective. The Chen style’s emphasis on explosive movements regularly interspersed throughout the form can jar the joints and spine.

This tends to make it less effective for healing in general, and for back problems specifically. All styles work equally well for healing musculoskeletal and internal organs problems due to weakness or energetic imbalance.
For problems caused by external physical, chemical or psychological trauma, the small frame, more internal styles tend to be more effective. This is due to their ability to release stored energy deep in the body, which normal movement alone usually will not unravel and release.

**The Best Style for Beginners**

If a style is naturally more comfortable and easier for you to learn and remember, you are more likely to finish learning it, remember the order of the moves and practice it on your own. That said the following points should be considered when choosing a style:

- The physical coordination skills of the Yang, Wu and Hao styles are usually the easiest to learn, the combination styles are in the middle and the Chen style is the most difficult.
- If your body is extremely tight and your goal is to get stretched out, the large styles of tai chi will initially work faster, especially for the legs and hips. However, the smaller styles will also get the same job done over time.
- For those with a bad lower back or injured knees, forms with higher rather than lower stances are better. Smaller frame styles tend to have higher stances.
- Large styles initially make it easier to develop leg strength because of their longer and deeper stances.
- Smaller styles make it easier to access the more internal work tai chi has to offer, including making it easier to work directly with the internal organs.
The Best Style for People over Fifty

The slow motion, short form styles are generally best for people over age fifty because they take longer to learn movements than younger people.

Therefore, beginning with a short form and learning a long form later on, if desired, is a less frustrating and easier path for older people to enjoy, absorb and remember tai chi.

Deeper, longer stances, more common in large frame styles, can aggravate the knees and back. If your knees are already strong, deeper, longer stances can make your legs stronger at a faster speed. Small frame styles are usually better for upgrading the health of your internal organs.

For elders the bigger movements of large frame styles may be easier to remember initially and the smaller styles more fascinating once you have some tai chi background.

*Let’s now look Tai Chi Secret #4 to learn more about “masters”* ...
Tai Chi Secret #4
All “masters” are not the same.

What Is a Master?
My desire here is to simply clarify what a master really is—at a very high level—as the term has been used for millennia in China because often this term ‘master’ is thrown around loosely in the west without much regard to its true definition and meaning.

It is very useful to know the different skill levels within any sport or movement form like tai chi, especially for a student who is looking for a tai chi instructor or a tai chi “master.” Once students know what they are looking for they can know what to ask for, saving them from going down the wrong path or not achieving their full potential.

This is the dilemma that confounds many inexperienced people looking for a tai chi teacher. They do not understand that tai chi is a very sophisticated and carefully constructed body-mind training, which with practice deepens and has a profound effect on health, emotions and longevity.

Tai chi affects the insides of the body and mind in ways that are not obvious and even counterintuitive to those who have not learned from a good teacher. More is required of a skilled tai chi teacher than one teaching an intellectual skill, such as mathematics or English. When students are working with chi development and personal internal growth, intellectual knowledge alone is insufficient.

The level of the teacher’s personal accomplishments also determines their capacity to transmit these qualities to another. The universal spiritual qualities of teaching intricate body-mind relationships mandate that teachers be able to embody and communicate the qualities they teach non-verbally.
The challenge today with regard to tai chi is not in finding someone to instruct you, but rather finding someone who has been authentically trained. There are many teachers out there who have gone to a weekend workshop and then start teaching. (Can you imagine a medical student going to a weekend workshop and then practicing the next week?).

Unfortunately, there is no equivalent to a consumer’s guide to help you choose among the thousands of tai chi instructors and there are few true masters currently teaching in the West.

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There are no simple criteria for determining competence. To make this issue more complicated, the criteria for determining a teacher’s competence for a beginner is very different than those for an advanced student.

The four basic issues that generally define the better teachers are:

1. Quality of the teacher’s knowledge (competence)
2. Teacher’s ability to communicate verbally and non-verbally
3. Decency, honesty and generosity
4. Student’s comfort level with the teacher.

Most students who choose and stay with a tai chi teacher will define why they like that teacher in one or more of these terms. If you have teachers with the same innate talent, the ones that are decent, honest and generous are likely to take you further and upgrade your knowledge faster. Tai chi is an art form that deals directly with the human spirit.
However, if you must choose between an ordinary teacher for whom you are comfortable and an excellent but somewhat less personable teacher choose excellence. In general, the quality of instruction will be remembered long after the price of learning is forgotten, or as the old maxim goes, “You get what you pay for.” A competent tai chi teacher can positively influence you and possibly change your life for the better. Incompetent ones can turn you off forever.

