

# Tai Chi Chuan

as the Masters-of-the-next-level see it

*The way of movement*

for beginners

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## Shifu Damir Tenodi



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## Master Ananda

The Master-of-the-next-level, Master Ananda, is a mystic, who opts for anonymity.

Working with a core group of aspirant-participants, Master Ananda provides teaching, writings and discourses on mysticism—as a method of attaining self-knowledge by recognising the impulse from the soul, and fostering that line of communication.

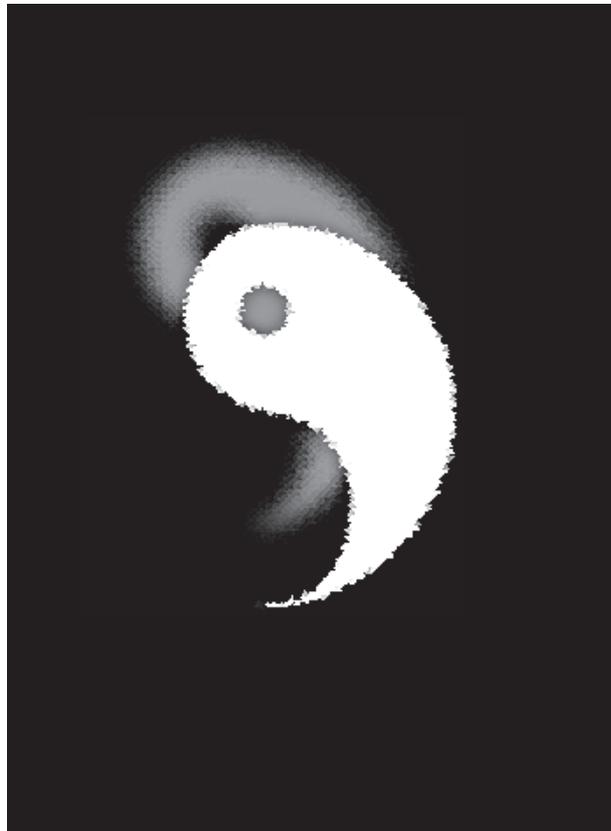
For the mystic, it is an imperative to cultivate the mind and nurture the intellect, even more so than it is for those who believe intellect to be an end in itself. The mystic's priority is the Experience; Experience being the experience of the soul, which becomes accessible through the rational mind, thus illuminating daily life.

In Master Ananda's teaching, through the central idea of the Endeavour, defined as a multiple, three-directional effort for Self, Society and the Source, we find instructions and guidelines for modern-day mystics, or aspirants, in their sustained effort towards Self-development.

Shifu Damir Tenodi

# **DESPERATELY SEEKING YIN**

exploring the neglected dimensions of modern tai chi chuan



with commentaries by Master Ananda

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...Tai chi chuan was thus consciously and intentionally created as a **rendering and elevating engine** to enable *the earth—through man—to reach up and kiss heaven...*

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In Anan-Do integral tai chi chuan and chi kung teaching, there are no grades, belts or titles, other than the minimum required to establish a basic structure. Although the Masters-of-the-next-level do have more elaborate gradation (grouping people as potential aspirants, aspirant-trainees, aspirant-beginners, and aspirant-participants), they see people generally as either beginners or aspirants.

The beginner group includes true beginners, skillwise. But it can also include advanced students, black belts, masters, grandmasters, even keepers of the styles—all those who keep perfecting a single aspect of their work or life, who have not (or not yet) chosen to work towards completion, through complementary methods.

An aspirant can evolve out of a beginner of any of these kinds. Aspirants are those who, having sensed the impulse from the soul, have chosen to strive for completion and started working towards attaining wholeness.

The term 'master' is commonly written with a capital M, but in this book, I use lower case (with no disrespect intended) for masters of all the types and degrees we come across, reserving the capital M solely for Masters-of-the-next-level, such as Master Ananda and Master Ido.



