

Tai Ji Quan practise and Parkinson's disease

Prof. Roberto Benetti

Since 2006 I and other qualified members of P.M.C. Association, founded by me more than 10 years ago, have been regularly running Tai Ji Quan classes with Parkinson's disease patients in Vicenza, Italy.



Twice a week, from October till June, a number of patients, varying from 30 to 40, regularly attend the one and half hour lessons. Lessons are organised as follows: first 45', study of Nei Gong or Aware Movement, which can be practised by those having ambulation problems as exercises can be practised seated, too; second 45', study of the basic footwork movements of Yang Style Tai Ji and study of the 24 Form and Qigong.

More and more scientific studies show that regular Tai Ji training improves postural stability and walking ability, and reduces falls in patients with moderate Parkinson's disease.

Tai Ji Quan is a very powerful instrument for everybody, mainly for those who suffer from a neurological disorder characterized by problems with movement. In fact, the TJQ training regards the physical, energetic and mental aspect, performing its beneficial effects at **physical level** by loosening the joints and strengthening the body, at **energetic level** by developing a greater internal vigour and at **mental level** by increasing the ability to attention and concentration.

The approach to this topic is that there are no "ill people" but individuals with a greater or lower freedom of movement or of elaboration, due to impediments of internal or external nature, which limit the practise of any discipline.

Starting from these preliminary remarks, the discipline you are practising, in this case Tai Ji Quan, has to be precisely defined, by adapting its contents and application to the human and social context.

The application of a rigorous and scientific method in teaching and in the transmission of Tai Ji Quan enables to grasp and elaborate the principle of interior lack of harmony in order to be later able, through appropriate guided exercises, to "adjust" and "set" your man-system so as to get closer and closer to the harmony of the situations in body movement and not only.

The basic principle in Tai Ji movement concerns the concept of sphericity (or roundness) of the gesture, i.e. the development in the space of any body movement. The fundamental exercises (Nei Gong in Chinese can be translated as "internal work" or "aware movement") have been studied according to a systemic vision of the sphere: presence of a central axis, development around this of the three dimensional layers in the space and related pairs of forces: up-down, front-back, right-left.

The methodical application in each body part of this principle slowly builds up the process of awareness of the gesture. You move therefore from the logic of the product or of the result (to know how to make a gesture, an exercise) to the logic of process (knowledge of the process of how to perform the gesture and understand its correctness based on the principle of polarity) in order to develop a greater awareness of one's own being.

This approach enables to leave the frustrating logic not to be able to command one's own body when performing a certain movement, typical situation of the Parkinson sick person, and by the logic of the process, i.e. by small steps, to reach a correct result, parameterised to one's possibilities of the moment.

The slow gesture, measured and characterised by a listening attitude, typical of Tai Ji, makes possible a "mapping" of one's own integrated system body-energy-mind, by the repetition of body movements developing with opposing powers in the three fundamental planes.



Each class goes through all above mentioned criteria by paying attention to two fundamental moments: aware movement suitable for everybody, even for those who have ambulation problems and the application of the exercises in movement by the walking coming from the Tai Ji Quan movements, which combined together build up the so-called "Form". At the end of each group of classes (approx. once a month) simple exercises are suggested to be performed individually without contraindications.

The main benefits of this approach are:

- Improvement of overall posture
- Better perception of the forces both in static stance and in movement
- Development of a greater awareness
- Higher confidence when moving in the space
- Better balance or reduced chances to lose it
- Higher self-esteem
- Lower sense of handicap
- Higher mental clarity

But a good discipline is not enough to reach good results with Tai Ji Quan. You need:

- Prepared and qualified teachers both under a technical and a methodological-teaching point of view
- Good relational abilities in specific teaching rooms
- Scientific approach to the discipline
- Patience with yourself and firmness when applying the Tai Ji Quan principles
- Clarity of speech and ability to communicate by metaphors

The verbal speech used during lessons has to stimulate the aware listening and performing ability of the movement. Important for the sick person is not "to remember" movements or a drill, but "to fix" the Principles which are the base of the fundamental movements of the human body in the space so as to make them integral part ("normal") in one's daily life.

Roberto Benetti

teaches professionally and practises Tai Ji Quan, Chen and Yang style, Tai Ji sword, Liu He Xin Yi Quan, Qi Gong, Tuishou and Tuina.

Following his scientific training, he deals particularly with teaching methodologies and with the

relationship between Science and Holistic Disciplines.

Besides Chinese Martial Arts, he teaches Mathematics and Statistics.

He has been practising Tai Ji Quan for more than 25 years and teaching it for 15 years in Italy and abroad.

In his endless research he deepens his practice by attending regular seminars in China and abroad, studying with some of the most important Eastern and Western masters.

He holds seminars and lectures and collaborates with major Italian and European magazines.

He teaches "Didactics and Techniques of Tai Ji Quan" in the master-level course of Preventive and Adapted Physical Activity at the Medicine Faculty of Padua University.

He published many articles with specialized doctors of Recovery and Functional Re-education on medical journals.

Since 2006 he has been teaching Tai Ji Quan to Parkinson's disease patients through a qualified approach both from a technical and a methodological-didactical point of view.

He is the author of essays, articles and didactic videos.

He is founder member and Secretary of WACIMA (Worldwide Association for Internal Martial Arts) and he is a member of the Executive Committee of the TCFE.