

# NEWSLETTER

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## GREAT CELEBRATION

The one year anniversary celebration of our new club location went perfect! During the session people visited, demonstrated and most important: practiced. I was honored by the attendance of Master Yueng, Bernie Lau (my first sensei) and Dave Harris. In addition it was great having visitors from the 5 Willow Tai Chi club and a few local instructors. It was perfect, Thanks to all supporters.

## TAI CHI CANE

Saturday, March 15<sup>th</sup>. 9-9:45 I will start a two month session on the Tai Chi Cane. This is an intermediate class meaning the class will be quite vigorous, demanding, move quickly, and little review of past class material. This class is open to all club members (basic club fee raises to \$65 attending this class). If you're not overwhelmed by what you are already practicing, or have plenty of time to practice, are use to weaponry you might be interested in this class.

## SUMMER RETREAT July 25,26,27,28

I have a brochure available with information and details. Get one and start planning now to attend.

## KOOTENAY TAI CHI SUMMER CAMP

August 24-30<sup>th</sup>, \$425 Canadian \$360 US  
This summer the guest instructors will be: Harold Hajime Naka, John Camp, Arnold Porter, and Rex Eastman.  
Kootenay Tai Chi Center  
Box 566, Nelson B.C. Canada V1L 5R3  
(250)352-3714 phone/fax

## TIEN SHAN CHI KUNG

Starting March, Saturdays 10-11 basics class will begin to work on the T'ien Shan Chi Kung method. This is a Taoist Chi Kung that comes from the T'ien Shan mountains (foothills of the

Himalayan mountains). This will also be a good time for anyone interested in joining the class to start.

## BITTING OFF TOO MUCH

When March arrives there will be several some new sessions and options available for club members. On Saturday we will begin the Tai Chi Cane form (9-9:45), Chen Tai Chi members will have the option of beginning the Chen Tai Chi sword, Advanced members will begin the second side of the Yang partner form #8. Pa Kua students will begin the third level of the 24 palms.

Don't worry and don't rush! The first thing to think about is: *DO YOU HAVE ENOUGH TIME TO PRACTICE AND WORK ON WHAT YOU ARE LEARNING NOW?* Do you fall behind in learning your current forms? Are you confused on movements you've already learned? These other class sessions will come around again so it's not as if you'll miss them and never get a chance again. If you're interested in developing skill and understanding of the internal arts instead of just learning the forms then chew what you have slowly and carefully. If your time and life permits time to add another hour of practice a day to work on a new form and routines then take the classes.

There should be no tension created because you're constantly trying to fit your practice into your life, or keep up with the class sessions. If so, stand back and take another look at the reasons you are in the club and why you are practicing.

## ADVANCED CHI KUNG

The Friday, once a month advanced chi kung session is no longer meeting due to poor attendance in the last three meetings.

## BOOK OF THE MONTH

The Intuitive Body: *Aikido as a Clairsentient Practice* by Wendy Palmer

## PRACTICE FOR THE MONTH

Drop a pebble in a pond and the ripples move out in all directions, they never end . . . As we truly move from our center our energy also radiates out in all directions like a sphere shining brightly. When we loose our physical center it's easy to see since we either loose our balance or feel very awkward in our stances. However, we're seldom mentally centered or mentally moving from our center. Our mind is usually in the past or future, the next movement, what we need to do after practice, etc. As we begin our practice we usually start in Wuji, emptiness, calmness. If we relax, feel and linger here our mind for a split second centers, or settles into our center. To be truly centered is to be like a mirror: no opinions, no future, no past, just aware, just now. As each posture arrives seek to be centered, here now - feel. No thought about the next movement, perfect this one.



# T'ai Chi Ch'uan Body Structure

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The structure of the body plays a key role in being able to correctly perform the movement in Tai Chi. Tai Chi relies on smoothly flowing, circular movements, whether you are using it as a martial art or a meditational exercise. Improper body alignment will result in loss of control (swaying, tipping, losing balance) which will reduce the effectiveness of the chi flow in the body.