## What do I want my students to learn?

*I want them to learn  
that Life is somewhere else.  
It's not in our practice of tai chi chuan  
It's not in our family  
in our careers  
or in our friendships.*

*It is in all of those  
and none of those  
until  
we find that missing ingredient  
through which it all falls into place,  
and forms a complete, well-balanced Endeavour.*

*In the search for that ingredient,  
thanks to my work with  
Master Ananda,  
I can be of help...*



## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank:

- ☐ the masters of skill: Tsao Detsong, Chen Xiaowang and Chen Yongfa
- ☐ the masters of play: Gego the parrot and Smucek the cat
- ☐ the master of the brush, Esad Muftic, whose painting of a dead bird in a girl's arms hangs on my wall as a reminder of the fragility of life
- ☐ the master of verse, Enes Kisevic, who can sum up the greatest truths in a few words:

*This is not me,  
this is you.  
It is your fire  
that sets me aglow.*

*To us, my love,  
only belongs  
what upon others  
we bestow.*

Thanks also

- ☐ to Hajra, the tortured woman from Srebrenica, whose lovely face has become a face of pain, for helping me understand the anguish of the world
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- ☐ to Boro Ranitovic who, every time I visit Zagreb, puts his life on hold, and helps me with my work
- ☐ and to Phillip Mills for his valuable feedback.

\*\*\*\*\*

Master Ananda teaches me the importance of duality in our engagements, of balancing the material with the spiritual, and of threefold living, balancing our efforts *for Self—for Society—for the Source*. He also teaches me about the fourfold, fivefold and sevenfold nature of life. He shows me the innumerable facets of the Endeavour—thus making me humble. He reveals the role of an aspirant, how every word and deed reverberates to the furthest corners of time and space—thus making me responsible. He tells me of the world's sorrow, the way we are conditioned—thus making me patient. He tells me there is no room for compromise in the Endeavour—thus making me determined.

Master Ananda teaches me right discrimination and judgement, the ways of continuous re-examination in order to recognise what we can and should be in every given moment—thus making me cautious.

*Set me as a sign on your heart, as a seal on your soul.*

To Master Ananda, I do not give thanks in words.  
My commitment to his teaching is confirmed by my life.

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## **This book is dedicated to my students**

**The past, present and future ones  
The casual, the temporary and the permanent  
The superficial, the moderate and the profound.**

Most of my students are ordinary people. Most of them are tired, worried, stressed out by the demands of their families and careers. These I teach at the level of therapeutic arts. They learn tai chi chuan and chi kung for health and relaxation and fitness, as a counterbalance to their busy lifestyles. After just a few weeks there are good results, they become more relaxed and somehow perk up. They are interested in maintaining that state, they attend classes regularly and are quite happy to keep it at that.

*But I do not mention the Endeavour.*

Some of my students, after a few months of practice, wish to go slightly beyond mere physical movement. Those I teach the philosophy and principles of Yin and Yang, about the circulation of chi energy and how it is stimulated, generated, controlled and directed.

*But I do not talk to them about the Endeavour.*

Sometimes, there are serious, mature, well-trained students who emerge, claiming to wish to reach further and beyond. If Master Ananda acknowledges their potential, he nominates such students as aspirant-trainees.

*Them I teach about the Endeavour.*

Regardless of the point you presently find yourself at, this book can help you to establish your own practice, by seeing more clearly all the available options.

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# Through one to all and through any to One

**From hard to soft**  
**From crude to refined**  
**From coarse to delicate**  
**From rough to fine**  
**From obvious to subtle**

All the martial and therapeutic arts belong to the same big family.

This diverse family is composed of four main types of practice:

**karate** and **kung fu**—hard styles or external schools;

**tai chi chuan**, **chi kung**, **pakua chang** and **hsing i**—soft styles or internal schools;

**yoga**—a complete system in itself, encompassing meditation and constituting a much better balanced method than any one of the hard or soft styles; and

**meditation**—a fully internalised method, as formulated in raja yoga and Tibetan Buddhism.

All are based on the same principles, with the same goal in mind, thus sharing the same intention and the same purpose: to sensitise us, increasing our responsiveness to the inner, higher realms.

Different people will have different entry points into this family. But it helps to keep in mind that all these methods, no matter how fundamentally different they might appear, share the same basic precepts. Each of these methods, by concentrating on a particular aspect, attempts to awaken our other aspects, nudging us to realise our full potential. Once we awaken and start paying equal attention to all of our aspects, we can say that we are striving for completeness.

The differences between the systems are most obvious at the lowest level, but the further we advance, the closer they get. Viewed at the outer points, they might seem irreconcilably different, but they lead to the same inner circle.

This explains why it is beginners who are the most passionate defenders of their own chosen art, quick to attack any other style. The more advanced a master, the more tolerant and positive his attitude towards other methods. As for the Masters-of-the-next-level, we find them working in perfect accord. This is because beginners will concentrate on the *differences* of their choices, whereas masters will recognise the *sameness*.