**Benchmarks for Beginners**

Although everyone would love to begin studying with a master, for a variety of positive and negative reasons, most beginners do not need to do so. You do not initially need to learn piano from a world-class concert pianist to enjoy the benefits of playing the piano or to understand whether you want, or have the talent, to become a world-class pianist yourself.

Particularly for beginners the basics can be effectively taught by many tai chi teachers whether ordinary or quite exceptional. By practicing regularly you will begin to acquire the health and relaxation benefits of tai chi.

However, the better the teacher, the faster the students who are exceptionally committed will learn and absorb what is being taught and the more motivated they will be to continue their practice. If you are highly motivated, take the time to seek out exceptional teachers who can help you advance more quickly.

Remember that this lifelong practice requires effort to learn and looks easier than it is. Here are some guidelines that will help you choose the teacher who is right for you:

- Consider what goals you want to achieve then apply some competence gauges
- Evaluate the instructors’ teaching experience and their ability to communicate
- Understand the differences between styles/frames/forms and how they may apply to you
- Think about which teaching approach works best for you and which personality types you can work with.
Tai Chi Secret #5

There are traditionally five levels of credentials and competence for tai chi masters.

The Five Levels of Credentials and Competence

Contrary to popular belief tai chi does not have black belts or other obvious visible signs of competence. Nevertheless, in China, there is a long-established hierarchy of learning and teaching that progresses in five levels:

Level 1—Basic Movements and Body Alignments
Beginning students study until they are competent in the basic movements and body alignments. The overwhelming majority of China’s active tai chi instructors belong in this category.

Level 2—Intensive Study
Junior students study regularly for at least five years with a master and actively practice for at least ten years. Their advancement to the next level depends on natural talent, hard work and other factors.

Level 3—Study Directly with Master
Senior students take classes with a master several days a week—if not daily—for at least a decade.

Level 4—Formal Disciple with Specialized Knowledge
Masters are the formal disciples of lineage holders. They receive the deepest and most secretive levels of specialized knowledge available in tai chi. Masters can be truly exceptional at some but not necessarily all aspects of tai chi.
Level 5—Lineage Holder

In a particular tai chi or school, lineage holders are disciples who over time are chosen and specifically trained in the entire tradition to hold all, not only selected parts, of the tradition and the knowledge of the previous lineage holder.

Although some masters are beginning to issue teaching credentials to students who have passed instructor trainings, the vast majority of available tai chi teachers lack such credentials much less the competency to offer such credentials.

Consider your Goals

You may have determined that you want to learn tai chi for one or more reasons, which may include:

- Relaxation and stress reduction
- Improved health and wellness and longevity
- Joy of movement, entertainment and socialization
- Learning a tried and true and challenging body/mind/spirit practice
- Self-defense
- Putting more chi energy in your life
- Spirituality and personal growth.

Perhaps you want to enhance your life or address specific health issues. Tai chi research has shown to have a positive effect on mitigating high blood pressure, pain (physical, emotional and mental), carpal tunnel and other repetitive stress injuries, and helping patients recover from accidents or operations. Perhaps you need a teacher skilled at teaching the handicapped or the elderly.

You need to tell potential teachers what you specifically want to achieve and ask if they can help you, rather than assuming that they can. Not all teachers may be able or willing to teach what you need or desire to learn.¹

¹ For detailed information on this topic please see Tai Chi Health for Life pages 253-278
Tai Chi Secret #6

The outward movements of tai chi make up only 5% of the art of tai chi.

The real question when looking at a person doing tai chi is, “Do they have chi in their their tai chi?” I teach a course called Get More Chi in Your Tai Chi™ because I have found that so few students know the basic energetic principles that form the foundation of a solid tai chi practice.

If you have movements correct but are not getting the energy to flow, then you are negating many of the benefits of tai chi and simply doing a physical exercise.

“Tai chi is about energetic fitness and the measuring stick is how well your chi is flowing.”

So it is important to find a teacher and to learn how to feel, move and store energy. Learning to do this will take time but will be well worth the reward—better health and feeling more alive.

