



SHR-FU'S BOOK IS DONE!!!

In a couple of months Master Tchoung will take his book to the printers. From what I've seen of the book it contains detailed instruction on sections 1-9, tai chi principles. This book will be the only written material on our system so if you are teaching our Yang system this is an invaluable resource. Since shr-fu is putting up the money for the printing himself there will be limited numbers of copies printed. If you haven't let me know that you want one already do so ASAP.

A SPECIAL VISIT

On October 30th we were able to arrange a meeting between Masters Tchoung Ta-Tchen and Gao-fu. It went great! There was an exchange of demonstrations; Master Gao-fu showed the 24 form, and Master Tchoung demonstrated 7-8 sanshou, and tuishou. In addition we were treated to a demonstration of section #2 by shr-mu. At the end of our visit shr-fu wrote and presented Master Gao-fu with his calligraphy.

SORRY

In last month's chi kung article some of the information wasn't readable due to the color of the paper. Below is the list of points covered in the chi kung article.

- Lao gung** -- center of palm
- Hu Kou** -- between thumb & index finger
- Yung Chuen** -- middle of foot
- Pai hui** -- crown of head
- Tan tien** -- lower abdomen
- Shu shen** -- finger tips
- Ming men** -- small of back

SATURDAY WORKSHOPS

- Jan 7 - tuishou 10-12, \$15
- Jan 14 - sanshou 9-11, \$15
- Jan 28 - short staff 9-11, \$10
- Feb 4 - Los Angeles
- Feb 11 - free hands 10-12, \$15
- Feb 18 - sanshou 9-11, \$15
- Feb 25 - short staff 9-11, \$10

CLUB LIBRARY

Well, I now have it partially organized. In my file box you'll find a folder titled: LIBRARY In the folder there are two sheets: one for requesting a book and the other a checkout list. If there is a book on the list you'd like to check out put your name by it and the date. I'll be going through the list once a week and I'll bring you the requested book the following week. Please don't hang on to a book more than two weeks. Also, please be mindful when you have a book, I've lost some out of print books in the passed due to members forgetting they had the book. The books relate in one way or another to our study of the internal arts or to nurturing health and life. Many of the books in the library have been donated by Gene, the rest are from my personal collection.

BEGINNING CLASSES

will be starting January. If you know anyone interested in Yang Tai Chi, Pa Kua or Chi Kung January is the best time to join.

CLUB FEE \$55

Yep, it's going up. Starting January the basic club fee will be \$55 monthly. This fee covers the basic class, chi kung session, newsletters and video nights. *(Still quite a deal)*

VIDEO NIGHT

Fri., Dec. 2, 7-9pm
my apartment in Magnolia
directions are in my file box.



Have you moved? New Phone #?

In case of poor weather, snow or some reason class is canceled be sure I know how to let you know. Please check the information I have in the file box to be sure it's correct.

SHORT STAFF CLASS

I will be starting a short staff class once a month. We will work on basics for beginners, and refinements for advanced members. The class will meet once a month so you'll have the remainder of the month to practice. The class will be outdoors and sign up is required. Fee will be \$10 per session.

CLUB DEMONSTRATION

WOW, what a turn out! We had about 100 people at the demonstration. I knew we were going to have a large crowd but my estimation of 50 people was definitely off. This demo will definitely go down as special with Master Gao-fu honoring us with the Chen 24 form. It was sure a success, thanks to all who participated and those bringing friends.

If you are interested in a video of the demo you can buy one through the club for \$25 until Jan '95. After this the price will go up to \$35. It came out pretty good.

MASTER DANIEL WANG

I had the fortune to meet and have lunch with Gao-fu's friend and classmate Master Daniel Wang on his visit here. Master Wang teaches several styles of tai chi chuan in addition to pa kua chang, kung fu and chi kung. Master Wang has taught chi kung to HIV+ patients and it's shown to help. There are several good articles on Master Wang in my file box if you are interested in reading more.