If we choose wisely, whichever style we decide to incorporate in our daily practice will open up the possibilities for self-transformation.

When we watch a top master performing a hard style such as karate or kung fu, it is easy to see its **powerful beauty**.

Watching a top master going through a tai chi chuan or chi kung form, we can see its **graceful beauty**.

In yoga, we find a **refined beauty**.

In meditation, we have a **concealed beauty**.

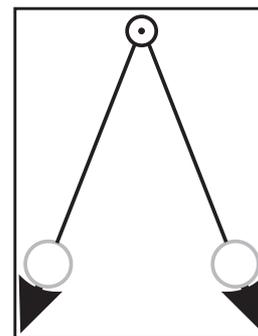
But the same core beauty is in them all. What differs is the magnitude of the pendulum swing (the external movement) propelling us towards the Centre.

## The mechanics of the hard styles

In karate and kung fu, or most fighting skills, we find the widest arc, from one extreme to the other. From a spectator's point of view, these skills are the most interesting to watch.

Karate is mainly favoured by young, energetic, ambitious people, ambitious in a worldly sense—those who want to live fast, to reach far, to get the most as quickly as possible. Hard styles can provide all of that. Karate and similar arts, with their strong emphasis on combat and competition, are best employed for **horizontal unification**, the swift regulation of our lower aspects. The intention is to provide the greatest momentum, 'launching' the practitioner fast and far.

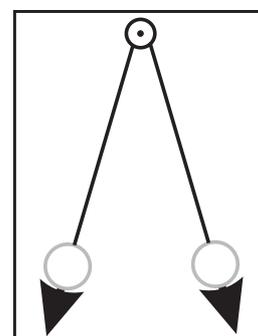
In the early stages of practice, the emphasis is mainly on the **physical body**.



## The mechanics of the soft styles

Of the four main types of practice, the soft styles—tai chi chuan, chi kung, pakua chang and hsing-i—have the widest appeal. Since they are only moderately strenuous and not overly demanding in terms of time, effort or space, they seem suitable for everyone. As they combine a physical workout with an energy workout, they can help bring about a **combined horizontal and vertical unification**.

Their pendulum moves through an arc less drastic than that of a hard style like karate, and the graceful beauty of these skills has attracted millions of practitioners. The emphasis on combat applications is still maintained only in the push-hands and fa-jing techniques. This lack of a competitive aspect also has its drawbacks: having no grades or belts, and with no benchmarks or judging systems to grade the students against, there is no actual qualification and no hierarchy, such as clearly exists in karate.



You can, for example, start tai chi chuan today and declare yourself a master in three months time, and who is there to say you are not? With no set criteria, this is proving to be an attractive area for mediocre sportsmen to resort to. Nevertheless, the soft styles can provide momentum for more balanced living.

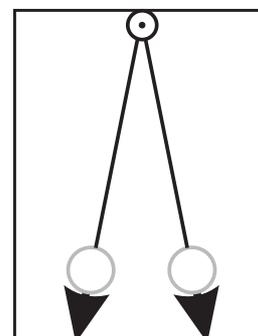
The main emphasis is on the **etheric body**.

## The mechanics of yoga

When we speak of yoga, we most often mean hatha yoga, though hatha is just one segment of the yoga-system eight-fold path. If hatha is viewed in its wider context, we notice that its gentle stretching leads a practitioner to self-observation; its focus on the central column, where the seven chakras are situated, can direct a practitioner inward much more effectively than any one of the hard or soft martial styles. In yoga, too, the emphasis is **equally on the horizontal and vertical union**.

The pendulum swings through a gentle curve, which reveals its refined beauty. The notion of combat or competition is completely absent, and one feels fairly isolated in the practice. In this system, our attention is, from day one, drawn to a wider range of practices, which results in what might appear to be a slow progress, but a well-balanced one.

In yoga, the emphasis is on the **astral body**.



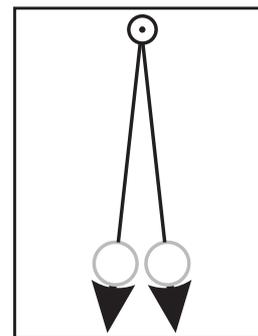
## The mechanics of meditation

If we were to organise a public demonstration of all these arts, meditation would hardly qualify, as it means absolutely nothing to the observer. Although we sometimes refer to tai chi chuan and chi kung

as a moving or walking meditation, or as meditation in motion, meditation is in fact a completely internalised process. But if its inner dynamics were visible to us, we would see the meditant performing a workout as complex as any karate practice.

