

Metro Plus Chennai

Published on Monday
Wednesdays, Thursdays

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Flow with the rhythm

PRINCE FREDERICK forgoes a Sunday lie-in for a Tai Chi workout and realises it's more than just a sedate group dance

PHOTO: M. Vedhan



ON THE BEACH George Thomas leads a Tai Chi session

Thanks to an invitation from a colleague who's part of George Thomas' Tai Chi academy, I decide to forgo a Sunday lie-in for a special workout called 'Sunrise Tai Chi'. I assume it is all about practising this Chinese martial art while soaking up the early sun at the Marina. When I announce that "I want to do this workout and write about the experience," she shoots the proposal down. "You can't blend with the group. You can't do this workout off the cuff."

As I pull into the parking bay at the beach, I don't know what to expect. When I reach the venue (Gandhi Statue), I notice the group has already got into the 'groove.' I know right away I can't be a part of it — at least not today! Assisted by music from a system, thirty men and women sway in total synchronicity. It seems more like a group dance than a workout. I learn later that about 700 sequences have been squeezed into the 21 minutes, the duration of the dance — sorry, workout.

This group comprises people who have been introduced to these sequences over six to twelve months. They have done them, one at a time. Only someone who has been through at least 50 classes can hope to perform a

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dance-like workout that combines hundreds of sequences.

But as the group goes through the movements, flowing with it like a river, I get a sense of the benefits it derives from the activity. Thomas tells me, "During a Tai Chi workout, the heart rate never goes up. The abdomen expands as the diaphragm comes down. Lungs take in more air."

Thomas and his group follow the Yang style of Tai Chi, which "combines the benefits of hatha yoga, pranayama and raja yoga". Thomas says the soft form of Tai Chi, used for wellness, is called 'Chinese yoga.'

"In this combined 'dance,' people lose their identities. If you walk up to someone engaged in this workout and ask his name, he will blink with incomprehension," says Thomas.

The group includes 78-year-old Krishnarajan, who suffers from Parkinson's disease. He claims his balance overall health have improved following Tai Chi classes. So does a middle-aged man, also called Thomas, who has a triple-vessel heart disease. Their examples settled the issue: I decided to enrol for a Tai Chi programme. Fifty classes later, I will write a proper experience piece for Metro Workout. Watch this space.

Bottom line: With its soft movements, the Yang style of Tai Chi is for all age groups. Tai Chi workout (Yang style, the only one I have seen) relaxes not just the practitioners, but also bystanders.

Downside: Reaping all the benefits of Tai Chi takes time. At least 50 classes.

(For more details, call 9840298450 or log in to taichiacademy.com)

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