Initially having a teacher that just knows the movements and alignments is generally enough to get you started learning tai chi. However, if you do tai chi for self-defense or high performance, it is important that your teacher—whatever style he or she teaches—includes some degree of internal chi work in order for you to get the maximum benefit from your tai chi practice.
Tai Chi Secret #7
If you understand your motivation for learning tai chi you can avoid frustration and burnout.

Why People Continue or Quit Tai Chi
Tai chi is ideally practiced daily as a primary health maintenance exercise. My teacher Liu used to say, “You become what you practice.” Practice becoming healthy and you will become healthy. Practice becoming relaxed and you will become relaxed. Practice letting go of negative habits and they will increasingly dissolve and disappear.

More vitality and energy for life, a capacity for joy and relaxation and realizing one’s inner potential are among tai chi’s gifts to those that persevere.

However, teachers of tai chi, qigong and other internal health practices know that at some point, many students stop practicing for long periods of time or quit altogether. Some become discouraged at the challenges of learning the physical movements; some become uncomfortable when they experience the depths of their negative emotions; still others stop for seemingly no reason, even as they begin to experience tai chi’s benefits.

Let’s look at some of the reasons why people stop practicing; the deterrents that can arise when people try to integrate a body-mind practice into their daily lives; and the stages that can lead to taking ownership of their practice.

Motivations for Change
Generally people make major changes in their lives and adopt new habits and rhythms for one of two major reasons:

1. They are motivated by fear of negative consequences.
2. They have positive goals.
Fear-driven change: Something goes wrong and if changes are not made, more troubles will follow that will have larger negative consequences. At this juncture, people become motivated to give up such habits as smoking and poor diet and begin tai chi. Fear of negative consequences is the largest motivator for change.

Positive-driven change: People understand that they can continue feeling good and stay healthy well into their old age if they make lifestyle changes. They investigate such options as tai chi, meditation, exercise, dietary changes and supplements.

**Changing Established Rhythms and Deterrents to Practice**

Establishing a new rhythm of practicing tai chi on a schedule will help you change established habits and mindsets. It will help greatly if you can do the following three things as you start tai chi:

1. Find a regular teacher that has a regular class or a local practice group near your house (your desire to attend will decrease exponentially as the distance you need to travel increases)
2. Commit to attending class regularly for 2-3 months no matter what
3. Adopt a beginners mind not judging yourself or compare yourself with other practitioners

Creating a new habit is not difficult however many times it requires that you wake up a bit and snap out of a fog. A tai chi practice can help you to live in the present moment—not the past, not the future, but right now. Tai chi also develops your attention and awareness.

Forces in our culture have steered many people away from physical practices that would necessitate taking responsibility for their health and adopting better habits. Advertisers continually target us with products and services that are designed to bring instant gratification. Most often buying more stuff doesn’t fulfill their promises - lack of cellulite, more hair, trimmer tummies and no more wrinkles. The more you can not buy
into the ‘heal in a weekend’ mentality and look at tai chi as a lifelong practice the more likely you will be to stick with it to see the results.

Because of conditioning, many people confuse their internal lives with stuff they can buy. Tai chi is a direct method for helping you retrieve your health and reduce stress. It’s not some magic elixir, but it will give you the personal power and inner strength to stay healthy and follow your inner compass.

Energy practices from China are designed to help people become aware of what is inside their body, mind and spirit. Over time you will tune in to how you feel physically, mentally, emotionally, energetically and spiritually. As you do this you have a great opportunity to become a more alive and more conscious human being.

**Tai Chi Secret #8**

**There are 7 basic stages in learning tai chi.**

**7 Stages of Learning Tai Chi**

Generally, it takes about thirty days of continuous practice to establish a new habit. Taking classes three or four times a week helps develop that new rhythm. Classes provide a good practice environment and the teachers and students provide a nurturing support system.

Practice in class also helps students become aware of the abundance of chi. During this stage, it is important for the teacher to explain the differences between external and internal practices and what the process of learning is likely to be as well as telling students what they might expect to encounter emotionally and what to do about it.

The teacher should also explain the challenges of tai chi, which include:

- Remembering the physical movements
- Slowing down and maintaining the 70% rule
• Not comparing their learning rates to others
• Letting go of competitiveness
• Feelings of awkwardness
• Problems with established self-image.

