Hooked on Speed
Tai Chi Mirror Chi Kung

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Hooked on Speed? - Looking in the rear-view mirror of life, someone or something challenging you, propelling and urging you to hurry, to go faster, more speed. Perhaps, reflected in that mirror is yet another car way too close, causing you stress, a common occurrence, visible anger, thrusting and pushing you to maintain the rush, to go faster than the speed limit. Yes but why? Hooked on speed, adrenaline junkies, addicted to the fantasy that only speed is good. What to do? Relieve the pressure to avoid the possible rage of the other driver. How? Do you speed up, break the law and join them in the hot pursuit of tension, distress and angst. Really? Is there an alternative, an antidote to this spiraling madness of speed and mindless pressure to go faster and faster? How can we learn to control anxiety and stress, to be in control, to slow down, and thus de-stress, deflect and neutralise the rage, anger and stress on the road and in life, how to chill?

Training the Mind - It is so easy to be hard and fast, but it is quite difficult to be soft, slow and controlled. Training and re-focussing the mind is paramount to making this transition from mindless haste to mindful calmness. We can begin by looking at the strategies, techniques and practices of the gentle way of *Tai Chi Mirror Chi Kung* (Tai Chi Kung for short) which uses Tai Chi martial forms as the architecture for our Chi Kung (Qigong). We can become proficient by learning how to observe, to reflect, to analyse firstly on the choreography or shape of sequence and movement. We also need to consciously and gradually reflect on underlying key principles of biomechanics relating to the efficient use of energy through a relaxed and optimal body posture, to making adjustments with alignment and movements, to understanding "substantial and insubstantial" weight shifting, to co-ordinating breathing patterns with "opening and closing" movements (Chi Kung), and thus generating vital energy and a quietened focussed mind. Importantly, we also need to know how to modify and adjust according to conditions both "internal and external" at the time of training - fitness and health levels, weather and location and always with safety. But training the mind in the gentle way needs lots and lots of focussed practice, there is no "quick-fix".

Tai Chi Kung can be practised standing or seated in a group with a leader facing the group, or solo facing a mirror or anywhere reflecting on what you already know. The rationale of training the mind involves a structured repetition of only a part of a movement or form, simplified to facilitate practice, and which over time and focused practice can increasingly become more complex, but always within the principles of learning to be able to move and function in a slow, gentle, controlled and powerful way.

Tai Chi Kung Freestyle means not following a predetermined and complex sequence as is found in the standard choreographed Tai Chi form such as the *Bejing 24 Yang Form* or *Sun 73 Form*. With the *Tai Chi Kung Freestyle Form*, as practised in class with guidelines outlined below, you can develop the confidence to practise by and for yourself, practicing what you can remember, being analytical about the shape to simplify, the upper or lower body, left and or right, in any sequence, standing or seated, physically or only in the mind, keeping it simple. Any simplified part of a standard form or sequence can be thus practised without feeling guilt at not remembering what is choreographed to come next. You can learn to be creative using your own mind, following the above key principles.

Practicing Tai Chi Kung Freestyle as a non-standard form or sequence of movements aims to create an awareness and confidence that focused practice does not have to rely on remembering a specific choreographed sequence such as the standard form. There is no need to be a slave to any predetermined sequence. The overall effect is that the freestyle sequence becomes a new form each time with its own rhythm and speed, with drills and repetition serving the rationale of focused practice.

Mirror-Method of Teaching and Learning –The practical method used in teaching and learning to train the mind to control the body is "mirror copying and following". It is a common and mistaken assumption that everyone has much the same cognitive ability to "copy and follow". The cognitive skills required in Tai Chi Kung do not rely on memory of any sequence, but on a cognitive ability to transform movement into a meaningfully connected mind and body experience - again this is something that is often taken for granted in both teaching and learning. A mindful, intelligent and creative approach to teaching and learning using the mirror-method can easily and efficiently assist in learning how to copy and follow as a co- and/or pre-requisite to movement. This is a very effective, creative and enjoyable method of teaching you how to learn and teach yourself.

