

THURSDAY T'AI-CHI
9-11 am
Magnolia studio

THE FRESH AIR

Bring a sweater and gloves to the classes. When it's sunny we'll be outside to enjoy the sun as we have class.

ITEMS FOR SALE

Wuji club T-shirt L - \$15.00
Assorted video tapes \$35.00 @
Our Yang Style T'ai-chi book \$35.00
Pa Kua Chi Kung Book \$8.00
Teaching and Practicing T'ai-chi Chuan by
Gene Burnett \$10.00
Assorted Pa Kua books from Joe Crandall.

**SEATTLE/NORTHWEST
T'AI-CHI FESTIVAL**

July 22-27th

There will be several instructors throughout the city offering classes morning to evening at reasonable rates (\$5 to 10 per session paid to the teacher). If you are teaching, or know a teacher that would like to participate please give me a call 283-0055.

SO FAR:

Chris Matthews, ATDale, Gene Burnett, Dr. Wang, Kim Ivy, Ken Wright, Mark Baclawski, Elf Evans, Dennis Sharp, Steve Gray, Saul Krotki,

SIFU'S CELEBRATION

June 8&9

Many, many top quality guest masters lecturing and performing, and mini workshops. Saturday night there will be a dinner for sifu. We are looking and in need of sponsors. Advertising will be done with posters, flyers, brochures, and even

on the Internet. If interested call me, Andy 283-0055.

PROPER ETIQUETTE IN A CLUB

Though we are an untraditional-traditional club there are certain manners that are important when visiting another club, attending classes or various session.

Here are a few reminders:

- * Never pick up or handle someone's weapon/practice instrument without first asking, ESPECIALLY at another's club.
- * Don't ask questions not pertinent to the current lesson or class session (time is usually limited).
- * Pay attention to the class and respect the others in the class; don't just visit, chat, or disturb another student while class is in session!
- * Don't talk to someone while they are practicing unless they speak to you first, you may be interrupting a very good practice session for them.
- * Don't eat food in the practice area, it's only for study and practice.
- * Students of grandmaster Tchoung's students should refer to grandmaster Tchoung as shr-yea or su-yea instead of sifu. Your teacher is sifu and your teacher's teacher is shr-yea, and your teacher's teacher's, teacher is tai shr-yea.

NEW BOOK

New book our for those interested in Taoism: Seven Taoist Masters *A Folk Novel of China* translated by Eva Wong
Also, **PUSHING HANDS** a movie with a T'ai Chi flavor is now in video rental stores. Good T'ai Chi in it.

MASTER TAO PING-SIANG

The Five Willow T'ai-chi Club will have their Chief Instructor, Master Tao Ping-Siang visiting

and teaching in Seattle this spring starting March 26th. For more information: Five Willow T'ai-chi Association, PO Box 45817, Seattle WA 98145-0817

TEACHINGS OF MASTER TCHOUNG

This time, as always, we had another wonderful lesson from grandmaster Tchoung, Ta-tchen. The session primarily focused on tui-shou (push hands). Some of sifu's comments: "All movement in T'ai Chi have an application. If you don't know how to apply the T'ai-chi forms you don't know T'ai-chi." "The body is a hand, don't use your hands independently. Where ever you have contact, that part of our body becomes a hand." "If your push hands aren't good, or you can't apply techniques then you are not practicing the solo forms correctly. Your stances or postures are incorrect." Then we proceeded to working on proper pushing in tui-shou and using the body as a spring.

Before going up Gene asked me to find out the significance of the posture 'Step Up to form Seven Stars'. In Chinese martial arts the seven stars refer to the seven primary striking areas of the body: feet, knees, hips, shoulders, elbows, hands, and head. But why is one of the postures called Seven Stars? Of course the seven stars refer to the seven sisters also known as the Big Dipper. The answer was that it looks like the big dipper. It never occurred to me but the posture can look like the big dipper! The forward leg being the handle of the dipper and the upper body and hands being the scoop. Thanks for asking Gene, I never would have thought of asking this question.

KOOTENAY T'AI-CHI CENTRE

SUMMER CAMPS

20TH ANNIVERSARY!

T'AI-CHI CAMP:

August 11-17, \$360 U.S.

PA KUA CAMP:

August 19-25, \$360.00 U.S.

(\$655 for both weeks)

Kootenay T'ai-chi Centre
Box 566

Nelson B.C.

