



## Yoga's Stability and T'ai Chi's Mobility

BY LAWRENCE BISCONTINI, MA

As fusion programs continue to permeate group fitness schedules around the world, I want to introduce Yo-Chi™, my newest training program, offered at AFAA.com as an LQA (Live Question and Answer) online workshop. Let me address some questions about this awesome new workout method!

### WHAT IS YO-CHI?

Yo-Chi is a mindful, barefoot fusion program where we celebrate the stability of yoga and the mobility of T'ai Chi in both standing and floor-based movements in 5-minute sections of choreography with special music and no equipment other than mats. From a fitness standpoint, we choose postures and progressions in each 5-minute section to challenge the entire body, giving a total-body workout by the time the class is over. We offer both 25- and 55-minute versions of the class so that almost every group fitness mind-body schedule can accommodate it.

### HOW DOES AN INSTRUCTOR PREPARE FOR YO-CHI?

I've teamed with AFAA to launch the first ever online 5-hour teaching programming format of Yo-Chi. Instructors can take this course and then follow the online directions to provide Yo-Chi in their facilities with no licensing fees. We include everything they need to know to teach the class in the 5-hour training except the music, which Power Music® supplies for under \$20. Like many of AFAA's LQA online training programs, instructors have two options for watching the course. The first way is to find special dates on the calendar when the creator actually hosts the training (specific day and time). The second is to take the training hosted by AFAA online whenever it's convenient for you in any time zone at all.

### WHAT PREPARATION DO YOU RECOMMEND INSTRUCTORS HAVE FOR TEACHING YO-CHI?

I think some mind-body experience makes a better teacher in the long run, but everyone can start here with no prior

FIGURE A  
DESCRIPTION  
ON PG. 14

# YO-CHI™

experience in yoga or Tai Chi. AFAA also has many other LQA courses available to deepen one's yoga background, such as the AFAA online yoga programs I did in both English and Spanish. To be sure, I always recommend the AFAA Group Fitness Primary Certification for anyone teaching group fitness because it addresses all of the things that instructors need to know for working with the dynamics of more than one person simultaneously per class. Yo-Chi offers the instructor who likes pre-choreographed formats the option of teaching something already created from start to finish. Conversely, for the instructor who likes to develop his or her own flow after training, we also allow this.

## HOW WAS YO-CHI DEVELOPED?

### HOW WERE THESE TWO COMPLEMENTARY DISCIPLINES CHOSEN?

When I directed the Golden Door Spa programming for the USA and Caribbean based in Puerto Rico, I had realized that, when I was teaching a 45-minute yoga class, occasionally it was too intense for some participants who were trying yoga for the first time. Conversely, with Tai Chi, I'd find that some participants grew bored with the fluidity and ease of standing movement. Always a proponent of cross-training to combat both adaptation and plateaus, I thought it would make perfect physical sense to fuse stability (yoga) with mobility (Tai Chi), just like life. I wanted to make participants' muscles really fire up during the 5-minute cycles of muscular endurance and strength, and then really relax and focus on balance during the Tai Chi sections. The results were amazing and Yo-Chi won first place for spa programming worldwide by Condé Nast.

### HOW DO THESE DISCIPLINES COMPLEMENT EACH OTHER FROM A FITNESS STANDPOINT?

We now have current, peer-reviewed and published research that proves the benefits of each discipline, listed at this article's end. For example, we know now that yoga can increase strength and flexibility, promote better sleep and rest, and increase the overall quality of life in a variety of other measurable ways. We also recognize that Tai Chi can improve balance, increase self-efficacy and even yield cardiovascular benefits. Unlike years ago, science has proven that this oldest group fitness discipline is not just for the chronologically enriched. In so many cultures where stress continues to be a significant part of everyone's day, the moving meditation aspect of Tai Chi helps people renew their sense of calm. Each movement form has its own poetic name that stimulates relaxation while simultaneously demanding concentration. "Wave hands like clouds," "White crane spreads wings and prepares to fly," "Supporting heaven like a pillar," and "Embracing the white, full moon" are the names of some forms that cannot help but accentuate the feelings of relaxation that the moving forms themselves encourage.