WELCOME NEW CHEN TAI CHI MEMBERS

KOOTENAY TAI CHI RETREAT

August 13-19
\$395 Canadian \$335 US
(604)352-3714/352-2468

MASTER GAO VIDEO

Chen 24 form
Chen 48 form
Chen 48 sword form
Chen 36 form
are all on one tape
Available from:
STCI
27247 NE Union Hill Rd
Redmond, WA 98053
(206) 868-8961
\$30.00

CLUB ITEMS

1994 Demonstration \$25.00
1993 Newsletters \$5.00
1994 Newsletters \$5.00
Pa Kua Chi Kung booklet \$8.00
(+ 2.00 postage if necessary)
Internal Wushu Arts
(206) 283-0055

GENE'S BOOK

Gene has updated his book:
**Practicing & Teaching
T'ai-chi Chuan.**
\$10.00

I highly recommend it to all students of the internal arts. To order call Gene: 547-7293

KOOTENAY PA KUA RETREAT

August 21-27
\$395 Canadian \$335 US
(604)352-3714/352-2468

Please

With the holidays here please be sure to take some time for yourself. Treat yourself to some restful, quiet time. Nurture your center thus you nurture your health. Even just 10 minutes a day has a beneficial effect.

Andy

BAD TECHNIQUE IS BAD TECHNIQUE

by Harvey Kurland

It seems to me that some t'ai-chi people have a way of making a very simple concept into a mystical and convoluted one. For example the knee pain and injury issue is a simple one, bad mechanics. (Sometimes combined with underlying problems or past injury) Though mystical debates go on. If the technique has bad mechanics then it is wrong. Being passed on by the stereotypical sage doesn't make it correct. Some teachers can and do get away with mechanics that are not good for their students, which I covered in the past ad nauseam. Another factor includes too much training too soon. This means with all the best intentions the sincere students beats themselves to death by doing more than their body is ready for. Some exercise science wizards call it too much *training volume, over training*.

This is clearly seen in running. If you want to start a running program you would start with a short distance and gradually run longer distances. This allows your orthopedic system a chance to catch up and keeps you from getting what are called chronic or repetitive injuries. Tendonitis and sore knees are common problems. The same thing can happen if you do too much t'ai-chi or pa-kua at first. Unless you are in good shape orthopedically to start with you should start out with a short period of time and gradually increase training time. Overtraining is possible, especially with the more demanding Chen style and pa-kua.

Professional instructors need to understand proper training methods as well as having good technique and an understanding of the "why" for what they are doing. Unfortunately anyone can claim to be an expert at t'ai-chi after a few lessons, without novice students knowing any better.

Tchoung Ta-tchen used to tell us, if you do not know what the techniques do and can't get them to work, you have no business teaching t'ai-chi ch'uan. Without its martial quality, i.e. spirit, the soul of it is missing and it becomes a dance.

Many instructors and writers seem to use the ploys "Raising a corpse from the dead", JIE SHI HUAN HUN and "Putting fake flowers on the tree" SHU SHANG KAI HUA, especially in t'ai-chi ch'uan and pa-kua chang. Instead of instructors relying on the quality of their art, depth of knowledge and being able to do proper mechanics, they bring up a "Famous" name, generations removed and use that as their claim to fame or as a rationalization for questionable positioning. While family trees are useful to establish some credibility, high level performance is more important. An example of the fake flowers ploy used by teachers is hinting of magical teachings to come, "When you are ready". For example I know of several cases where a teacher will tell a student that the class policy is not to teach pushing hands for TEN YEARS because the student will not be ready until then, i.e., their ch'i would not be strong enough. Is the teacher learning pushing hands in the interim or just stringing students along? In the 1970's this was a common HUSTLE which continues today. Interestingly when I went to Taiwan I didn't have anyone mention this ten year holding period with all of Master Gan's students eager to push hands with me. I did not find much of the mystical holding back in Taiwan that I often encountered in the U.S..

