



Tai-Chi, Andy Humphrey

Andy: Tai Chi, er, actually is a martial art, originally started, um, a long time ago in Chinese history somewhen ...

Jon: How many years ago roughly?

Andy: Thousands. It goes back generation after generation. I, I teach Yang family style so by the name the family means it's passed on generation from generation, so..

Jon: How many different styles or how many different families are there?

Andy: There are lots of variations, but they're all a variation of the same thing so they are... Tai Chi has some core principles that are all similar, but they are just different interpretations of the same thing really.

Jon: And how would that same thing differ from other martial arts?

Andy: Er, Tai Chi is an internal martial art rather than an external martial art. It's linked to your use of energies and your, your health more than anything. It's very much around, um, looking after yourself, Tai Chi is. Although it started for martial, in time it's become very much about your whole being really, about health more than anything. Most people nowadays practise it for health purposes. I've been doing it for fifteen years now. My teacher, a chap called Bob Pratt who lives in England still, he's done it for about forty years, but we've both also trained with, um, a Tai Chi master called Master John Ding and he's actually seventh generation Tai Chi master so he would have gone passed in history, passed down from master to master. Usually to the son, so that's where the family comes from Yang, but then if there isn't a son or a daughter to pass it onto it's usually their best pupil really.

Jon: So are there any female masters?

Andy: Yes, yeah, there are.

Jon: Oh

Andy: Yeah, yeah, there are. At the moment for the Yang style there's two masters - there's one there's an American chap who took up one lineage, and then the other guy's a Chinese chap, but he lives in London, so I go and train with him, but I'm not one of his registered teachers, I've chosen not to do that. Um, I teach his form but I'm not a registered teacher with him.

Jon: Do you need any professional qualifications in order to teach?

Andy: I have some qualifications. I'm, I'm trained to teach Tai Chi for arthritis. Um, So I have a qualification in it, but you don't need to. Um, it's more about experience. I've taught in other things, I've taught social work, I've taught other things, so I have teaching skills, um I guess the two, knowledge of something and the ability to then help people learn it is probably more important thing really.

Jon: The majority of people, why would they want to learn Tai Chi? What are the main, what are the main benefits for them?

Andy: Personally, I started cos I had a bad back. I ended up having surgery on my back cos I had a prolapsed disc, and my, my teacher was also my friend from when I was about eighteen. We used to go clubbing together and go when we were younger so we had a, a long history. I always knew he did Tai Chi and we'd always talked about it, but I'd never thought it right for me. But then after I had my back surgery I realised I needed to look after myself a bit better and what I'd heard about Tai Chi seemed to do that. Er, so I got in it cos I realised I needed to look after myself more both physically and also emotionally cos I, I had very busy job. I was working in the NHS, senior management, um, lot of stress, so a lot of people come into it either for physical or mental issues in terms of your, your, your state of mind, but also there is a spiritual element into it as well, not a religious element but a spiritual element so about your... It links very much to, um, the Daoist philosophy of which is one of the sort of three main Chinese philosophies. So it is, it has a spiritual element of it and it is about your connection with the place you live and the universe basically. But most people get into it for very different reason. I try to make it as accessible to people without over-advertising it cos I sort of think if, if people want it they'll find it.

Jon: So it's partly to do with relaxation?

Andy: Yes it is, yeah.

Jon: Rather than just exercise?

Andy: It's to do with your body, your, your mind and your soul really, so it's to do with all those things. It helped me deal with often stressful situations lots better. Um, I, I deal with, er life better I think really because of it, I think I'm much calmer and therefore I think my decision-making and what I do is better because of it.

Jon: OK. And you teach - is it just here in Gouarec, at the AIKB building?

Andy: No, I teach, my class is actually in Lescouët-Gouarec now, but predominantly English people at the moment, but I have my first French lady who I'm teaching which is brilliant cos I'm, my French is slowly getting better. I've only lived here three years, I had very little French before I came. I, I find teaching Tai Chi and learning French at the same time is really good because it's very repetitive, there's a lot of repetitive learning actions so to get words to stay in my head I say them over and over again, it works well. So I have an agreement with this lady and I just teach her on her own at the moment, um, but we have an agreement where she pays slightly less and she helps me with my French and I teach her Tai Chi at the same time, so we have a good agreement.

Jon: Andy Humphrey - maybe you'll see me there one day. Thank you very much.

Andy: Thank you