There is a range of meditation techniques, starting with simple moments of silence, progressing on to the study of pranayama, mantras and mudras, and arriving at a stage where senior meditants work with chakras, light, sounds and visualisation; so it can be as simple or as complex as one wants it to be.

The emphasis is on **vertical union**, and on the **mental body** and beyond.



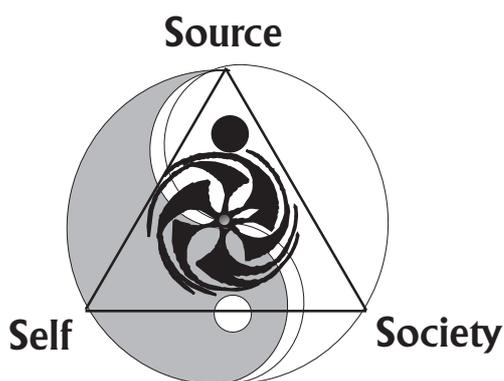
### Which method is the right one for me to start with?

We can say that, in all four groups, each of their methods is complete, in the sense that they, through different **entry points**, all try to teach the practitioner the same ethics, which can be summed up as *Duty-to-Self, Duty-to-Society and Duty-to-the-Source*.

In karate, for example, the stress is on Duty to society; it has the strongest ethic, with a strict code of conduct, and rigorous self-discipline with close attention paid to context and surroundings.

This ethical dimension is least apparent in tai chi chuan, where it is more a question of one concentrating on oneself.

In yoga, in its complete, eight-limb form, the three principles are equally strongly represented, and can provide a triple impetus.



In meditation, the focus is on Duty to the Source. Advance in this area will enliven the other two Duties much more effectively.

In each case, there is a danger of staying trapped in that particular segment and its focal points, so we find karate practitioners completely enwrapped in the concept of honour, pride, confrontation and winning; or tai chi chuan practitioners focussed only on personal wellbeing, vitality and "immortality"; or yoga practitioners or meditants who lead impractical lives of pure devotion.

When selecting a method, we tend to choose the one most attractive to us, the one that fits our personality and given mental bent. But an aspirant who wishes to awaken his neglected aspects will choose the method that *least* resembles his first choice—selecting the one he *needs*, not the one he *wants*.

Karate, for example, can be much more effective for a subdued, introverted person, a dreamer; while yoga can bring much more benefit to a stressed, agitated, extroverted person, a natural athlete. But, regrettably, we commonly find like attracting like, rather than like attracting its opposite.

Our focus, in this book, is on tai chi chuan. But it is good to remember that tai chi chuan is just one of the internal methods, and that what was once intended is through one to reach all, and through any to reach One.

## Tai Chi and tai chi chuan

The essence of tai chi chuan is Tai Chi itself.

One of the basic rules found in the Tai Chi Classics is: *Clearly distinguish between Yin and Yang*. Similarly, here we have first to distinguish between Tai Chi and tai chi chuan.

In our casual, everyday speech, practitioners of tai chi chuan usually just say, “I do tai chi”. Which is fine, as long as we are aware it is just a manner of speaking. I often use this manner of speaking myself; but it is still good to remember that tai chi chuan is a discipline, whereas Tai Chi is a philosophical concept.

In this book, I will be using lower case for the discipline, reserving the capital T and capital C for the philosophical concept—just to help us all stay aware of the distinction.

‘Tai Chi’ translates as ‘The Great Ultimate’ or ‘The Absolute’ and represents the Cosmic Law that governs the Universe and reflects itself in every particular thing. Tai Chi is a philosophy based on the harmony of opposites seeking balance in a continuous motion.

Tai Chi is the first differentiation of the Inexpressible, the Unnamable, which is sometimes referred to, ironically enough, as Wu Chi (‘Emptiness’ or ‘Void’).

‘Chuan’ translates as ‘fist’ or ‘skill’, but in a context of internal martial arts denotes a physical discipline controlled by the mind; it is a range of techniques based on the principles of Tai Chi as set down in the Classics.

So for tai chi chuan to be understood correctly, it needs to be viewed in relation to Tai Chi, and it helps if quite early in your practice you try to clarify its **starting point** and its **destination**—the **intention** and the **purpose**.