It is too easy to get into a debate over technique, due to stylistic variations. Who is to say if technique is correct? If it hurts your knees, it probably isn't correct. If it is structurally

weak, it isn't. If it is stiff, disjointed and uses brute force it isn't. If it relies on arm strength with little or no waist and legs, it isn't. I'm sure Yang Cheng-fu had mediocre skilled students who ended up teaching, just as most modern teachers do. Learning from a great master for a short period of time is not a guarantee of quality. But the family tree is there, as are claims of knowledge by association. The tree, at the least, shows the possibility of knowledge. Which follows, "What do they call the student who graduated first in their class and last in their class in medical school?" Answer, "Doctor!"

I have often felt there should be some standard for credentialing teachers just as for high school biology teachers. Our organization (NWTTC & CTCA) had a step wise training and testing program. You pass one test then go on to the next. This is common problem in the Western exercise world as well. Look at the so called experts on TV who lack a fundamental understanding of exercise, but who are educating the public. The major organizations, such as ACSM, the American College of Sports Medicine, are fighting an uphill battle, trying to certify exercise instructors to minimum levels of competence to protect the public. Yet self taught experts still train unsuspecting but seemingly happy clients.

Some t'ai-chi ch'uan instructors lack basic understanding of what they are doing and why. The first glaring example is poor alignment and lack of waist turn. Unfortunately the beginning students doesn't know that.

TYPE OF TEACHERS 3 models 8 variations

There are many types of teachers, for one model let's say they fall into three categories: honest and competent, well meaning but don't realize they are incompetent, and frauds. Frauds include both the highly skilled who mislead and rip-off students, and those who are just pure charlatans. For example let us say hypothetically there is a kung-fu or karate instructor has great skill but as a side line teaches t'ai-chi. He teaches t'ai-chi like a slow version of this hard style and implies to his students that if they stay long enough they will learn the secrets. After many years his students work hard, learn his method and are promoted to instructor level. They are teaching a poor quality t'ai-chi but they are honest and well meaning, if not gullible. Their students get a good workout and are happily drawn into the group. These instructors are the "Well meaning but incompetent" and their instructor could be classified as a fraud. The whole scenario may smack of a cult, because it fits the criterion, but none will admit to it. And the knowing martial art community condones it with silence. As they say, "After all they aren't hurting anyone and the exercise is good for them and the students are happy."

continued next page

BAD TECHNIQUE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2:

In another model (I) we have excellent t'ai-chi instructors who have great knowledge and are able to demonstrate the techniques and specific "Internal power". (II) There are the technically good teachers who don't like the "Violence" so just do form, do it well, but that is all. These are usually the most popular and do a lot of good for their students health. (III) Next there are the teachers who have technically poor form but through other martial art training have ability to do applications and have martial power. (IV) Next type has poor form and doesn't care about applications.

They are into abstract movements and may even do a "free form" art passing as t'ai-chi. There are those who are teaching due to a deep need to teach but may or may not have the skill or experience. Example of this can be seen in the Western exercise world as well. Just walk into a few clubs, some "trainers" are high school level muscle men or aerobics instructors; others have masters degrees in exercise science. You don't have to be the best performer or fighter to be a teacher, but you should have a certain minimum competency. Paradoxically in the gym often the relatively untrained but enthusiastic trainers have the happiest clients.

STUDENTS NEED LIKE MINDED TEACHERS

Another part of my model differentiates those who are interested specifically in dance, health, exotic exercise, relaxation, martial art, shamanism, and or a mixture. If a student is looking for a health exercise then maybe the martial art oriented instructor is not appropriate and health oriented one is. If one wants to gain a high martial skill then only the martial oriented teacher will be suitable. Students need to find teachers that match their interest.

We can take these various types (interests) of teachers then add their level of technical competence, their ability to teach and then add another very important factor - their WILLINGNESS TO TEACH. For example I have met several highly skilled masters who are also masters of the art of taking their students for a ride. They had no interest in teaching their students, just the annuity their "disciples" provide. They hold back.

