

# **Tai Chi Chuan: The Art of Balance, Vitality and Relaxation. Tai Chi 4 Riders**

## **Introduction:**

Welcome and well done! By enrolling for this unique course you have taken a key step towards gaining even more fun, pleasure and enjoyment of being with and riding your horse(s). One of the Tai Chi 4 You motto's is "a healthy body is a wealthy body!" This gives you the aim of these workshops and that is to work towards improving health and well being in yourself. Thus giving yourself a wealthy, richer more fulfilling experience with your horse. In other words "A healthy rider is a richer rider" So once again I warmly welcome you to the workshop and I wish you lots of happy chi ☺

Tai Chi & Qigong is the most advanced form of Mind Body and Spirit exercise in the world. Yes, That is what you just read = THE MOST ADVANCED EXERCISE! More recently the United Nations declared it the "the perfect exercise" and you are about to make the first important steps of learning this most rewarding way to exercise. A first in The Netherlands to feature Tai Chi and Qigong as a specially designed health fitness and wellness program.

## **About the Workshop(s)**

The workshops program is structured to show you exactly how to create a more holistic, balanced mind body and spirit you and yes your horse(s) will feel the benefits too. = Your newly learnt tai chi principles will help you create a balanced horse by being a balanced rider. During the workshop and follow up workshops it is the balancing of YOU that is the focus and goal. Each individual goal achieved will bring you a step closer to enjoying a more holistic way of being with your horse(s). There are many aims and goals of this workshop. For sure one is to learn how begin to better harmonize with the true spirit and energy of your horse. By better being in connection with yourself you will naturally connect better to your horse(s).

Just as we do in Tai Chi Chuan you are looking to create Tranquillity in Motion, a union with you and horse. Just imagine this achievement and the incredible joyous harmony felt when being as one with your horse. Also you will be learning vital relax management skills which will not only help with your hobby but also with your life in general. Without doubt you will gain a lot from this first workshop and the follow up lessons planned will give you the opportunity to fine tune the principles learnt at your first workshop.

## **Workshop program:**

### **Step one:**

#### **Morning session Introduction:**

Introduction of workshop learning about What is Tai Chi Chuan, how and why Tai Chi and qigong is so good for you, what is CHI, what is Yin & Yang and learning how these powerful and once secret relaxation management skills will have so many benefits for you and your horse. Here is a brief list of key benefits identified for you. I'll discuss different Tai Chi principles, relating these principles to riding, and describe

some basic ways you can start adding some Tai Chi practice to your horse riding skills and routine. Is it difficult at first = yes. Yet as Rome was not built in one day you will might hear a lot of information but you must know that all is done step by step. Its about you! So if you feel the need to you must please ask questions.

The morning session you train without your horse. Once learnt you can practice your horse riding in your own back garden by doing your new postures, forms and exercises designed to improve breathing technique, balance, stance and listening skills. So a tai chi warm up becomes an integral part of your away from your horse preparations for when with your horse. Remember, the horse is more advanced in listen skills so we better start catching them up! During the afternoon you will be carefully guided and instructed by both the instructor and myself. Here I will be watching and coaching you to keep to what you have learnt in the morning. That brings you to:

## **Step 2:**

**The following skills will be studied during the morning session and be watched closely to check there application while you are on your horse!**

Action: Getting moving. The morning session you will learn various special selected Tai Chi moving qigong's performed , , walking, standing in fixed feet position and stepping routines. Standing still like a tree mediations and also training with a partner work known as Pushing hands. Here are the key principles you will be introduced to and focus on throughout this and all future workshops:

**Listening skills.** That is to learn the importance of listening through all our senses with key focus being on the alignment and listening from your three dan tien's centres. Your upper centre **The head**, your middle centre **your heart** and your lower centre your **lower abdomen**.

Listen skills are developed by the focus on your understanding and appreciation of FEEL, In Chinese it is called "TING". The free flowing movements you will learn as you practice tai chi will bring benefits for you, the rider and your horse will benefit by because he also feels better as a result. We often think of listening as responding outside of you sounds. Yet in Tai Chi you learn to listen to your inner self and quite literally you communicate in your mind body spirit world by applying a relaxed and alert awareness. This listening with feeling will have an enormous positive impact on your way you are with your horse and yes other humans to.

### **To learn how to truly relax!**

A relaxed rider allows the horse to be himself and allow you the ability to know your horse better. To put it another way you want your horse to stop coping with you and start carrying you! If he is having to cope with you then he will not do well under this hard work pressure. However you can learn how to better care and carry your own emotions you will make his job much easier to do what is natural for him and that is carry you.

When relaxed in Tai Chi we say one's body is still and quite yet highly alert. Anyone experiencing a noisy, tense conversation you will quickly see how difficult and draining this is. One then realizes that when one relaxes the listening is much easier.

So being relaxed is vital to gain true understanding of your horse and indeed other riders near to you. Relaxation increase your natural reflexes.

Just like in Tai Chi pushing hands you the rider will benefit from relaxation as all moves of your horse are being adhered to and reacted appropriately to. Lilian my partner who owns 4 horses and a expert Sport massager specialising with horses explained to me that If your horse pulls away fast= Yang you must first have a Yin go with the sudden flow only then and only then can you redirect the horse. Failure to do this and panic pull back to quick may well lead to bigger problems on the next pull. For the rider this will mean being able to feel what the horse is giving or taking. Just like us humans we like being listen too. Your horse is no different! Your quietness will be shown in him taking more appreciative notice as your body speaks to him.

