

INTERNAL WUSHU ARTS NEWSLETTER

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LEARNING-TEACHING-LEARNING

As we start any art we definitely need guidance. We need someone to give us a direction and set the momentum going in the right direction. However, after a certain point it's important for us to start questioning what we've learned and test it to see if it is true for ourself. We need to start thinking for ourself so the information, instruction and practice we've learned can begin to develop.

This is similar to plaiting seeds, this is what a class and the instructor does.

The forms and movements are planting the seed. It's up to each individual to nurture the information (seed) they've received in order for it to be of value. Teaching or helping others is a part of this advanced learning and growing process. Before, during, or after class, as you help each other or a new (younger) student you are practicing and learning even more than what's been taught during the class. You have to translate your understanding of the various postures or lessons for someone else. This re-

enforces what you know and guides your understanding and personal research. As you help someone else, you're actually helping yourself.

In a traditional chinese martial arts school it was looked upon like a family unit, there are the following titles for the members of the club. Grandparent, father, older brother/sister, younger brother/sister. Grandparent is your instructor's instructor, father is your teacher, older brother/sister are those who started before you did and

younger are those who started after you. It's the responsibility of the older brother/sister to watch over the younger ones and be helpful and the responsibility of the father to set an example and look over everyone and the grandparents to council them all. Unfortunately, part of this was a traditionally a blind loyalty to the club which is outdated now, but the caring for each other is for the growth, learning and benefit of everyone.

OUR CIRCLE OF STRENGTH

Don't lock your arms or legs, don't completely extend your limbs, keep your feet flat on the floor, sink your shoulders, drop your elbows, stay upright, don't lean, the list goes on. Focus on the here and now sink into your center. Control your balance, control every movement. *ALL MOVEMENTS MUST BE COMFORTABLY DONE.*

All these guidelines serve to help us stay inside our circle of strength as well as teach us where our circle of strength is. On tip toes we're not only not steady, but we have no strength. Anytime we reach beyond our circle of comfort and strength we might as well be standing on a sheet of ice.

Our circle of strength is the way we move our torso, arms and legs in all directions comfortably and efficiently. This type of movements enables us to use the full power of our entire bodies when moving and applying strength. It also serves to keeps us inside a safety zone, it helps keep us from straining and from being hurt.

All the forms and styles we practice in the internal arts teach us to move within this circle. This is why the martial applications are important to know. Without this the arts become health chi kung instead of martial arts. These arts retrain our bad habits and teaches us to stay strong, safe and centered. This is important regardless whether we're doing martial arts or painting the ceiling. A typical example of moving outside our circle of strength is being on the top step of a ladder and reaching a bit too far to get that one spot. At that point we are in danger, we may just strain a muscle or we can fall and break a leg. When practicing our forms the execution of our power isn't at the end of our movements or reach, it's 3/4 of the way to the end of the movement. The last part of the movements is the sinking. At the end of each posture you should think of someone pulling your hands, trying to pull you off balance. As we practice, what we are learning is to move and stay as structurally strong as we can.

I see this habit of extending too far or reaching too much as a physical example of our greed and fighting mind. During applications a common mistake made is to try to respond to an attackers strikes while they are still out of range, thus throwing yourself off balance. Trying to manipulate the situation. Chen Man-Ching had a saying: "Let the meat come to the hook." We tend to try to control this physical attack before it's a threat to us. This puts us in a disadvantageous position. The other point is we can't really control someone else, we can only try to control ourselves and our own actions. All these are within our circle of strength. Another example of this greed is in pushing hands, **trying** to push our partner, instead of surfing the situation to notice when the time is right to push. The purpose of pushing hands is to gain sensitivity, greater

relaxation and feed back as to where our strength and tension is stuck, and where our partners tension, stiffness and weakness is. What happens as we practice is that our mind tries to control and calculate the situation, wanting to win, trying to force a win. There is no winning or loosing in tuishou, only learning and working out. What we need to do is keep our mind inside our circle of strength, our center, and observe what our partner does. Our job is to relax and surf our partners strength, energy and power. As we do this, windows open as to where the weakness and stiffness is, then we need to seize the moment. But when this happens we should respond within our circle of strength.

The more we try to control something or someone, the more they have control over us and the less control we have over ourselves. It's like parents demanding their children not to do something. The kids are more likely to do it. If you wish someone would act a certain way and they don't or won't it only pushes your own buttons.

The internal arts are based on wu-wei, non-action. This is actually letting things follow their own path and direction. Trying to understand energy and how it flows, changes and grows. Many people begin to study for self-control and discipline. The problem then soon starts; as soon as we start to try to control ourselves we'll find every reason to do something else. We need to be sneaky, instead of applying force, we need to focus on our center and direction we'd like to move toward, then guide ourselves in that direction. We should remind yourself of your goal, focus or reason for the change you want and slowly you'll move in that direction, but not beat ourselves up for not being better. Each time we remind ourselves of our direction, it's like adding one drop of clear water into a cup of tea. Each time we remind ourselves to relax, not loose our temper et., is one more drop of practice in the direction we want. A healthier, safer, stronger life. If we try to force ourselves to relax we usually get the opposite, we'll tense up even more.

We need to be firm in a sneaky, gentle way, inside our circle of strength.