Canada V1L 5R3

Phone/Fax (604)352-3714

TIME, RANKING AND TRAINING

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How much time do you need to spend doing t'ai-chi for the exercise benefits? The best answer is 30 to 60 minutes 3 to 6 days per week. For the ch'i kung and stress reduction benefits 20 minutes may be enough. Cheng Man-ching recommended doing the form 10 minutes twice a day and Tchoung Ta-tchen recommended 20 minutes twice a day. As in meditation there is a minimum threshold to get the benefit, starting at about 10 minutes, with most people getting good benefit at 20 to 30 minutes. For those who want to excel at t'ai-chi ch'uan the amount of exercise is increased to 1 1/2 to 3 hours per day, six times per week. This greater volume of training does not necessarily make you healthier. As training is a stress. The athlete's goals are different. Exercise is like medicine, the right dose helps you, too much can cause problems. Doing t'ai-chi for health is different than training to be an elite athlete.

Last month we looked at the amount and time in training and becoming technically competent. We looked at Japanese martial arts such as aikido in terms of their ranking, i.e. belts, and t'ai-chi ch'uan titles. We found that there is a direct relationship between how long one actively takes lessons and rank. But time spent practicing does not necessarily correlate to skill, as there are many people who practice t'ai-chi all their lives and do not do it technically correct. So they don't have the higher level techniques. That does not negate the benefit they get from the exercise, unless they hurt themselves. If they stick to the concepts, they will get the health benefits. But they just do not have what is considered the ideal form or method to teach others to gain real skill. We discussed the example of the two t'ai-chi teachers who taught over 13 years each, who did not have the pushing hands skill or rooting of my 2 year student. Another fellow who was on the US t'ai-chi kung-fu team and writes about t'ai-chi for several magazines was unable to push over my 2 year women student. We find many of the new masters out of China do more of a decorative "wushu" art and less of the centered art. Learning T'ai-chi is a systematic process and there is a positive relationship of skill and time spent studying in a structured class.

JUDO AND T'AI-CHI RANKING

In some martial arts ranking is based partly on competition. For example the main ranking method in Judo, a grappling method, was to defeat a certain number of opponents to get points to get a black belt (shodan is first degree black belt). Also factored in was how long one was a brown belt and how many points were won in tournaments. In judo the lowest adult rank was white belt called 6th kyu and highest is 10th dan Red belt. Brown belt was 3rd (lowest brown) to 1st kyu highest brown. So when a 1st kyu beat 6 other 1st brown (ikkyu) in a row, or won 10 points, or won 6 points

in one year as ikkyu, or 3 points in 2 years as ikkyu, they can get a shodan. Each black belt rank after that follow this structure. They also had to know their kata, which were specific techniques. A different system was used for women. Honorary black belts are also given for years of service. With the stress on function it is easy to see that a black belt in judo would be relatively competent. After a few years one would reach their appropriate level, the more talented would achieve black belt faster. In Japan most start learning as young as age 5 and may have a black belt by time they are 15, some elite athletes have 3rd or 4th degree black belts by the time they are 18. On average, high ranking judo athletes train 1 1/2 to 3 hours per day, six days per week and teach 1 1/2 to 2 hours a day. Champions usually came from the Police Department teams or University teams. Most Champions are 4th to 7th dan (6th to 8th dan are red/white belts). Judo has a system which will keep the knowledge and level of teachers high. Can this be used with t'ai-chi ch'uan?

Doing t'ai-chi for health is different than training to be an elite athlete

In t'ai-chi, most people are after good health, stress reduction and getting some light exercise. But there are those who want to gain the higher level skills, compete and become teachers. The way it is now a t'ai-chi teacher could be the equivalent of a 10th dan red belt, like Grandmaster Tchoung Ta-tchen, Cheng Man-ching, Kuo Lien Ying, while more teachers have less than the equivalent of a 3 kyu brown belt. The beginner wouldn't know the difference. Several visiting masters have told me that they have the same problem in China. They said that only one in ten t'ai-chi teachers in China are competent. This is because there are no standards. Of course they don't consider wushu performers masters. Many times "Hard style" masters who teach t'ai-chi are considered masters even when they are at the white belt level in t'ai-chi. For that reason the NWTCCA has developed some standards for teaching levels based on technical competence.