Having taught tai chi and qigong to more than 15,000 students, I have come to a deep understanding of seven distinct stages that my students have gone through in learning and adopting tai chi into their daily lives.

**Stage 1: Starting the Search**
Students talk to their friends and health and fitness practitioners. They read books and research on the Internet about practices that can help them achieve their goals. They find something that rings true intellectually or emotionally—it seems right, it makes sense or they think it will solve their particular problems. They look for intellectual confirmation to bolster their view. They narrow their choices to a few.

**Stage 2: Seeing What Fits**
In this stage, people research what teachers and classes are available. They may take an introductory class or weekend seminar and talk with students and teachers. They may purchase a video and try a practice on their own. They find out about the challenges involved and then must make a decision if it is something they want to do.

**Stage 3: Committing to a Class**
In this stage, people commit to a class several times a week. External factors matter: the setting of the class, the personalities of the teacher and other students.

**Stage 4: Practicing Outside of Class**
There is an ancient phrase that tai chi teachers like to quote: “The teacher leads you to the gate, but only you can pass through.” At some point, students must take tai chi unto themselves and make it their own.
That begins with practice outside of class. The teacher will show what the next learning phase is and ask students to practice in order to progress. At first beginners will feel happy to learn the basic movements and get better at them. But, the bigger challenge is to learn them well enough to feel their impacts deep inside the body and mind and develop the new inner rhythms that will lead to adopting tai chi as a daily practice.

When students begin to practice outside of class their practice is often erratic. There is no support from their teacher or other students when they encounter moments of forgetfulness or awkwardness.

There are also the very real challenges of encountering negative emotions without anyone to provide guidance. In addition, there is the inherent slowness of the process in learning and remembering the moves and feeling the benefits. The best strategy for success at this stage is for students to find a consistent time and place to practice—a time that is held apart and becomes routine and inviolable in a place where the practice cannot be interrupted.

**Stage 5: Committing to Mastery**

Students have stuck to the class long enough to learn basic movements and have developed the practice habits that bring about new internal rhythms. While practicing tai chi, there will be breakthrough moments when new plateaus are reached. In these moments students suddenly feel more agile and alive; their minds and spirits have moments of great clarity and focus; they feel moments of total relaxation combined with a new ability to handle tensions and anxieties. They recapture the sheer joy of learning they once had as children.

**Stage 6: Facing Challenges**

Chinese energy practices inherently come with inner difficulties to overcome and pass through. Plateaus may be followed by periods where not much seems to happen, the practice seems to be going nowhere and self-sabotage is likely. This is where students feel their negative karma and the effects of the accumulations of negative emotions.
They may quit just before a new summit is reached and sink back into self-destructive habits. Tai chi brings them increasingly into contact with their ego and the flow of their energy. When they begin contacting that energy, for better or for worse, they will contact areas of their emotions or thinking that may make them feel out of control. When they start traveling in unfamiliar territory they might become uncomfortable and afraid of working through these feelings. They become fearful of what they may encounter and stop practicing.

One of the warning signs of self-sabotage is disassociation. Students do the movements on automatic pilot and remain unaware of their effects. They will have to make peace with themselves before they can pass through it and head towards the sublime. With diligence and perseverance students will build a foundation that will effectively and increasingly enable their practice.

**Stage 7: Re-inspiration**

In the period that follows a plateau or an encounter with a self-destructive habit, students need approach their practice gently and find ways to challenge themselves with small successes so that their practice inspires them again.

They might try:

- Focusing on relaxing particular body parts as they do the movements, such as softening their shoulders or relaxing their stomachs.
- Making their movements more connected and smooth.
- Doing movements extremely slowly.
- Practicing one movement over and over.
- Relaxing into one posture and hold it for a minute or more.

Thinking of ways to continuously re-inspire themselves will keep the practice fresh and alive. Satisfaction must come from the inside and increasingly this is what the practice of tai chi can provide.
Tai Chi Secret #9
You can influence your “chi” in tai chi by two general methods.

Subtle Energy: Chi Development
For most of human history the higher arts of learning how chi energy works have mostly been kept secret and only shared with a privileged few. These ancient traditional barriers are beginning to break down, so that access is becoming more openly shared.

Nevertheless, the work itself can be definitely challenging. When its components are clearly spelled out, developing chi can sound deceptively easy, in much the same way that golf can sound easy—you just hit a ball through the air and tap it into a hole in the ground, right?

