

Accepting the force

PERHAPS sensing my frustration at not being able to kick fast as lightening and with expert timing, Rick Attix explained about the gentle nature of Tai Chi, "In other martial arts and in Western sports we are used to following through with power or action for a definitive goal or end result, but with Tai Chi you recede and come back."

I relaxed my body and obeyed my instructor. Rick Attix was born in Santa Cruz, California and has studied martial arts since he was fifteen, settling on the art form of Karate in which he attended many competitions and received many accolades and bruises along the way.

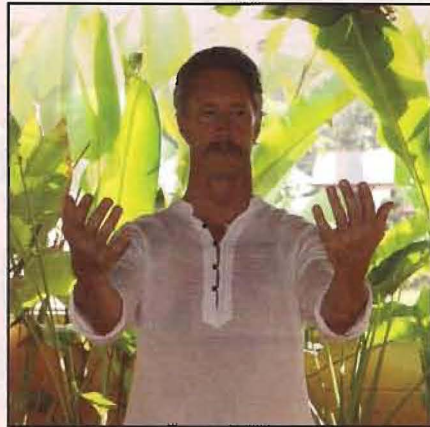
As he got older, he had what he likes to call an epiphany, "I remember thinking, where will I be when I'm 60? So I started looking at other forms and found people in California who were 60 with beautiful and strong bodies. They were students of Tai Chi."

I have been a student of a number of different forms of martial arts and was fascinated and captivated with each one until my interest inevitably waned. I was as much intrigued by the subtle, graceful and gentle movements as their abilities to knock a chap down with a flick of an ankle. Well almost....

Rick explained that Tai Chi is separated into two sections; the first is 'preparation' known as Chi (energy) Gung (building). This is a type of body conditioning, consisting of deep breathing exercises and the loosening of the body, almost like moving yoga poses.

The second section is called Tai Chi Chuan, which is composed of the 100 forms or as Rick calls them the applications of energy. However, at the Tai Chi Center Phuket school, Rick teaches a condensed regime of 37 movements adapted by Cheng Man Ching which was developed in Shanghai in the 1930's by Yang Cheng Fu.

This ancient Chinese martial art has been created, adapted and transformed by numerous Taoist sages over the years and its concept of harmony with nature has remained constant since its inception. The slow, rhythmic movements practiced within a fluid and changing moment allows a momentary release of worldly concerns that calms



the body and stills the mind. It's also good for arthritis...

The mythical history, the slow motion movements so far removed from Western concep-

tions of sport or exercises make it perhaps a strange pursuit for an American man who studied to be an engineer, has a masters in International Management and who worked for numerous oil companies, including ARAMCO, throughout his career.

However it was such a path that led Rick to set up a Tai Chi center and home in Phuket. "Throughout my time in Saudi Arabia, I used to come to Thailand for my R&R time. In 2004, I came here permanently and was able to concentrate on Tai Chi full time, as a hobby and a job."

Rick has not found this easy though, attributing it to not only, as Rick sees it, Phuket people's sole desire to "eat and sleep" but the way Phuket is marketed and to whom, "Phuket is targeted to transient tourists. It is set up as a playground paradise so is not really well equipped to accommodate wellbeing."

Rick believes that Phuket is 90 % targeted towards indulgence and drinking and partying and 10% aimed at wellness packages. He hopes to change this and although he accepts that Tai Chi is not very popular in Thailand, he believes that on the strength of its popularity in America and Europe, more and more people are choosing to come to Phuket to experience the 3x hour and half session weekly classes or the 6 Day Tai Chi retreat which is held on the first Monday of every month at the Tai Chi Center.

As previously said, based on my very limited experience, I am used to contorting my gangly body to ridiculous forms, I enjoy, at least for a short time, the

physical commitment and dedication that practicing a martial arts requires.

With Tai Chi however, even for the one class I took, I began to understand what Rick meant when he said, "It's as much a mental concept. What we're doing is trying to recreate the calm that one experiences when sleeping. It's learning to control the fight or flight instinct / reaction, inducing a sleep like calm and bringing the heart rate right down."

Indeed as your body flows from one movement to the other to postures seemingly designed to follow the previous, it is easy to just... Be.