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OFF-CENTRED IN THE TAO

"Buns of Steel and Chi-Full Bellies"

by Hajime Harold Naka - *Born Again Taoist*

I hope I'm not too negative, but after observing the odd behavior of people, I have come to the conclusion that we live in a very sick society. Oh, really, what took you so long? I must be a slow learner. T'ai-chi can do that to you. I have noticed how human beings are being replaced by human doings who are being replaced by technology. People driving their bodies like machines until they collapse or are injured, while others force inches or pounds off or are adding bulk and rippling muscles, trying to achieve the perfect shape, as projected by the commercials and glamour magazines and there are those who don't give a shit, do nothing and become like slugs. I think I fit that category, not giving a shit, only I call it 'The Tao of Pooh.' Image is everything or nothing if you don't like how you feel about yourself inside.

Come to think of it, we are all products of our culture. Created and packaged by our parent(s), educational institutions, media and government the only difference between us and a box of cereal is that we're not sitting on a shelf in a supermarket. Sound far fetched? Then ask yourself, "Who am I?" Chances are that everything you identify with was externally imposed. I'm not sure if this applies to you new age people. Are you part of this society or out there somewhere? Just checking. I consider myself an exception to the rules, I break them. While most people support the system, I am digging away at the foundation with other radical rebels, so it will collapse and a more compassionate community will rise, where real healing can take place before people get sick of being sick, where the human spirit can soar.

Recently I had the opportunity to experience community, where it was safe to peel off our masks and feel at a deeper level, to be vulnerable and honest with ourselves and each other. It happened at Rex Eastman's T'ai-chi Retreat in Nelson, where seventy or so T'ai-chi players of all levels gathered for a week of learning (unlearning for me), sharing and growing. This was my ninth or tenth camp and the first one as a guest instructor. I said to Rex that I felt like I had been demoted. I must say, I did feel a bit intimidated standing in front of the whole group on Monday morning when it was my turn to lead, especially since I didn't know what I was going to say or do. I think I said something like "This will probably be the only

time in your T'ai-chi practice where you will learn from someone who knows less than you do." The other instructors were patient with me and encouraged me to play. I want to thank Andy, Mike, Kevin and Rex for sharing their skill and knowledge of the internal arts and for their humble, humorous and human qualities. Just checking your egos, guys.

The time at the retreat was nurturing and inspiring, reinforcing the feeling that I am unfolding into my destiny. By the way, did I dream I was a butterfly? Are you messing with my mind again, Mike?

Meanwhile - Smile - Have a Chi-Full Day.

(reprinted with permission from Harold)

A study guide to pa kua chang

by ATDale

WEEK EIGHT: CONCLUSION

THE ART AND LIFE

Over the last few months we've covered the main training areas of Pa Kua Chang. The pillars need for each of us to succeed in gaining depth, understanding and skill, digging deep into the art of Pa Kua Chang. But there are actually hidden secrets to all these levels that need to be understood and practiced each session, consistently, in order to get anywhere. As the T'ai-chi Chuan classics say, "Without correct practice, years of study will result in wasted time." These *secrets* are actually the core of all the internal arts, they need to be constantly checked and corrected until they become part of our daily life, our spiritual life.

- relax
- no force, no strength
- suspend the head top
- sink the waist
- keep the mind and chi in the tan-t'ien
- keep the 5 bows of the body
- shoulders and elbows down
- empty the chest, round the back
- do not strain
- daily practice
- perseverance in practice
- mindful study
- all movement smooth and connected
- I - Ling - Chi (the intent leads the energy)
- I - Chi - Li (intend leads energy and power follows)
- distinguish clearly yin/yang

Within our practice of Pa Kua Chang there are extra requirements: rise, drill, fall, overturn must all be clearly distinguished (In T'ai-chi Chuan the energies are: ward-off, roll-back, press, push, pull-down, split,

elbow, shoulder). Next comes the principle of 'JIN CHANG LI DA', expanding the joints and ligaments to increase the flow of power. This is short of a stretch and less than completely relaxed. Keeping the entire body open, flexible like a piece of bamboo. This is the same principle as 'suspend the head top and sink the waist'. From the waist up to the head top is like a flame reaching **gently** upward, while the hips and legs sink and extend into the earth.

A general principle of the internal arts is keeping the chest hollow so the energy doesn't float but sinks into the tan-t'ien and creates a root, a reservoir for the chi to accumulate.

On a deeper level are the mental requirements: keeping the mind in the tan-t'ien, being alert and listening to our bodies yet not being controlled by our emotions, working toward being calm and centered.