The basic tai chi phrase that describes the process of how human beings can influence their chi from within is called “the mind moves the chi.” This occurs in two ways.

The first is through the normal use of awareness, will and intent. This is the entry point of practice. Here your mind has a specific goal of what you want to occur. You then, without tension, gently focus your will and intent like a laser to accomplish X or Y. This is the way to acquire background, then progressively advance, step-by-step, one stage building on the next until you reach a high level of chi development.

The second is the Heart-Mind. This is the center of the energy art of tai chi. In Chinese thought the Heart-Mind is the center of consciousness in the body, located in the center of the chest next to the physical heart. Here rational intellectual thoughts and what we call the emotional feelings of the heart are one. In the Heart-Mind there is no schism between the talking head and heart-felt wisdom. The Heart-Mind is what makes human beings more than just jumbled emotions or biological thinking machines.
The Heart-Mind functions before the specific conscious intent to do something arises. The Heart-Mind merely has a general tendency or possibility. It is diffuse rather than goal-orientated. It flashes with an intelligence that shines before words and intellectual descriptions monopolize your awareness. It also gives your intention the power to function well.

Although intent or will enables you to achieve focused goals, using it exclusively is often myopic and lacking balance. For example, the conscious or unconscious sense of how to achieve your goals often leads either to positive or negative ramifications that can affect your whole being, including the inner and outer environments in which you live.

The Heart-Mind allows you to see the whole forest of consequences; using the intent only allows you to see clumps of trees. It is not at the level of intent, rather it is at the next level of the Heart-Mind that inner peace, emotional balance, intuition and spiritual insight arise.

**Tai Chi Secret #10**

“Chi” development progresses from the gross to the subtle taking time and patience.

**Gross to Subtle**

In tai chi it is said that you only can go as high as your foundation is solid and deep. Developing chi, by its very nature, progresses from the gross (which is easier) to the subtle (which is more difficult).

If you have a teacher who is willing and able to teach chi work from the start, it is most useful—even if you can’t yet feel the chi energy inside you—to imagine your chi moving in line with the specific recommendations your teacher gives, so that over time you can develop a sense of it. This can help you benefit even more from the exercises.
How chi works can be intellectually described. However, like love, it has a subtle mysterious quality that must be experienced for it truly to make sense. When encountering the chi of tai chi, it will most reliably happen through a series of basic processes on which different teachers have different views.

**Two Phases of Chi Development**

Upon recognizing what your own chi feels like, you begin two separate phases that synergistically work with each other. The first is centered on your central nervous system. Having gained the experience of putting your mind (awareness) into your muscles, you now learn to put it into your nerves. Relaxing and releasing the nerves themselves enables you to recognize the constant nervous buzz that runs through your entire nervous system.¹

Most of us are not aware of this ever-present stressful buzz because it has become so normal. This buzz is a sure sign that your nervous system is either beginning to rev up (like a car going from 0–60 miles per hour in a few seconds), or even worse, has been locked habitually into a constant rev. This rev or buzz is how stress hardens into your body like soft cement into concrete. You now focus on ways to re-soften this nervous buzz inside you and progressively relax and release it from your nerves.

With a growing capacity to relax, you move into the second phase. Here you want to release the more subtle nervous buzz of blocked chi inside all your body’s tissues. Progressively, one by one, you find and release the rev in your joints, blood flow, spinal system, internal organs and glands.

Each stage of releasing the rev from your bodily systems makes your body more awake. This takes you into more subtle and powerful experiences of what it means and feels like for your body to be fully alive. This reawakening can be quite mind-blowing.

Releasing Stagnant Chi

An essential part of recognizing and releasing the buzz inside your nervous system is to release any stagnant chi. This may happen naturally as your tai chi improves or because you learn to apply various techniques from the 16-part neigong system to specifically address stagnant chi issues.

Neigong methods within tai chi that resolve stagnant chi situations include:

- Getting the balance right between sinking your chi to the lower tantien and raising chi to the top of the head.
- Clearing stagnant energy from the central, left, right or other channels of the body.
- Working with various openings and closings so that when you are pulsing between opening and closing you don’t get stuck on either end of the pulse.

Resolving stagnant chi conditions can become major ongoing projects.

Tai Chi Secret #11

Each individual tai chi posture (movement) has specific chi flows associated with it.

