

# INTERNAL WUSHU ARTS NEWSLETTER

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## DECLINING ARTS

Shr fu is in his 80's and his skill just keeps getting better. The same is true for many of the old generation masters. As each generation passes in the internal arts the skill level seems to decrease. The arts themselves aren't necessarily changing but the teaching and commitment level to them are. Our emphasis now is to make these arts a way of life in present society, making them adapt and become useful for today's world.

Who gets up everyday and goes to the park at 6 am to practice for 2 hours? In the past this was they way of life, they had to keep their skill up to stay alive. They not only practiced but sparred with friends and constantly sought out new and better teachers to learn from. Though the skill level of these masters may be desirable our aims, training methods, and time commitment is very different.

Our aim is more to improve the quality of our lives instead of becoming fighters. Being a fighter isn't of much use in present society. Any skill beyond our health and well being is extra, interest accumulated.

## HOME TRAINING METHODS

In the past newsletters I've mentioned basic home training and practice methods. One such method is to use either a traffic jam or a red light to work on relaxation, sung, breathing exercises or various meditations. you can also work on the post posture (pretending to hold the wheel of the car).

Intermediate members I've show the pa Kua pole exercises to help develop sensitivity for pushing hands when there are no partners to work with. We've also covered several exercises for the hands and arms to increase reactions for tuishou during the Saturday sessions. All these are to help you advance in your practice if you have the time, interest and no partners available.

Another way of refining skills for applications and tuishou is self-massage. As you take a bath, wash your hair, or are just sitting around watching TV you can train your hands and fingers to focus energy and strength as well as learn about the 'feel' of various muscles and nerves. The founder of Aikido would have his top students give him a massage regularly for the same reason, or partly so. Saotome sensei said he'd have to massage the founder until there was no strength left in his hands. O'sensei (the founder) would always tell him to press and push harder.

This was training for connecting the hand and arm strength with ones' center. After giving the massage all weaponry techniques would flow easily and naturally. The grabs and nerve techniques were also very easy. Aside from strengthening the arms it also taught knowledge of various muscles and nerve centers. When grabbing someone you naturally know how to apply pressure efficiently and effectively.

When you are working with an instrument of some kind, are you grabbing it tightly or are you grafting your hand to it so it becomes an extension of yourself? When you push open a door are you keeping your body connected and using efficient movement and strength?

For some this may be just too much to think about, or beyond your interest. However, the relaxation and efficient use of energy can be useful to everyone. The applications are for those of you with time and interest to become stronger and more skillful, not just healthier.

Relaxation and patients, the two are intertwined. you can't relax completely without being patient. Relaxation has its own timing that depends upon each situation. We can work on increasing our patience every time we get behind a slow driver.

## PATIENCE

I've written often about the importance of patience but it can't be emphasized enough. This is the secret to any advancement. you can't quicken the rate of water sinking into the ground, every soil condition has its own rate. Similarly each individual has their own rate to learn, absorb, sink and relax. The maturation of skill also has its own timing. Just as with soil; as you work it, cultivate it, the water drains quicker and deeper. The same holds true with our bodies. What's required though is a great deal of patience, time and study in order to permit the levels to deepen and gain an understanding of them.

You can usually gage a person's level of inner Tai Chi by the transitions of the postures and the time it takes them to do the forms. A beginner will complete one posture and move directly into the next. An advanced practitioner seems to linger at the transitions. This is what the classics refer to in 'The movements may stop but the intent continues'. This lingering requires patience and careful listening at the beginning. You may not notice anything happening at first but more is happening in the transitions internally than with the overall movements. The less outside movement the more internal action happens.

As the body moves the chi and blood is dispersed into the limbs, like the wind blowing up a dust cloud. As the

postures are completed and arrive (settle) it permits the chi to settle, just like dust. Actually the chi drains back to the tantien. Our goal is to move softly and smoothly so this dust (chi) cloud doesn't stir up as large as the last movement. Yin/yang, hus/fa, close/open, coil/release, forward/back, they all follow one another like pleats in a garment. Our goal is to make these movements smooth. Beginners usually can't understand the feeling of hsu or coiling, just the end of the outward movement. This is where you want to hesitate, root and relax.

