

From <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1245924929053&pagename=JPost/JPostArticle/ShowFull>

ONLINE EDITION
JERUSALEM POST

National Service: Keeping tremors at bay

Jun. 25, 2009

GLORIA DEUTSCH, THE JERUSALEM POST

Name - Daniel Loney

'Tai Chi had given me the tools for dealing with Parkinson's long before I was ever diagnosed,' Loney says.

Photo: Gloria Deutsch



Age - 59

Organization - Israel Parkinson's Association

Family status - married plus four

Hours of volunteering a week - about 20

Residence - Jerusalem

Profession - retired engineer

Most meaningful moment - when he looked up from his first Tai Chi demonstration and saw everyone trying to imitate him.

Parkinson's disease is an incurable progressive illness that can strike anyone regardless of age, sex or nationality. An estimated 20,000 people here suffer from Parkinson's at various levels of severity.

With drugs and other treatments, most patients seem able to lead an ostensibly normal life, coping with the unpleasant symptoms like tremors, stiffness, lack of coordination and muscle cramps. But they grow progressively worse over time and eventually become debilitating.

Daniel Loney, a 59-year-old retired engineer who worked for Israel Aircraft Industries, was only 49 when Parkinson's struck.

"I had been doing Tai Chi for about six years when I had my first symptom of Parkinson's," he says. "It was during the class I was taking and my instructor's wife noticed that my left shoulder wasn't moving easily during warm-up exercises and my left hand wasn't always in the correct position when doing the Tai Chi form. At the time I shrugged it off as stiffness. A year later I developed a small tremor in my left hand and my arm didn't swing properly when I walked."

He consulted a neurologist and his worst fears were confirmed - he had Parkinson's.

"One of the worst things was being unable to do Tai Chi," he recalls. "I was put on a number of medications with a many side effects. So I looked for alternatives - I tried Chinese herbal medicine, Ayurvedic treatments, pressure-point massage, acupuncture from a Tibetan monk and yoga lessons."

Finally Loney decided he would take responsibility for himself and he would develop his own way of dealing with his condition. He would take small doses of Western medication - and Tai Chi would return to his life to play a vital part in his treatment. TODAY, 10 years later, he is teaching Tai Chi to other Parkinson's sufferers on a completely volunteer basis and his own performance has improved out of all recognition.

"A good Tai Chi workout seems to be as effective for me as taking a pill and the results of a session last for hours," he says. "Tai Chi had given me the tools for dealing with Parkinson's long before I was ever diagnosed."

He joined the Israel Parkinson's Association, regained the confidence he had lost and began to teach fellow sufferers. The first lesson was a traumatic but ultimately triumphant experience.

"I was asked to give a talk on Tai Chi with the possibility of starting a study circle if enough people were interested. I was very nervous when I got up to give my talk with 40 pairs of eyes on me and as I began to talk about Tai Chi I felt I wasn't getting a response.

"I decided to put down my notes and start to demonstrate and I was shaking and self-conscious until I realized that everyone was shaking - this was a group of Parkinson's

sufferers. There was total silence as I explained what Tai Chi was - a form of self-defense - and I began to show the different moves.

"People began to get up and circled around me, trying to imitate the moves. I gained confidence when I saw how they were enjoying it, and even the Filipino care-givers got up and joined in what they saw as a 'dance.'"

TODAY LONEY has two groups in Jerusalem and two in Modi'in and he gives workshops around the country. He is actively involved in the activities of the Israel Parkinson Association and devotes many hours a week to fellow patients.

"I feel that my Tai Chi activities go beyond instruction," he says. "I try to develop a personal relationship with all my students."

His connection between Tai Chi and Parkinson's may be unique. "I believe I'm a pioneer in the world," he says modestly.

As an observant Jew, he finds absolutely no contradiction between his religious beliefs and the practice of the martial art which uses the mind to control the movements of the body. "It calms and helps to focus on prayer," he says. "Many Tai Chi instructors are observant."

He now has three things in his life which drive him. The first is to spend time with his family - his wife and four children - the second is to continue his hobby of building grandfather clocks for each of his children which will be a family heirloom; and the third is to help as many people as possible with Tai Chi.

"I want to share with others what has worked for me," he says.

If you know of someone who volunteers in a worthy cause, please send details to gloriadeutsch@gmail.com.

This article can also be read at <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1245924929053&pagename=JPArticle%2FShowFull>