

Introduction to Tai Chi and Qigong Fundamentals Syllabus
OLLI Spring Semester 2023

As the course title suggests, this class will explore some of the diverse practices which make up tai chi and qigong. During the 8-week class we will lead participants in a series of exercises which will familiarize them with these ancient health and longevity practices. While there are many “flavors” of tai chi and qigong which have developed over the centuries, the exercises which we will present are common to most practitioners the world over. The exercises may be broadly grouped into three categories:

1) Tai Chi Form – This is a series of movements performed slowly and in sequence which most people recognize as Tai Chi. Although many variations have arisen from the original five family styles, the Chen family style which we practice is representative. We will learn an 8-movement form which mirrors common everyday movements. This form was compiled to reinforce good body mechanics and promote clear mind/body connections. Practiced with stern seriousness by many Westerners, doing the form in the East is often referred to as “playing” tai chi. – “Try not to try too hard, it’s just a lovely ride.”- James Taylor.

2) Moving Qigong – This practice is a very close cousin of tai chi form, however where the form involves pivoting, changing direction and stepping, moving qigong is done for the most part with a fixed stance and little or no footwork. In addition, these exercises are performed individually or in a short sequence. The relative simplicity of this practice allows the beginner to focus less on the physical aspect and more on connecting mind and body with intent or imagery. We will include exercises specifically for balance in this category.

3) Static Qigong – Also referred to as wuji, meditation or mindfulness, we will use the terms interchangeably. Wuji, meaning literally “no thing,” is performed in a standing, sitting or lying down position. The Chinese aphorism “Wuji is the mother of tai chi.” expresses its importance as the very foundation of tai chi. It was often held as a secret by “masters” who would only share it with their chosen students. The lack of obvious, physical “technique” presents a challenge for most beginners, however gentle persistence will reward the alert adventurer.

During the weekly classes, each of the three categories of exercise will be practiced in 2 sessions of 10 to 20 minutes duration. The exact length of the individual sessions will depend on the interest and weekly progress of the participants.

Overall, we practice not to become experts at the qigong and tai chi exercises, but to become more aware of ourselves and our capacity for an energetic life. We will encourage remaining curious and open to the unfolding moment rather than achievement of imaginary expertise. As our practice deepens we ask less and less, “Are we there yet?” and more often we ask, “Am I here now?” – “No matter where you go, there you are.” – Confucius.

Instruction will emphasize the primacy of a relaxed, happy and self-confident attitude rather than the “correct” mimicking of technique. Take it easy. You already know all the “secrets” of these practices, you have just been neglecting them. You have the innate capacity for a life full of energy and quiet serenity. We offer a quote from the Tao Te Ching by Lao Tzu: “Less and less do you need to force things until finally you arrive at non-action. When nothing is done, nothing is left undone.” Enjoy your journey of rediscovery!