We also seek to maintain the six harmonies: (internal 3) I-Chi-Li (external 3) hands and feet - knees and elbows - hips and shoulders. *Grandmaster Cheng, Ting-hua's oldest son's system is called The Six Harmonies Pa Kua Chang.*

Coordination of the Nine Palaces are other requirements: (3) unifying the lower, middle, and upper tan-t'ien (3) - the hands, elbows, and shoulders (3)- the feet, knees, and hips. *Grandmaster Cheng, Ting-hua's top student named his system the Nine Palaces Pa Kua Chang.*

Many of these requirements are based upon our physical body structure and carriage. On an elementary level they are intended to strengthen us physically and keep us moving and acting in safe and healthy ways. Supporting and nurturing our strength and physical centeredness. On a deeper level it helps the inner energy move easily, strongly and build our health from the inside. Another level is the interconnection between our mind-body-spirit. As we become centered, inner connected, peaceful, content and happy our outer form has a different upright carriage to it. There is a confidence in our walk, an expression of our spirit shining through. Just as our spirit and emotional state will reflect in our body our posture and stance can effect our inner state. This is the practice of the internal arts in real life and much more valuable than the hour or two practiced daily. If you can maintain the principles of the arts as you go through your daily chores, struggles, or enjoyments you need not set aside a 'special' practice for your art. Life is your art.

During one talk master Yueng mentions that the change and adaptation of the martial arts to current society was not only natural but good. Yes, once in a while we may need to physically defend ourselves but the most important aspect now is to maintain our health and return to our spiritual center. This is ultimately good for everyone.

A STUDY AND PRACTICE GUIDE TO

T'AI-CHI CHUAN continued

by ATDale

BEGINNERS

A good teacher isn't necessarily good for everyone.

You're sampling the waters. You come to the art having seen, read, or heard about a portion of the art and decide to try it. You may come with greater expectations of gaining health, centeredness, self-defense, martial arts, or spiritual reasons. First, keep in mind your exposure and understanding most likely has been just a small glimpse of the art. Just like the five blind men touching the elephant, there's much, much more than what you've seen, read or heard.

The name translates as "Grand Ultimate Boxing" i.e. all encompassing. Its practice will or can effect all levels of our lives: physical, mental, emotional, energetic, spiritual. Coming to the art for spiritual reasons but not willing to put the physical effort doesn't work. Everything is intertwined.

'In a hurry' doesn't work in T'ai-chi. It takes time for a loaf of bread to bake or to prepare a nutritious meal.

The best thing for a beginner to do is come to classes or lessons and listen with an empty mind. No preconceived ideas about what's to happen or what's to be learned. Come listen and play with the information. Even if you're not a beginner empty your cup, clear the mirror of your mind so you will see clearly what is being presented. Too often we come to class with expectation or assumptions that get in the way of our understanding. Often those who have studied with another teacher will sit in class comparing the current lessons with their last teacher's instead of learning what is being taught.

Beginners have no responsibility except to come to class, listen and try. You aren't expected to know it, do it perfect, or even be correct. The most important

thing for me, as a teacher, is a class that is eager, interested, and puts forth effort in what's taught. Before or after classes playing with some of the movements, experimenting or just trying to remember. practice any movement instead of just standing waiting to be taught.

CHOOSING A TEACHER

Buyer beware! Just like any other thing there are good and bad, qualified and BS T'ai-chi instructors out there. First of all you need to figure out what it is you'd like to get out of the art. Some people come to a club to learn a particular form or choreography, Yang, Wu, Chen, Li, Hao or others styles. This really isn't the study of T'ai-chi Chuan but the study of a stylized version of T'ai-chi Chuan. All of these styles are T'ai-chi Chuan because they all are based upon a series of classics and principles that govern T'ai-chi movement. It's just different flavors of the ice cream. My advice if you are interested in learning the art of T'ai-chi Chuan is to look at the teacher, club, and students instead of a style. From what you've read does the class seem to fit with what you're looking for? You'll find a range of T'ai-chi for health to T'ai-chi for fighting. Don't listen to what the teacher tells you! Especially sales pitches. If you hear "We are the only . . .", or "We have the truth", keep moving on. Actually if you hear someone say 'we' more than the benefits of 'T'ai-chi' look elsewhere.

