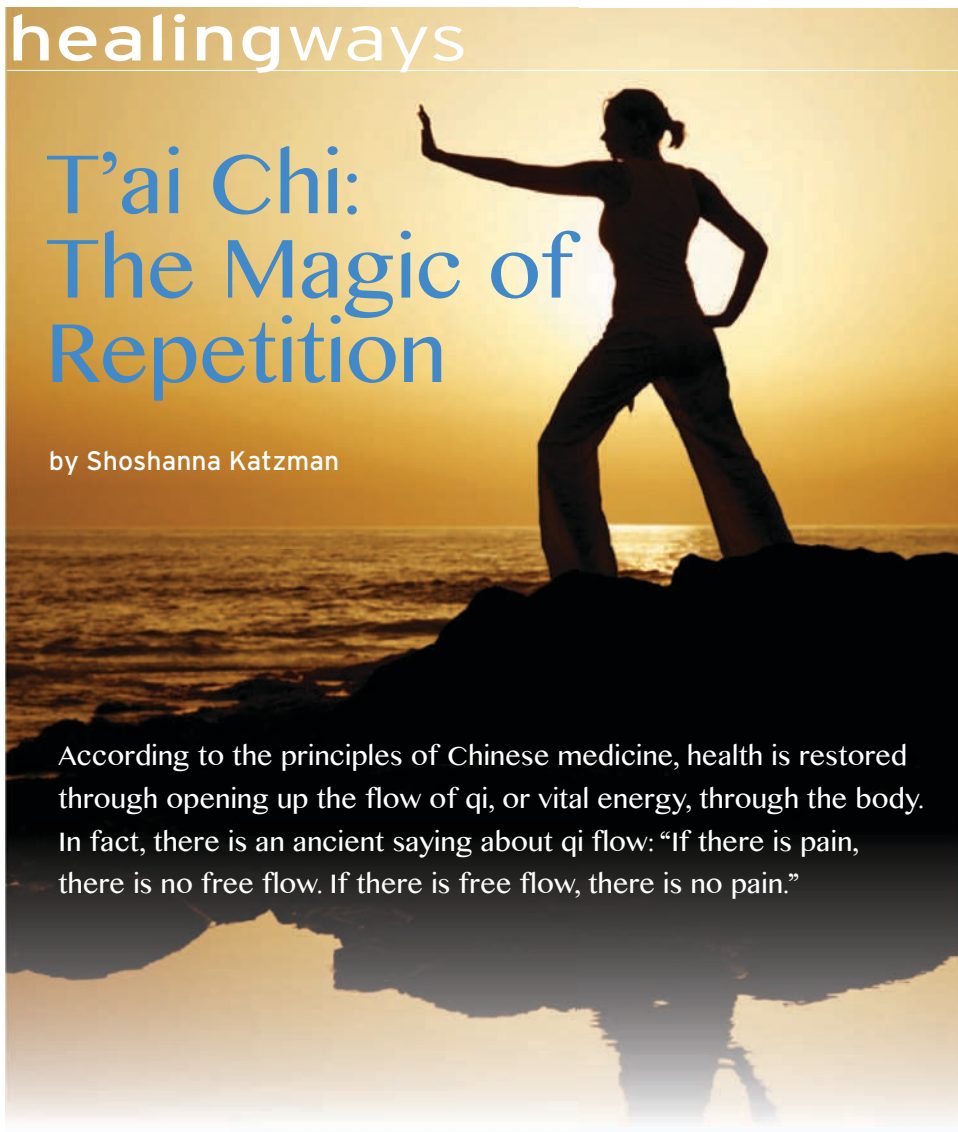


T'ai Chi: The Magic of Repetition

by Shoshanna Katzman



According to the principles of Chinese medicine, health is restored through opening up the flow of qi, or vital energy, through the body. In fact, there is an ancient saying about qi flow: "If there is pain, there is no free flow. If there is free flow, there is no pain."

Practicing the gentle and flowing movements of t'ai chi is one of the traditional ways to promote qi flow. T'ai chi exercise facilitates a systemic rebalancing of qi by combining the relaxation of muscular tension combined with the facilitation of qi flow through the channels. The repetition of movements in t'ai chi provides a natural way to decrease muscular tension and pain, especially if it is due to what is traditionally termed "stagnant qi". Even for beginners, it doesn't take long to notice an amelioration of pain in the body.

T'ai chi proponents note three main benefits of the repetition of movements. First, repetition promotes consistent, regulated flow of qi through the meridians, or energetic pathways. Second, by increasing qi and blood flow, it balances the nervous system.

Third, the practice reduces stagnant blood, restoring proper flow of the circulatory system.

The oxygenation of the body is enhanced even more through natural breathing techniques in which the mind is concentrated on the lower dantian, or energetic center of physical healing, located approximately two inches below the belly button. At the same time, the practitioner expands the belly on inhalation and contracts upon exhalation, which leads to a more diaphragmatic form of breathing that increases lung capacity, thus increasing oxygenation of the cells.

Another physiological benefit of t'ai chi is stimulating oxygenation and lymphatic flow. The rhythmic contraction and relaxation of muscles increases the compression of the capillaries, which efficiently brings oxygen into the

tissues and removes carbon dioxide and additional waste products from them, thereby nourishing the cells more efficiently. The compression not only increases oxygenation of blood and tissues, but also improves lymphatic flow, which benefits immune system.

T'ai chi helps practitioners move through their day more calmly, able to ward off stimulation that may otherwise send them into an anxious, panic-stricken stress response. This balanced, centered and relatively stress-free existence has physiological benefits as well, raising parasympathetic response and reducing the amount of energy used in the "fight-or-flight" sympathetic nervous system response. Reducing chronic stress also benefits the immune system.

With years of practicing the rhythmic and repetitive movements, a vibrant life of health, longevity and good humor is promised. These repetitive movements are believed to create distinct patterns of energy flow within the entire body that generate centeredness in a way that most people would not experience otherwise, and enables practitioners to remain calm, strong, self-assured and resourceful, no matter what challenge they face. T'ai chi also forms a sound basis for making the right decisions in life.

For regular t'ai chi practitioners, the movements seem to magically initiate profound healing on many levels. As the movements allow the release of energetic blockages within the body, breakthroughs can happen in other parts of life, like work or personal relationships. T'ai chi helps practitioners to take things as they come, deal with them and move on. Of course, these benefits take time to develop; they become more evident with the consistent practice of t'ai chi.

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