- A quiet still rider. Creates a quite still horse freeing you both up from unwanted limitations.
- The old saying I once heard was we have two ears and one mouth, so we should use our ears twice as much as our mouth. In this thinking one can say that we have four limbs (two legs and two arms) so we should use them to listen four times more than we speak with our one mouth. Now your body is the largest mass when compared to rest of body so it your body centre has the biggest listening and when required speaking task than any other part of the body. So listen, and move from your body centre. Like in today's world of conflict we often find we need a good mediator. You have that mediator it is your tan dien (body centre point just under your navel) this master centre of your whole body is were all relaxed movement starts and concludes with total body connection.

Your horse is a secret tai chi master! For example it is clear they are master of observation skills in that they listen, feel, think and act on our aids and body movements, this is known as "ting". Their amazing "Ting" master skills is their way to protect and survive in the wild. Its is this very natural ability of TING that riders and non riders can learn so much by simple being in their company.

**Step 3:** Afternoon session: The practical applications what you have learned during the morning and doing so with your horse. This is done with the close guidance and instruction of the horse riding instructor. Non riders attending can watch and listen to the coaching being given and of course safely mimic what they are seeing whilst watching from outside the horse training area.

The workshop comes to an conclusion with a few warming down exercises and teambuilding and fun moving qigong. To wave us all off 😊

Before you leave for home you will have some time to chat to fellow students and reflect on the days training, ask any questions you may have and finish off with a drink or cup of tea.

### **Throughout the day you will learn**

#### **BREATHING**

In Tai Chi Chuan, when doing Tai Chi the whole relaxed body movement and mindfulness together with correct breathing technique lowers heart rate and enables us to take in up to 20 times more oxygen than in the normal breathing pattern. Note! It is not just good correct breathing that is important its is to know how to combine your breathing with your relaxed movement. Breath on its own, will not lower your

balance and improve your stances. It is the good breathing when combined with correct body posture and alignment that you feel and get the grounding benefit. Some know how to breathe correctly, but despite this knowledge it is quickly apparent that they are easily moved of balance as the breathing is not connected in a relaxed way to the rest of your body. You will learn natural deep breathing. A much ignored part of western exercise programs.

### **CENTRAL EQUILIBRIUM or your ability to have good balance**

Being rooted, but with the ability to change your position and move at incredible speed with inner stillness, are important integral aspects in tai chi chuan. I understand that these qualities are also essential skills for riders. Having a good awareness of your centre of being balanced from this centre is vital in Tai Chi. This centred balance will allow you to naturally make movements and quickly adjust to your various body and limb positions in harmony with your horse or to redirect him in a harmonious way. Allowing the horse to work to their maximum potential. Just like tai chi you get maximum results from, minimum effort.

When training horses we are constantly working on many different minute details on body positioning, body movement and precise limb movements. I have come to understand the way the horse is moving and how the horse is balanced can be felt through the sensitive rider's body. The inner part of your legs are in TCM Yin and interestingly have the task of steering the your horse by your legs listening skills (yin) and directional action skills (Yang) About from your mind and spirit the only other part touching / connecting with the horse is your hands and fingers. The hands and fingers in particular are used as a vital listening device on the rein, to feel how the horse is balanced and how or where the horse is moving. Being centred will allow you from this good base camp be able to watch the body language of your horse but to create balance with the horse we must first have balance in the rider. This is where your Tai Chi and qigong training will be needed.

With good ability in listening, listening skill when combined with having a good central equilibrium you can be described as being finely tuned. Like a radio, your fine tuning will be heard by the horse. Consequently the horse is being finely tuned as they are being ridden. A finely tuned rider or horse, in balance, calm and connected will make a "good sound" just like a well tuned radio! It is from these principles that your riding skills can be executed with even more proficiency.

### **Importance of being grounded:**

The healing and martial arts principals of Tai Chi & qigong will assist you to become a more subtle, flowing, free, relaxed, connected and effective rider.

By definition Tai-Chi is a Chinese system of physical exercises designed especially for self-defence and meditation. It focuses on being content and in balance, achieving yin and yang. This is accomplished through correct diaphragmatic breathing, which centres the body's gravity into the pelvic core, releasing tension and having good positioning and aligning. To be grounded one must be relaxed, it is as simple as that.

Horses are intuitive animals, so as a rider who is grounded and skilled in tai chi principles "The Art of Tai Chi Chuan" walks up to them the greeting and time together will automatically be improved, even before they get into the saddle.

I recently had a funny exchange with a some new students which clearly made them think! One said “is Tai Chi and al this mediation stuff just wishful thinking, up in the clouds tree hugging?” I laughed and asked them did they feel a lot of stress and a feeling of being every where except in his body = sort of burning out! ? they answered yes. To which I said well my friends, I am afraid to I have to confirm that is people suffering from stress are already levitating away from themselves and their ground under there feet and thus you can all be described as being in the clouds. Being in the clouds without being earthed leads to a long fall. They laughed back and the irony and got the message.

***By the end of the day you will all of hopefully learnt a lot of knew skills and had a lot of fun doing so 😊***

Thank you for attending this workshop. I hope you thoroughly enjoyed yourself and feel you gained a lot during the day. I look forward to seeing you all back for the planned workshops scheduled for the coming months ahead.

Happy Chi and Ride in happiness chi,

Tony Stewart

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Tai Chi 4 You School of Internal Arts. Original Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan.

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