



INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS LEE FAMILY TAI CHI?

NOW, MORE THAN EVER, WE ALL NEED TO FIND A WAY TO BRING BALANCE INTO OUR LIVES. From career, family, and social demands to the increased volume and way we receive information, the pace of modern life can easily overcome our abilities to cope in a healthy way. So where do we look for this balance in current times? I believe one of the best sources can be found in the past.

For most of my life, I have practiced Lee Family Tai Chi. Tai Chi was an integral part of my martial arts training that began at the age of eight with my grandfather, Grandmaster Ie Chang Ming. As most young people do, I was more interested in the active, physical side of the training or “bouncing off the walls” as I like to tell my students now. But as I grew older, I started to realize the importance of what we call the “internal” side of the practice, including Tai Chi.

If you asked me to write a definition of Tai Chi for the dictionary, it might read something like this: Tai Chi is an exercise system that consists of several linked movements, performed slowly and continuously, in tandem with controlled breathing techniques, based on a philosophy of achieving harmony, unification, and balance. Tai Chi trains us to think and move as “one” while developing a greater awareness of mind, body, and spirit—a great *inner balance*.

The Great Balancing

In short, I like to describe Tai Chi practice as the “Great Balancing.” The full name of the style we practice is Lee Chia Tai Chi Chuan or the Lee Family Tai Chi Form. Some descriptions of Tai Chi Chuan use terms like “meditation

in motion” or more literal translations like the martial arts sounding “Grand Ultimate Fist.” Those are accurate labels, but I like the “Great Balancing” as I believe that the Lee Family form is more focused on health rather than martial arts. In fact, the translation of the “Chi” character in Tai Chi can be as a pole or an axis, as in the North Pole (Pei Chi) or South Pole (Nan Chi), the axis upon which the earth rotates in balance. In my opinion, Lee Family Tai Chi helps you more effectively create a balance of inner calm, energy/ Chi flow, equilibrium, and awareness than any other exercise program. The focus of this book and video is using Lee Family Tai Chi for the Ultimate Health.

Don't Forget This One

One of the most important pieces of advice I received from my grandfather was him telling me “not to forget this one” just before I left my home in Bandung, Indonesia for the United States in 1968. He was referring to Lee Family Tai Chi. Grandmaster Ie and my other teachers at his school all practiced Lee Family Tai Chi daily and often as a warm-up



My grandfather and teacher, Ie Chang Ming

for or cool-down from their other martial arts training. His words and actions have left a strong imprint on both my own practice and on my approach to teaching since then.

I initially only taught Lee Family Tai Chi to my advanced martial arts students. Part of that was because Tai Chi and other meditative arts were not very well known or practiced in western culture

when I started teaching in the United States in 1968. The way they had often been presented up to that point was as something mystical—unproven by western science—and I didn't want to come across as a “snake oil salesman” to those who had not been exposed to this type of study. My advanced students had already experienced the benefits of internal, or “Nei Kung” training and we also applied the principles of Tai Chi's use of force and heightened awareness in our sparring, so I kept it in-house for many years.

Gradually, the benefits of meditation became more widespread. Studies from well-respected science and medical institutions began to emerge and, just as importantly, people sought better ways to deal with stress, aching joints, mental issues, and aging. I cautiously began to offer Tai Chi and other internal classes like Chi Kung to non-martial arts students. I quickly realized that not only was there a great demand for this type of knowledge, but I was able to directly see the health benefits in action outside of the martial arts classroom.

So what are some of these benefits? Improvements in:

- Core postural strength
- Physical balance
- Flexibility
- Memory loss and dementia
- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Type 2 diabetes
- COPD
- Hypertension

Studies have also shown that Tai Chi practice can:

- increase our ability to handle stress
- help reduce unwanted side effects of chemotherapy and radiation
- help prevent falls in older adults
- slow the effects of osteoarthritis
- improve abilities of those with Parkinson's disease
- help fight depression and anxiety

In much older times in China, before modern medicine, Chi Kung practices were one of the few ways that people could treat illnesses and injury. As it was then, Tai Chi can also be a type of diagnostic tool that lets you know where problems are developing, so you can put more emphasis there in your training or choose to see a physician.

Of course, there are no magical cures and we are all born with our own genetic predisposition, which may make us more susceptible to certain health problems. We do have the choice, however, to improve the genetic “hand we are dealt” by maintaining a healthy lifestyle, diet, exercising and working on our emotional and mental well-being. I believe that Lee Family Tai Chi is a great way to achieve those goals. As I tell my classes, if you can do Lee Tai Chi in the morning, you are not going to “go down” that day.

Other Benefits

There are several Tai Chi family styles practiced today. These are some of the practical benefits to the Lee Family Tai Chi’s particular style.

- It does not require a lot of floor space to perform. We often use a circular shape to describe the practice area. The diameter of this circular boundary is about the same as the person’s height. For example, a six-foot man would cover a circular area about six feet in diameter. You don’t have to move furniture and can even do it in a hotel room if you are traveling.
- It doesn’t require a long time commitment, so it is easier to incorporate into our busy lifestyles. The Lee Family form can be done in 12-15 minutes depending upon the pace. And if you desire a longer practice time, the Lee Family form’s duration is easily doubled by just repeating the form.
- Through practice, you can develop the ability to focus or “target” your vital organs or other areas of your body to improve either specific health issues or your overall wellness.

You Will Be Rewarded

During my time teaching Lee Family Tai Chi, the number one request from my students has been to produce a book and a video to aid in the practice and understanding of this excellent exercise system. After many years of effort towards its creation, I am now proud to be able to offer them to you.

People of all ages, both men and women, and individuals with a range of physical abilities and health issues, attend my classes. I don't believe Tai Chi discriminates. I would love to be able to go back in time and ask its creators what it was that they were thinking when they developed Lee Family Tai Chi. Even though I don't know exactly what they would say, I am convinced that they wanted to find a way to improve the lives of others in what was surely a rugged time to live. I also think they asked a lot of those to whom they taught it—to spend the time, the effort and the energy it would take to acquire something of value. I strongly believe that if you invest *your* time in practicing Lee Family Tai Chi, you too will be rewarded.