When we practice only yoga with primarily isometric contractions, we get the benefits of a "yoga body." Conversely, when we practice only Tai Chi with super-slow isotonic, mostly unilateral

standing movement emphasizing deceleration, we get the benefits of a "Tai Chi body." I fuse the two disciplines into one training program to offer what I call mind-body cross-training. Table 1 helps explain the complementary aspects of these two disciplines:

TABLE 1

YOGA	T'AI CHI
Stability	Mobility
Isometric	Isotonic
Nose Breathing	Nose & Mouth Breathing
Individual Focus	Group Focus
Little Observable Movement	Constant Observable Movement
Floor Work	Only Standing
Simple Complexity	Complex Simplicity

### WHY SHOULD A CLUB CONSIDER OFFERING YO-CHI?

Today clubs stay ahead of the competition when they can offer unique programming. Yo-Chi can be a part of that unique programming because of its proven track record in giving research-based results that many different populations may enjoy in one class. It's for everyone, from athletes appreciating the powerful aspects of our approach to yoga and active aging adults improving their balance during Tai Chi. Wise Taoist philosopher Lao Tzu described the purpose of slow movement stating, "It is the stiff old strong tree that snaps in the strong wind, while the blade of grass bends and lives to see another day." Yo-Chi offers both approaches to training in terms of stability and mobility, so it is universally appealing. Plus, the accolades that Yo-Chi has received—from *LIVE! with Regis and Kelly* to being featured in *Club Business Industry* to appearing on group fitness program schedules from Alabama to Athens—helps bring an international credibility to the program.

### HOW DID YOU DISCOVER THESE TWO DISCIPLINES IN YOUR OWN LIFE?

When I was growing up in the early '80s, I was overweight, had a father who died from heart disease, a brother who died from a heart attack, and a mother who had open heart surgery. These events scared me, so I started to make changes to my own life in small steps to alter the path I was on. Yoga and Tai Chi were parts of these steps because I loved how simple they were, had no "contact sport" competitiveness, and did not require me to be physically fit just to start practicing these disciplines. **AF**

LAWRENCE BISCONTINI, MA, has worked as an AFAA contributing writer for over three years and has been developing fusion programs such as Yo-Chi for more than 30 years. Lawrence has created programming for traditional fitness international chains including Gold's Gym, Bally, LifeTime, 24 Hour Fitness clubs, Equinox, and also for spas



To take the Yo-Chi training, sign up at [afaa.com](http://afaa.com) for either the LQA (Live Question & Answer) event at a specific scheduled time (with the course creator) or the archived, version available on demand 24/7.

FIGURE B

FIGURE C

An example of a fusion exercise from Yo-Chi is to find the yoga Vrksasana posture (Tree) on one leg, and hold this mindfully for at least five breath cycles with ujjayi (nose) breathing (Figure A).

T'ai Chi will add mobility to this stability exercise, enhancing its functionality, and invite the practitioner to lower the raised foot toward the floor (Figure B), forming a T'ai Chi "T" Step.

Next, step to the side in the frontal plane, placing the foot of that moving leg on the floor, forming a T'ai Chi Bow Step. Arms adduct until parallel with the earth. (Figure C).

Holding the position longer converts this T'ai Chi move into a yoga Warrior II. To repeat on the other side, find a yoga Tree on the other stabilizing leg, and then repeat the above.

seeking to offer unique programming only available at their locations, from Memphis to the Maldives. Perhaps best known in the industry as a mindful fusion specialist, Lawrence also speaks and writes internationally in several languages. Find out more about AFAA's Yo-Chi online workshop at [afaa.com](http://afaa.com) and [www.findLawrence.com](http://www.findLawrence.com).

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