Look at the group, the method of instruction, talk with the students and if you like what you see and hear then consider it a place to study. The form or style doesn't matter if the atmosphere and energy 'feel' comfortable and real. Who you choose will vary greatly upon whether you want just a little exercise, meditation, form or to apprentice in the art. When I first met master Gao-fu I had no intention of learning the Chen method of T'ai-chi Chuan, I had enough on my hands trying to become proficient in the Yang method. However, after seeing her move I new I could learn a lot from her about T'ai-chi Chuan. At the time she was teaching T'ai-chi Chuan through the Chen method so I began her Chen class in order to study T'ai-chi Chuan with her. I wanted to study with her. When you find a good teacher you study with them, you don't dictate what you want to learn from them. Most of what you'll learn isn't what you thought you'd learn anyway. If you want to study the depths of T'ai-chi you need to find a teacher you can trust and be willing to practice and learn/unlearn.

It's all the same; if you want to learn how to change the oil in your car almost anyone who knows can teach you. However, if you want to learn how to rebuild an engine then look for a master mechanic that can and is willing to teach and that you can tolerate.

PRACTICE SCHEDULES

We get caught up in the ideas. The ideal is to practice at least one hour straight, twice a day. Well then . . . what do you practice if you know more than an hours worth? What if you don't know enough or can't remember enough to fill an hour? What if you're sick or traveling? What if you don't have enough room?

Our minds resents structure and control: discipline. As a beginner (or even an advanced practitioner) the minute you decide to set aside so many minutes to practice you'll find so many interruptions and reasons you should be doing other stuff. But if something is pleasant and nurturing we'll somehow begin to fit it in, whether we have the time or not.

Beginners, don't try to memorize or practice perfectly. Pick a movement you remember and 'play' with it. Don't worry about practicing correctly, just move. If you can't remember any movement then make one up and try to stay relaxed and smooth in your movement. When tired quit. Practice when you have the time (morning, lunch break, watching the news) whenever. The most important thing T'ai-chi will begin to do is to get you 'into' your body, feel and listen to your body. Are you comfortable? Are you relaxed? If not then your first priority is to adjust yourself to make yourself comfortable. That T'ai-chi Basics. **THIS IS YOUR HOMEWORK FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE AT ALL TIMES.** (I'll be checking up on your progress from time to time, even if you're not in classes).

Once you begin to learn a form, if you want to keep remembering it you do need to go through it at least once a day. You see, this really isn't practicing T'ai-chi, it's practicing memorization and conditioning the body. Once you know the movements and don't have to think about them then you can begin to practice the T'ai-chi. Also you never really need to learn a complete form, choreography to practice T'ai-chi. Just learn a couple of movement and repeat them over and over again. After a while your T'ai-chi can be as good, if not better, than anyone with a collection of forms. The 'T'ai-chi' is working on the feeling of being comfortable, relaxation, centeredness and smoothness as you move not thinking about the postures and movements.

Occasionally you'll hear of the 'traditional' style or the 'secret' style of T'ai-chi Chuan. Well, T'ai-chi is T'ai-chi. As long as the form is based upon T'ai-chi principles it's traditional T'ai-chi chuan. Form choreography don't matter, the content does.

Principles of T'ai-chi Chuan

- relax completely
- distinguish clearly between yin/yang in movement
- suspend the head top, sink the waist
- the entire moved is connected in movement
- the energy is sunk into the tan-t'ien
- the body is light and nimble
- there is always central equilibrium
- coordination of mind and body, movement and breath
- the intent leads all movement

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE:

WEEK #1: focus on smoothness when shifting your weight. Whether working on cloud hands or the entire form. A smooth even flow gently shifting back and forth.

continued from page 2:

The teaching levels are based upon passing tests on levels of forms. Students are put through a formal testing procedure and are graded on their performance. Each form and sections of the long form have its own test. As senior students know, instructors have to pass a test on all the forms including san shou, fast form and weapons and be able to do pushing hands with some skill. We cannot rely on competition for ranking, like judo, because of the examples earlier. Many teachers who have been teaching for ten or more years are not competent. Others who win at form, may do a non-functional wushu form. So we have to stick to our own standards and grade each student on what we consider technically correct. The highest rank of chief instructor (sifu) is bestowed by grandmaster Tchoung.

The way to get better is to get coached regularly, train mindfully, be attentive to what you are doing and strive to follow the classics.

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 Grandmaster 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.