

T'ai Chi

FOR

CLIMBERS AND

SKIERS

AN INTRODUCTION



*Andy Selters*

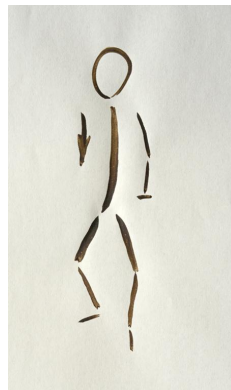
# T'AI-CHI FOR CLIMBERS AND SKIERS

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*An Introduction*

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An ebook companion to in-person or online classes  
with Sierra Shanti Studio.



**ANDY SELTERS**

[www.sierrshanti.com](http://www.sierrshanti.com)

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# CHAPTER 1

## **Introduction**



**T**'*ai-chi chuan* originated with Chinese fighters who stepped back from the heat of combat to build better fighting techniques out of calm efficiency. They unfolded a practice that not only can “use an ounce of effort to lift a thousand pounds,” but can enhance general vitality and the efficiency of pretty much any movement. The T'ai-chi forms of moving on our own (without a sparring partner or weapon) are basically shadow-boxing with gravity, and for this reason they apply well to mountain sports. This little ebook is a brief introduction to the underlying principles as they apply to climbing and skiing, and is designed to accompany your in-person or online classes, where you will learn “the moves” and other aspects. If you read on and practice mindfully you will quickly see that it is a mistake to picture T'ai-chi as some curiously slow and esoteric choreography. T'ai-chi is a training process to use your body well, from the inside.

By advertising to enhance climbing and skiing skills, I present this material with the hazard of generating expectations and their limitations. I will cue you as to how the principles and movements apply to outdoor action, but I invite you to join the practice in the same spirit as the original masters; by stepping back from expectations for direct action. T'ai-chi is an “inner” martial art that operates through the core of our body-mind system, beneath our normal expectations. Without obvious objectives like speed, endurance or flexibility metrics, T'ai-chi can look like it has nothing going on, but there's a lot going on and it's not easy. The best pitch I can offer to athletes is that it teaches us to entrain the wondrous complexity of all our

parts into a unified and dynamic whole, where, for instance our left hip knows how to engage its foot on the ground as we steer our right hand. There's much more to it than that though, and we access the practice best with an empty mind. The movements are both as simple and complex as our body and mind inherently are, and we learn best when we set out simply to explore a flat-ground practice that will indeed give us some clarity and ease to take into the mountains. In T'ai-chi as I know it we don't really achieve anything except that we walk away from a mindful session feeling lighter, more relaxed, more solid and sure, and more alert to the world around us.

The foundation of a good relationship with gravity is an aligned posture. Similarly, the basis for cultivating healthy energy is easy breathing. Thus our starting position is standing and breathing--with our feet about shoulder width apart and the feet and legs pointing straight forward, knees not locked. Then while breathing in we lengthen ourselves a tiny bit upward, as if the sky is pulling us up from the crown of our head. Exhaling out we let ourselves rest back down into our bones. Through this subtle inhale-lifting and exhale-resting process we make little adjustments so that gravity pulls straight down through our bones and into the center of our feet. As skiers know well, that center point is at the front of our ankles, ie. the back of our arches. Gradually we learn how standing well is a practice in itself, and sweet, floating alignment happens when our main joints--the hips, shoulders and back-crown of the head--are lined up in a plumb line above that foot-center. If we meet in person I can give you posture suggestions, but it is your own awareness of gravity pulling through your bones that will align your body with gravity. When we find good alignment we are both solid to the ground and floating to the sky, and with those opposing forces in balance, we are ready to start .