



My name is Lauren Kecskes and I am a freshman at Claremont Mckenna College. I grew up in Havre de Grace, MD but I went to boarding school in Pennsylvania for four years. At CMC, I am majoring in Biology and trying to complete an off campus major in Art at Pitzer College. This semester, I enrolled in beginning Taiji class. I didn't know much about Taiji before I took the class. My grandmother always told me that it was beneficial for my health, but being a skeptic, I never really believed her. However, I've done some yoga before and some breathing exercises for swimming that have always helped with flexibility and staying calm.

I swam competitively since I was 9 so I've always been used to physical activity and always had been in shape. However, as I was applying to college, I realized that I wanted more time to pursue other goals instead of swimming, so as a result, I do not swim everyday anymore. I've always been concerned with staying in shape so for the first few weeks of the school year, I tried to stay engaged in rigorous physical activity. However, as you can guess, I couldn't keep up that routine and gradually let my endurance, strength and flexibility decline. I also noticed that my concentration was affected and I was more anxious even though it seemed that I had more time on my hands.

When signing up for a PE class for this semester, I wanted to choose a class that could help me relax at the beginning of my week, which has always been the most stressful for me. I didn't need to register for a class that was physically exerting because I had made a promise to myself to work out more, but I needed a designated time to focus on my own energy and stress and how to release that stress.

The first few weeks of class, I didn't really see any visible change. The motions seemed strange and I felt rather clumsy trying to practice all the forms. I also had trouble remembering all of the motions. But once I was able to focus less on the forms and more on my own personal energy, I began to see some results. After every class I would be much more calm and able to concentrate on my work.

I felt less anxious about due dates and more focused and determined to get my homework done. My mind seemed to work more efficiently after spending time focusing on the flow of energy inside my body through Taiji. On Tuesdays after class, I sleep very well because my body and mind seem so relaxed.

Although Taiji didn't help much with flexibility and endurance, it helped me with relaxation and coping with stress. The time spent in class was a time when I could forget about everything else and just focus on the movement of my body and the exchange of energy inside. I've realized that having time to turn off everything else that is bothering you is important because you let your mind rest. As we go through our day, we are constantly thinking about what we have to do next and what work has been piling up throughout the week. Taking just an hour to focus your mind completely on something else helps to ease your mind and body of stress, bringing you to a calmer, more relaxed state of being.

April-25-2011