

INTRODUCTION



T'ai Chi is an internal martial art and health exercise system based on the ancient Chinese Tao (pronounced Dao) philosophy. An oral tradition over 5000 years old, Taoism is widely known for its emphasis on nature, harmony, balance, Chi-energy and mysticism.

Just as yoga has been an indispensable part of Indian culture for over 2000 years, T'ai Chi has been considered the pearl of Chinese culture for centuries. To the Chinese, the pearl is not only synonymous with great beauty and value but also symbolic of ancient wisdom.

Today, T'ai Chi helps people all over the world to become physically fit, mentally relaxed and prepared to guard against possible attack. Because T'ai Chi has a deep philosophical and spiritual perspective, it gets more interesting and fulfilling as the years roll by. People in China start when they are five years old and continue to practice it well into their old age.

The purpose of writing this book is to provide readers with an insight into this fascinating art, which is a training of both mind and body. Today, there is a pressing need for people to learn a discipline such as T'ai Chi, which has so many physical and spiritual benefits especially in the later years, when the weakening effects of ageing cannot be denied. Amidst life's imperfections, T'ai Chi gives you peace of mind that can see you through the hard times.

It was only when I was totally convinced that T'ai Chi is a lifelong, challenging, learning experience that I put pen to paper, in the hope of bringing T'ai Chi's many benefits within the reach of the common man. All the thoughts expressed in this book have perhaps been thought before, but I have contemplated upon them deeply and honestly, until they have taken root in my personal experience.

People I have talked to for more than a few minutes, know at least one thing about me: that I have been a student of Dr. Bob Bacher

and the Chinese Grandmaster Zhu Tian Cai. That's because I am deeply proud of both. The experience of learning the 'Chen' style from them has empowered me to live life completely.

'Chen' is the original form of T'ai Chi from which all other styles, including the more popular 'Yang' style, have been derived. Compared to the Yang style, which left the village in the 19th century, the Chen style did so only recently. This can be attributed to the fact that Chen Fa Ke (1887-1957), who is considered to be the father of the modern Chen style, took this style to Beijing only in the first half of the 20th century.

Personally, T'ai Chi is a means of cultivating friendship and extending love to people. It would be unthinkable not to make the effort to spread its benefits. It is through this book that I want to present the healing aspects of T'ai Chi and get its message across to people.

THE JOURNEY THAT PUT MY LIFE TOGETHER



Martial arts became an integral part of my life in 1978, when I was 15 years of age. It was a failure in the 2nd-degree black belt test in 1987 that spurred me to undertake a trip to Okinawa, the land of karate, and study a new style – Okinawan Shorin-Ryu Karate. I was inspired by *The Essence of Okinawan Karate-Do* written by Grandmaster Shoshin Nagamine. The trip to Okinawa was not easy, and it took me a year to convince Grandmaster Nagamine to accept me as his student.

The first time I went to Grandmaster Shoshin Nagamine's *dojo* (practice hall), I was in an agony of apprehension. Here, I was a mere 1st-degree black belt in the presence of an Okinawan god, holder of the 10th-degree black belt, the highest rank in the world of karate. My fears and apprehension quickly disappeared as he inspired faith at first sight. He made me feel at home by being appreciative of my attempts to learn a few moves from his book, prior to the visit. Later on, I realised that there is a sound philosophy behind the word 'Shoshin'. It means 'the beginner's mind' – actually an empty mind, a ready mind. If your mind is empty, it is open to everything; it is always ready for anything. In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities; in the expert's mind, there are few.

Of the three sessions that I attended every day, I found the first session with the Grandmaster the most wonderful yet most difficult, as it challenged my ability to sit still for 45 minutes in *zazen* (sitting meditation). With eyes half-closed, half-open, as I sat on a pillow in the half-lotus position, my legs went numb in 15 minutes. The mind became restless and uncontrollable. I felt frozen. But the result – a feeling of total serenity swept through my body. It awakened the sleeping man in me and helped me form the foundation necessary to go higher in martial arts. *Zazen* was followed by *kata*, various sequences of offensive and defensive techniques against imaginary adversaries.

For the next 30 days, I would wake at 6 a.m. and would remake my bed in order to go to sleep, totally exhausted but immensely content, at around 1:00 a.m. every night. What strengthened my resolve to take every difficulty in my stride and practice diligently, was the following precept that was put up on the wall as a guide to what karate truly is – “He is human and so am I. If he practices three times, I must practice six times.” An inner voice told me I could do it. I grasped the essence of 14 *kata* (Shorin-Ryu has 18) during my first month.

During the last session, Grandmaster Nagamine drew a circle and asked me to stand within the circle and perform 14 *kata* back to back, expecting me to return to the same spot from where I began. I did each *kata* as if my life depended on it. I felt strong and my *kiai* (a short, shrill shriek) released all the built-up tension. When I came back to the same spot thirteen out of the fourteen times, Nagamine Sensei smiled and called the class and me to line up. I had passed my 3rd-degree black belt.

30 days seemed like a lifetime, but I had learnt much about the philosophy, the tradition, the etiquette and the manner in which people in Okinawa approached and trained in karate. I did not see giants or gods performing supernatural feats of strength. I saw ordinary people who trained diligently, driven by the desire to make a difference in the lives of those with whom they came in contact. This national trait has enabled them to achieve the prosperity that Japan now enjoys.

The subsequent trips from 1990 to 1997 saw me learning the last four advanced *kata*, and also passing the tests for 4th and 5th-degree black belt, conducted by the Grandmaster himself. He died in 1997 and I lost my zest to continue, even though I could have gone further. I will forever remain grateful to him for arousing my curiosity and interest while teaching me the essence of Okinawan Karate-Do.

In 1998, I was introduced to Chen style T'ai Chi by Dr. Bob Bacher in Freising, Germany. A Doctor of Chiropractic, Dr. Bacher has studied T'ai Chi and Hatha Yoga for many years. He became my first teacher of T'ai Chi. I learnt T'ai Chi from a medical as well as a martial art standpoint, thanks to his background. Becoming a student of Bob was like finding a hidden treasure. I felt I had found the most medically sound and logical way of keeping my body in peak condition.

The journey that put my life together

Dr. Bacher's enthusiasm and unflinching faith in the efficacy of the system, left a deep imprint on my mind. Although I spent only a short while with Dr. Bacher during my first visit, I knew then that this was what I wanted to do with my life. This faith has turned into conviction in subsequent years, as I have travelled to many parts of the world including USA, Singapore and China to learn. I consider myself lucky and privileged to have been able to study T'ai Chi in the Chen Family Village, China, the birthplace of this art, under the strict guidance of Grandmaster Zhu Tian Cai. He is the 19th Linear Successor to the Chen Family T'ai Chi.



The author with Grandmaster Zhu Tian Cai in Chenjiagou village

I must have practiced T'ai Chi for a year when I began to feel my body undergoing profound changes. My knee injury, sustained because of excessive kicking in karate, healed completely. My lungs, which had taken a beating as a result of my tendency to train to the point of strain, felt stronger. Standing Meditation Posture enabled me to function with six hours of sleep instead of eight. The slow motion movements helped me to take in more air, improving my respiratory and digestive system. As a result, my skin became clearer, softer and tighter.