Master Ananda’s teachings define human life in terms of:

**Oneness,**

**Duality,**

**Threefoldness,**

**Fourfoldness,**

**Fivefoldness,**

**Sixfoldness, and**

**Sevenfoldness.**

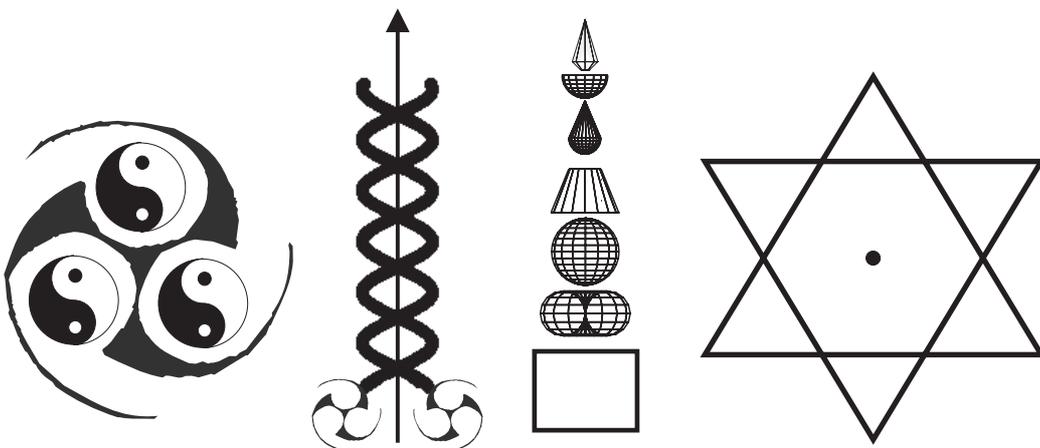
Learning about these differentiations leads us to an understanding of the septenary nature of man, and then eventually brings us back again to man’s duality, which is where our multifaceted work can start taking shape as the Endeavour—a double spiral formed by two strands of effort, each consisting of three components, which, intertwining and spiralling upwards, can lead us to a whole.

Once we have thus unfolded the multiple layers of tai chi chuan, we can go back to our practice of this art with new insight—and so start something entirely new.

## Symbols of the fundamental principles

oneness	
duality	  
threefoldness	 
fourfoldness	  
fivefoldness	 
sixfoldness	

### sevenfoldness



## Tai chi chuan—basic tool and supreme art

When I started practising martial arts, almost forty years ago, I was—like more or less any kid—fascinated by well-trained martial artists and their seemingly miraculous achievements.

I embraced karate, participating in competitions, studying katas and the Classics, running classes, never missing any opportunity to train with well-known masters visiting Croatia.

It was quite a fulfilling time, when enthusiasm and dedication were paying off in the form of satisfaction, recognition, dedicated students. But at the top level, among black belt holders, at the championships where, apart from judging students' skills and elaborating on the theories and teaching structures of different schools, we held long discussions about the past and the future of the art, there was a strong feeling that something was missing. Something that could not be found in the all-too-physical art of karate as it was practised at the time.

A turning point for me came in 1980, when I met a great teacher, Dr Tsao Detsong, and started branching out to incorporate tai chi chuan and chi kung into my practice, as these soft internal arts are the complement of karate-do. That was a fulfilling time as well, especially since I was fortunate enough to work with some of the best masters, with whom I studied a range of different forms. After I arrived in Sydney in 1983, I started training with Chen Yongfa and later also with Chen Xiaowang, each of whom has exceptional skills which set them apart from the average teacher.

Being involved with those arts for so many years, I had a chance to observe how people progressed and developed over time, both in their selected art form and in their personal lives.

*And I did not like what I saw.*

Or rather, I did like it at one level, the level of skill—but, again, the feeling of something missing was still there.

I saw students who were working with the top teachers and embraced the art fanatically, to the exclusion of everything else.

I also saw that, once a certain level of skill had been achieved, there came stagnation. The theory was well elaborated, the skill well presented, but the parameters stopped expanding. Ten years later, the same person would still be doing the same thing, following the same patterns, trapped in the same structure they had started off with.

What I set out to find were those who practised tai chi chuan as in its yin-yang symbol: those who were no longer fascinated by any of its forms or effects, but who were finding a way to translate it into daily life, incorporating its principles—duality, balance, continuous movement—into every aspect of living, turning it into a supreme art.

This is when Master Ananda started teaching me how the vicious circle that modern-day practitioners find themselves trapped in can be broken. How our going in circles can be fine—but only if, from a sideview, it becomes a spiral, with every new cycle taking us to the next level.