Happily there are those few highly competent masters who are eager to teach and are happy when their students excel. An example of such a master is Tchoung Ta-tchen. When I met Tchoung he wanted to increase the level of the art. He told us that the old pernicious habit of "Saving a little" has caused t'ai-chi to decay as a martial art. His goal was for his students to surpass him and he said some have. He pushed us hard and we found that you can teach "Everything" (Even the "Secrets") and only a few will excel anyway. That is due to talent, perseverance, and practice, lots of practice. But I find Tchoung is a rare teacher. I have heard several rationalizations why top masters hold back and don't teach. The answer remains if they don't plan to teach, then stringing students along is fraud, period.

A good teacher is more than just a fighter or technician. Ideal teachers should be competent, willing to teach, and have the ability to teach. This is the same as learning from a college zoology or high school math teacher. There are good ones and bad ones; the most famous in their field are not always the best teachers. Anyone who has gone to graduate school and has taken classes under a "World Renowned Expert", can attest to that. To accredit t'ai-chi teachers would be a tough job as there are so many variables. The central factors remain: demonstrate basic skills competently and be willing to teach.

I attended a CAEA meeting (California Art Educators Association) and the final speaker talked about how accepting art that was clearly bad or off the mark was part of why the general population does not respect the arts. He said artists have to be the first to say "this is junk" or this is off target and doesn't do what it proposes. Only that way can there be credibility. I see the same concept holds in the art of Tai Chi chuan. To accept anything, just because, does not increase the credibility of the art.

Reputable organizations will have to police themselves to maintain high standards. We as instructors should work on raising our competence, teaching honestly, not holding back, and try to improve our teaching methods. To repeat what Sifu Tchoung often told us, "The goal is to raise the level of the art through the generations." The question remains, how does a novice find a good teacher? Good luck. Stay well and be happy.

Harvey Kurland received his Masters Degree from the University of Washington and has dedicated himself to public health issues for the last 30 years. He has degrees in public health education and exercise physiology. He is a certificated chief instructor of t'ai-chi ch'uan by Grand master Tchoung Ta-tchen and teaches at the University of California at Riverside and Loma Linda University. He also holds certification from the American College of Sports Medicine and International Sports Sciences Association.

ANOTHER CAN OF WORMS

Buyer beware!

Different strokes for different folks!

One size does **not** fit all!

The Empty Bucket Makes The Most Noise

Harvey asked me to comment about the importance of lineage when seeking or studying with a teacher. What did I think? This subject also came up during lunch with Master Wang.

This actually brings up a point I feel is becoming vitally important, more so year after year. As I was working on a chapter in the chi kung book I couldn't figure out a subtle way of saying it, I have this urge to get up on my soap box and shout.

It's Up To Us! We Are The Only One Responsible For Our Selves, Our Lives, The Quality Of Our Lives. The final decision and responsibility is ours!

BE ALERT, STAY CENTERED

OK what does this have to do with the subject? I've been very lucky to have, what I consider to be,

the best teachers around compared to all the teachers I've seen and met. I have also had some poor ones but luckily they were few. I've also met quite a few self-promoters with no skill in the arts at all, just what they've read out of a book.

First of all a novice can't really tell a good teacher from a bad one, a 'true' style from a dance, the 'real' thing from a fake. Usually what I've found is that the fake/false/con-man has more salesmanship and 'bells & whistles' than the real thing, the sincere teacher. In modern society the 'bells & whistles', the promises of instant gratification, skill, invulnerability, instant health are what people now expect. The real thing takes time and much effort. That nasty word *EFFORT!* "I want health and to be fit but can't I do something as I watch TV?" "I want calmness, won't once a week do?"

If a novice goes to only one club, then there isn't any comparison. They may not know whether it's the real thing or not but there is no chance to compare. Exposure to all the teachers in a certain area, talking with them, asking questions and being 'suspicious' of any statements such as criticism of the other teachers, or that they are the **only** 'true' or 'direct' lineage. Master Wang says his question to someone who claims a good lineage is, "Were you a good student?" I'd add, "Was your teacher a good

**"AUTHORITY
PREVENTS THE
UNDERSTANDING
OF ONESELF."**

J. KRISHNAMURTI



student?" "Was your teacher a good teacher?" Anytime I hear a teacher pump their system up with words and belittle the others; or comment on how powerful they are: I tune-out. It's best to go elsewhere. I keep remembering Master Tchoung's classes. Whenever he'd fa-jin or complete an application he'd say, "Isn't tai chi wonderful?" not look what I've done, or look at what I can do.