Chi Flow and Tai Chi Movements

It is important to know that individual posture (movement) have specific chi flows associated with it, as do four or more linked moves. The chi flows of these linked movements have specific internal rhythms, which altogether create a certain kind of chi. Small series of movements simultaneously benefit the body’s overall chi in specific ways. Individual postures create specific chi flows within particular parts of the body.

Intermittently you may get spontaneous insights into how specific energy flows work. Initially, however, impressions are usually more vague and imprecise, or just out of
reach. You sense you know but aren’t quite sure how. You can make your chi flow in various specific ways. For example:

- Inside to outside, outside to inside
- Up to down, down to up
- Left to right, right to left
- Towards or away from the spine, lower tantien, or central channel of energy
- Within the energetic space or aura around your body
- Between the physical body and the boundary of the aura.

These energy flows in you can externally affect observers. Animals often stop and watch transfixed or come close to suck up the energy. It usually helps people who are sick feel better and often speeds up their healing process.

Chi flows may stay focused only within the physical body to the edges your skin, or may extend into the external space around your body, commonly called the bioelectric field, etheric body or aura.

**Tai Chi Secret #12**

**To supercharge your tai chi put 16 neigong components into your tai chi.**

**The 16-Part Neigong System**

The Taoist science of how energy flows work is called the 16-part neigong (also nei gung) or energy work system. These energy techniques were discovered by Taoist monks as they delved deeply into their minds and bodies during meditation.

They developed chi to maintain superior health, heal illness and realize profound inner stillness and spirituality. Later their work created neigong, which became what is often
called qigong today and formed the energetic foundation of the internal martial arts of bagua, tai chi and hsing-i.

These ancient methods, which have been kept relatively secret for millennia, have immense depth. With good teachers, they may be communicated on a surface, medium or very deep level.

Each one of the components of neigong could legitimately merit a very large book of its own. Each component forms a segment of a continuous circle, where there is no definitive starting or ending point and each is organically connected to the rest. The order is not fixed and linear only descriptive.

As it is impossible to state the precise beginning or end of a circle, so the 16 neigong components also have neither a beginning nor end point. As such, each and every time you go around the circle of 16, it becomes possible to go to a deeper, more fulfilling and beneficial level with each individual component.

The complete neigong system can be made accessible for an ordinary person, although it is generally only known or taught by tai chi martial arts masters. Any individual tai chi school may know or teach none of the components, a few of them or all of them. Some are comfortable teaching the 16-part neigong system openly, others only in secret.

- Neigong 1: Breathing Methods, from the Simple to the Complex
- Neigong 2: Moving Energy at Will
- Neigong 3: Maintaining Precise Body Alignments
- Neigong 4: Dissolving and Resolving Bloackages
- Neigong 5: Main and Secondary Acupuncture Channels
- Neigong 6: Bending and Stretching
- Neigong 7: Opening and Closing
- Neigong 8: Working with the Energies of the Etheric Body
- Neigong 9: Spiraling Chi
• Neigong 10: Absorbing and Projecting Chi
• Neigong 11: Awakening and Controlling Spinal Energies
• Neigong 12: Awakening and Controlling the Right and Left Channels
• Neigong 13: Awakening and Controlling Central Channel
• Neigong 14: Developing the Capacities and All the Uses of the Body’s Lower Tantien
• Neigong 15: Developing the Capacities and All the Uses of the Body’s Middle and Upper Tantiens
• Neigong 16: Integration

**Good Luck on Your Journey**

It is my hope that the information provided here has been helpful to you and to helping you better understand the tai chi world.

I invite you to join me at a retreat or workshop in the future. I also invite you to join my mailing list at energyarts.com. Thank you and good luck on your journey.
About Taoist Lineage Holder Bruce Frantzis

Background
Bruce Frantzis has more than forty years of experience in qigong, healing practices, meditation and martial arts having taught over 15,000 Westerners these practices.

Fluent in Chinese and Japanese, he has drawn on 16 years of intensive study in Asia to develop a systematic approach to teaching Taoist energy arts.

The Taoist lineages that Bruce Frantzis holds and teaches today are in the Water tradition of Taoism, which has received little exposure in the West. Part of his lineage empowers and directs him to bring practices based on that tradition to Westerners.