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GUIDELINES for Practicing Tai Chi Kung Freestyle

Relaxed Performance – Standing or seated, soft gentle background music will add to the enjoyment of a relaxed and focused performance. The magic mantra and rules of generating a "flowing sequence" is - "do not sweat the small stuff", "let the detail of the bits and pieces go", "just go with the flow", "enjoy the flow do not look for perfection", and "the only bad form is one that will hurt yourself or someone else". Three Free Rules are important to encourage relaxation and confidence – "*Keep breathing, Do not fall over, or fall off the chair, Keep smiling* - everything else is a bonus". Which means practise what you can see (group) or you can remember (solo) - take responsibility for yourself in only doing something that is safe, accepting that making errors is a normal part of learning, and those who never make mistakes, never learn anything. When stress creeps in, remember the Magic Mantra and the Three Free Rules!!

Wu Chi (Wuji) – Stillness, Mind-Body Focus - Start and finish any sequence with the Wu Chi (stillness) to assist in the mind-body focus. Wu Chi become the "bookends", the beginning and end of a sequence as "stillness" with what is in between being Tai Chi as "movement". Start with a simple "posture check", checklist starting with - Golden thread - optimal alignment; Shoulders relaxed; Spine un-slumped – pull up and down; Hips loosened with tail-bone gently forward; Knees softened; Feet and Ankles - reflect on optimal weight distribution of feet – midway between centre to ball of foot. Follow with a couple of slow and deep breaths using abdominal breathing technique.

Sequence Training Mantra – "What-comes-next" - Just before commencing, try to visualise "what-comes-next" in words, pictures or both, how does a sequence begin and then use this as a strategy, as a mantra throughout the sequence where possible within each set of six repetitions. Start with Tai Chi salute, slowly lowering both arms to side of body. Flow then can be into any form selected with each form practised both sides either alternating from left and right or three repetitions one side then three repetitions the other side. It is a matter of choice if each side is completed three times before shifting to the other side or alternating between left and right.

The strategy of efficient learning is to shift the mind from passive to active, to be thinking ahead "what-comes-next" being the mantra. The selection of a form is random, but once a form is chosen begin to perform the simple shapes and movements of the first repetition, to process this into mirror movements with the second and subsequent repetitions to complete that part of the six set sequence.

First Movement – Start the sequence with something simple, possibly with no shifting of feet, but can include weight transfer based on what upper body is doing. Each form or movement is repeated three times on each side, that is, both left and right. Nearing the completion of the six-set repetitions, switch the mind to what form do you the leader/teacher want to practise next. At the end of that six-set sequence then shift in a slow, controlled way to this next set of six repetitions, deciding in advance based on a real-time understanding of the ability of the group, as to how to structure the flow of the repetitions, such as completing one side first then swapping to other side or alternating.

Subsequent Movements – Each movement is both simple and consistent with the gentle and safe way of moving, ensuring that the transition from one set of movements to the next is smooth, slow, controlled and consistent with the weight shifting principle (substantial/ insubstantial).

Final Movement – Finish with Tai Chi salute, "count to three and enjoy the Wu Chi" using same "posture check", breathing and relax as at beginning. Do not rush the finish, experience the discipline and mutual respect of anyone else practicing in a group.

Develop the Confidence to practise for and by yourself, do not resort to the "excuse" for not practicing anything because not remembering the complex movements and sequence of the standard forms and sequences you may be learning. Remember that practicing through the techniques of Tai Chi Kung Freestyle means that you do not have to rely on remembering a specific choreographed sequence such as the standard Tai Chi form.

Don't be a slave to any predetermined sequence. Let the freestyle sequence of slow and controlled deflect anxiety and stress, training your mind to find a rhythm and pattern that neutralises anger, stress and pain reflected in the rear-view mirror of life. Be motivated through the discipline of sustained effort, drills, repetition with focused practice, don't become a victim to rage in life or on the road and hooked on speed. Go with the flow, more power to you!!

For a detailed outline of *Tai Chi Kung* see also - *Gentle Way of Tai Chi Kung* by Dr Denis Arthy © Extracted from: *Australia Dreaming: Tribute to the Ancestors Elva Arthy & Dr Denis Arthy (5th Ed)* – 1 February 2019