These arts are Internal Martial Arts whose to say what 'true' art is? How can you tell if it's internal? Are you in deep concentration, meditation or on medication? Standardization would be great and make things much easier but the internal arts aren't only a series of techniques. They are an expression of certain principles of mind body harmony and study. Some of the most highly skilled and gifted teachers I've had weren't from 'one' traceable lineage or a certain master. However, their knowledge, skill, compassion, and teaching ability was beyond question. They were living representations of the art, a living example of the classics. And though I've had excellent teachers with direct lineage to past grand masters I've found the ones who use their lineage to sell their classes or as their credentials to teach were fairly poor. So what do we do?

We all have to make many decisions every day hoping we have good judgment. It's the same thing when it comes to looking for a teacher, we need to keep our eyes open and alert, accept nothing told to us as the 'truth' without questioning it. Not just does it sound logical but is it useful to our own life? Does the particular teacher reflect those concepts? I look at my teachers and I hope to achieve their level of skill and sincerity as I continue to practice. Those who have been around Masters Tchoung, Gao-fu, Yueng all know they love the art. Even at their age they are still studying and practicing joyfully.

When I see a new teacher or practitioner I usually wonder what lineage they are from -- but only as a curiosity. When it come to the art and if I should study with this person, it has no value whatsoever. I watch them, their movements, their attitude, I listen to what they say, how they act. Are they sincere or should I get my hip boots on? As we study the internal arts we are developing 'listening' energy first. The beginning of this is listening to our bodies, the tension and looseness. Our body has a great deal of wisdom we block off due to tension and daily stress. We need to begin to trust our own feelings our own intuition. We all know that 9 times out of 10 our first hunch was right. The same holds true here. I also look at their students, the characteristic of the club. Does it have attitude? Are the members friendly (this is very important to me). Are they like sheep, or afraid to talk? Are they practicing or standing around talking and only visiting? Are they helping each other?

As I've studied with many teachers I've had some that were very skillful but lousy teachers, some were very mean people but still highly skilled. I've had some with very lousy technique but great insight into the art and applications. Some that were able to shake me out of my rut to see another aspect or view of the arts. I've stayed with a couple of teachers that were either unkind or mean because I knew I could learn from them.

The problem is we all want our teachers and masters to be perfect, the real thing, a saint, a priest, what is written about in novels. THE MASTER I had this unrealistic view of a teacher until he show up to class with a huge hangover smelling of booze. It sure can burst a big bubble.

We all feel fear, love, hunger, passion, jealousy, envy, depression, joy, confusion etc., some just hide it better than others. Any feeling and attitude you have, you can be sure that your teacher also has in their life. Sorry no saints.

There is an ideal of what a martial artist should be, what a health practitioner should be, what a true master should be. These ideals are like the stars, something for us to wish upon and reach for, a goal.

Having been exposed to Masters Tchoung, Gao-fu, and Yueng we have a certain expectation of what a teacher should be. However everyone has their own special niche and unique quality that can help us all with an insight or lesson no one else can help us with. Master Tchoung always says, "If you don't know tuishou you don't really know tai chi". Well, I've know some individuals who live their lives as an expression of tai chi but don't know the forms. Some who don't know tuishou but use the same principles in their speeches or group dynamics. It is true that if you don't know tuishou you don't have the complete system, but which system are you studying? Is it useful to your life to have a complete system?

Often I get caught in wanting it all the complete system. EVERYTHING to see all sides. To know it all. This is studying the system not necessarily the art, though the system leads us to the art. Which came first the chicken or the egg?

This is one big mountain, if I only know or prefer to go one path to the top, I've still climbed the mountain, perhaps I don't know the entire mountain, perhaps I do.

Is the teacher or club someone you feel are 'neat' or OK people? If so see what you can learn from them. You can always change your mind. It must help nurture *YOUR* life and health.

ATD