

Mindfulness in Tai Chi

By Ian Deavin

© Ian Deavin 2012, All Rights Reserved. Article may be downloaded for personal use only
www.sheffordtaichi.org, e-mail: ian.deavin@btconnect.com

Mindfulness is receiving a lot of attention in “alternative” circles at the moment – but it is worth reflecting that it is, and has been, a vital component of spiritual meditation and of martial arts for centuries – helping us to link mind, body and spirit on a daily basis.

For example we use the practice of mindfulness throughout Tai Chi both externally and internally by calming the body and quietening the mind. This creates a meditation – a relaxed state of awareness in mind and body where our focus – our mantra – is our body moving in the world - from quiescent standing to dynamic fluidity. We use the habit of mindfulness to keep us connected and present – grounded in reality where our subconscious can work most beneficially without interruption and to achieve in Tai Chi a level of skill that we could not do with conscious intellect alone.

So how can we practice mindfulness in Tai Chi and continue the practice elsewhere?

Calming the body enables us to feel the slightest change, the smallest movement - while quietening the mind allows us to observe and notice what is going on in and around our body. We can use this internally to adjust how we move and to compare the external effect – thus we can create a feedback between our way of moving and our actions - also generally in relation to partner work where we use mindful attention to work with a partner so as to further understand how we move and how others do so – and how people move in relation to each other. We can then develop this movement to improve our balance, ease of moving and power of action – whether on our own or when in relation to others.

Mindfulness extends beyond our Tai Chi practice as we continue the principles into all aspects of daily life where we use it in physical actions and in the intellectual and emotional areas of living, working, relating, caring, loving and co-operating in positive and negative situations. Being mindful in our mind/body/spirit enables us to move from reactive to responsive and so to develop our own humanity and personal expression.

Simply Observing and Noting are vital habits of mindfulness allied to:

Copying – (and observing and noting)

Using repetition – (observing and noting)

Seeking new opportunities to observe

Replaying actions with changes – (observing and noting)

Trying old exercises in new ways e.g. slower, faster

Trying new exercises

Looking carefully and deeply – observing ever smaller detail

Looking for connections

Looking for patterns

Looking for discontinuities and differences

Working co-operatively with partners

Seeking understanding – considering one's observations and their relationship

www.sheffordtaichi.org

www.taichiblog.org