Master Gao's ability to demonstrate the hsu is remarkable. It changed my Tai Chi and pa Kua dramatically in just 5 minutes.

When each posture arrives, take the time (patience) to sink, relax, quiet your breath and mind, focus on the feet sinking into the earth, then check your posture before moving on. As you get in touch with this sinking of the chi, storing of the chi, and the deep relaxation you'll want to linger here longer, hsu begins to happen and you begin to notice it.

There does come a point that you feel you need to move on. To me it feels like jumping on a trampoline. As you touch the canvas it gives, you sink with it, it slows down

and almost stops, then you accelerate into the next upward movement. You appear to stop but you don't really stop.

For Pa Kua members we try to keep this connection all the time. We first learn this in the inner palms. If our practice is correct and mindful this is the feeling we're working with always. Don't concern yourself with the next change, just the feeling. Seek an inner emptiness, a Wuji inside and a smooth extension outward. This extension is energetic, not muscle. As you find this spot in your practice the move becomes easier, your arms are like a wire frame with a strong current and a connection to the ground, you'll feel empty yet solid and strong.

Patience is the secret. As you practice you basics, don't be too eager to move on to the next movements. Study the feelings and relax, let go. As with meditation (which this is) we may not notice a result today or next week, these changes happen very slowly. The feeling and awareness also depends upon your inner sensitivity and advancement. Each mindful practice brings you closer and amplifies your last practice.

## BEING SELF-CONSCIOUS

No one likes to be made self-conscious. "He's watching, I'd better do it right. he makes me so nervous when he watches. I do it fine up until he starts watching." We just don't like being watched. our practice may be going great, then all of a sudden we notice someone looking at us.

We're in class to practice, learn, get refinements and corrections. how can this happen without being watched? When working on applications it doesn't seem to matter, but when working on forms or practicing, it becomes a MAJOR issue. When we work on the applications all our concentration has to be on the attacker, if not we get hit or pushed. When we're working on a form, all of a sudden our concentration moves from the form to being watched. It's funny, because now we have an idea it has to be perfect since we're being watched (but not before). It's like going to the doctor when your perfectly healthy or not telling him where you hurt or why you're there. It would be great to just practice and ignore all else.

Most of the time I try not to stand directly in front of you or be too obvious at watching you. I do watch however, most of the time, in fact, I can visualize everyone in the club working on their forms. Body movements, alignments, connections, stiffness etc. I'm always watching! That's partly what I'm paid to do.

When you know you're being watched, that is the time to concentrate the most, focus internally so I can see what you need to work on. Here is one very important note: Don't claim all your mistakes. When i watch the group practice, most of the time I notice things I've forgotten to emphasize, or things I haven't emphasized enough. It's my fault, not yours, but don't blame all your mistakes on me!

Keep in mind, the more corrections you get, the better your form will be and the greater and sooner your skill will develop. Also, certain corrections only can come at certain times. If you don't have the footwork I'll seldom correct your hand movements, and I won't even mention smoothness or the movement. Everything has its time, and there's always something to work on. Always another level.

Studying with master Tchoung was rough sometimes. he would have us each stand in the middle of the room with everyone watching us go through one of the sections. After we'd finish everyone would take turns critiquing our forms. I never got use to this, even after 4 years. During private sessions with master Gao, she would stand directly in front of me (one foot away) looking eye to eye as I would go through a form. I eventually was able to be less nervous, only uncomfortable.

Let's face it, there's always something that needs correction or refinements. When your movements are correct, that's when the lao-shr (teacher) can take you to greater depths of the same movements. We should actually encourage our teachers to watch our forms and practice. Watching the group sometimes sparks my memory of a lesson I've received on that particular form that I had forgotten.

One teacher I had didn't like correcting us, he didn't care so i would purposely and dramatically mess thing up so I'd get a correction. Keep in mind: each correction leads us to greater depths.