He learned the Chinese language and became immersed in the traditions of China during his training there, which spanned a decade. This has enabled him to bridge the gap between Chinese culture and the West and to bring living Taoism to Westerners in a way that they can comprehend and learn.

Frantzis studied acupuncture and worked as a qigong therapist and tui na bodyworker in medical clinics in China. In 1981 he was the first Westerner to be certified in Beijing by the People’s Republic of China to teach the complete system of Tai Chi Chuan. Frantzis has studied with some of the greatest masters of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China including Kenichi Sawai and Han Hsing Yuan (I Chuan); Wang Shu Jin and Hung I Hsiang (bagua and hsing-i); Yang Cheng Fu’s eldest son Yang Shao Jung, T. T. Liang, Lin Du Ying and Feng Zhi Qiang (Yang and Chen style tai chi).

In 1981 Frantzis was accepted as one of only two disciples of the late Taoist Sage Liu Hung Chieh. Prior to becoming a Taoist Lineage Master, Liu had been declared enlightened by the Tien Tai School of Chinese Buddhism. For several years, Frantzis studied bagua, tai chi, hsing-i, chi gung and Taoist meditation daily with Liu in Beijing.
In 1986 Liu formally passed his lineage to Frantzis, empowering him to teach bagua, tai chi and hsing-i, as well as Lao Tse’s Water method of Taoist meditation, a practice which had been virtually unavailable to Westerners.

Twenty years of prior training provided a foundation to prepare Frantzis for Liu’s teachings. At the age of twelve, Frantzis began his comprehensive study of martial arts, healing therapies and meditation. He earned black belts in judo, karate, jujitsu and aikido by the age of eighteen. To pursue advanced training, he moved to Japan, where he trained for two years with Morihei Ueshiba, the founder of aikido. He then went to China and studied Taoist energy arts for 11 years. Frantzis also spent two years in India studying advanced yoga and Tantric practices.

After the death of Liu Hung Chieh in 1986, Frantzis journeyed back to the United States. He offers workshops and instructor trainings in North American and Europe. Frantzis has personally certified more than 400 instructors worldwide. He has lectured at Oxford University in England and served as an advisor to Harvard University’s Qi Research Group.

**About Frantzis Energy Arts**

Drawing on sixteen years of training in Asia, Bruce Frantzis has developed a practical, comprehensive system of programs that can enable people of all ages and fitness levels to increase their core energy and attain vibrant health.

The Frantzis Energy Arts® system includes six primary qigong courses that, together with the Longevity Breathing® Qigong program, progressively and safely incorporate all the aspects of nei gung—the original chi cultivation (qigong) system in China invented by the Taoists.
Core Qigong Practices

The core energy practices consist of:

- **Longevity Breathing®**
- **Dragon and Tiger Medical Qigong**
- **Opening the Energy Gates of Your Body™ Qigong**
- **Marriage of Heaven and Earth™ Qigong**
- **Bend the Bow™ Spinal Qigong**
- **Spiraling Energy Body™ Qigong**
- **Gods Playing in the Clouds™ Qigong**

Books, CDs and DVDs

- **Taoist meditation series**: *Relaxing into Your Being, The Great Stillness* and *TAO of Letting Go, TAO of Letting Go* CDs
- **Qigong**: *Opening the Energy Gates of Your Body* and *Dragon and Tiger Medical Qigong Instruction Manual, Dragon and Tiger* DVDs
- **Internal martial arts**: *Tai Chi: Health for Life, The Power of Internal Martial Arts and Chi* and *Bagua and Tai Chi*
- **General**: *The Chi Revolution*

Workshops, Retreats and Instructor Training Opportunities

Bruce Frantzis is the founder of Energy Arts, Inc., based in Marin County, California. Energy Arts offers instructor certification programs, retreats and corporate and public workshops and lectures worldwide. For a complete list of Energy Arts events click here or go to www.energyarts.com.

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Health & Safety Notice
Anyone with medical, emotional or psychological problems should consult a physician or psychotherapist before embarking on these programs. Energy Arts events are not intended as a substitute for the services of a physician or psychotherapist.

The Frantzis Energy Arts® System provides the tools to increase your core energy and attain vibrant health. Energy Arts offers courses in qigong, internal martial arts, Longevity Breathing Yoga, Taoist meditation and related subjects. These programs are especially valuable for alternative and conventional health practitioners, athletes, martial artists and people looking to enhance other forms of exercise.