Correct body structure starts in the feet. They must always be fully relaxed while firmly attached to the ground. This is your connection with the earth, one of the sources of clean, fresh chi that can be utilized by the body. A flimsy connection will reduce the amount of chi that can be absorbed or channeled. To gain a good connection pay close attention to how the feet contact the ground. You should feel as though the entire base of the foot, all the way around the edge, is touching the ground. If you feel that only the ball or heel is contacting then you do not have a good contact and you must study how to restore the contact. This will be true all through the movement, with the exception of spins and turns.

The next part of body structure is the ankles. The ankles must be relaxed at all times. Any tension in the ankles will result in a constriction which will block or slow down the flow of chi into the body.

Moving up to the knees they must maintain their orientation to the feet. The knees need to remain over the feet and not be allowed to drop inside or outside of the feet. This is very important, not only to your form, but also to your health. You can seriously injure your knees by allowing them to drop inside your feet as this places a large amount of torque on the knee which it is not designed to handle. Also, by placing torque on the knees you will be blocking the flow of chi through that area.

To keep the knees over the feet you must allow the perineum to open. As you are shifting your weight forward you must allow the back knee to remain over the back foot while the forward knee is pushing towards the forward foot. This will result in an expansion of the thighs and will help to open the chi channels in the legs.

The hips should always face in the direction of the forward toe. Turning the hips away from the forward toe will result in twisting the knees.

The hips and waist are separate structures of the body and can move independently. When you need to turn keep the hips facing the forward toe and turn the waist. If the waist is stiff then practice some of the repetitive waist stretching exercises to help loosen the waist. Turning the waist will stretch the Ming Man point on the lower back which will increase the chi flow to this area.

The back needs to remain straight and perpendicular to the floor. Any bending in the back will move your center of gravity and result in loss of stability.

To keep the base of the back straight allow the sacrum to rotate down and forward. Be careful not to rotate the hips down as this will result in the back being curved. The tuck of the sacrum should be down and towards the floor to a point just in front of the feet.

While the spine is straight allow the shoulders to rotate slightly forward creating a slight dip or inward curve in the chest at the sternum. This will result in a slight amount of pressure on the thymus gland which will result in an increase in energy. Do not exaggerate the rounding - it should be slight but present.

Maintain the shoulders over the hips. If the shoulders are not over the hips you will be tilted and you will not be able to relax fully.

The shoulders, elbows and wrists must remain relaxed to allow proper chi flow to the hands. In the standing position allow the elbows to rotate slightly out and forward. This will help to create the rounding of the back and will also open the armpits and help to open the shoulder joints.

The fingers should be slightly extended, but not fully straightened. Focus your mind on the fingertips and let them grow longer. This will open the palm and the finger joints.

The neck must remain straight and relaxed to prevent a chi blockage. A stiff neck will prevent the chi that is accumulated in the head from draining to the lower Tan t'ien, a highly undesirable position.

The crown of the head must point up so that the whole body can feel as if suspended. To accomplish this the chin must be tucked in, but ever so lightly. Exaggeration of this tuck will result in tension in the neck and blockage of the chi flow.

Be aware that while you need to focus your mind in all of the above locations you must also focus on maintaining full relaxation of all of the muscles. At first this will be difficult for as soon as your mind moves from one location to another your body will "forget" to maintain the proper alignment. This can only be corrected by repeated and mindful practice. Begin by working on each part separately and focusing on the feeling your body has as each part is placed in the correct position. Hold the position and allow the body to memorize the correct position and then move on to the next part of the body. Continue until the body understands all of the parts and then work on linking

multiple parts together. You will have to keep going back and forth between practice and check, practice and check before you will be able to maintain the correct body structure.

With the body in proper physical structure there is one other change that needs to be accomplished - the opening of the joints throughout the body. One way to accomplish this is to focus your mind on the extremities growing away from each other. Do not do this as a physical exercise - you should not feel or see a physical stretching of the body. Rather, as the joints open you should have the sense that the joints are relaxing open, not being stretched open. Focus on the following extremity combinations:

#### Simple combinations - single joints

- Crown of the head and the shoulders to open the neck
- Shoulders and sacrum to open the back
- Neck and elbows to open the shoulders
- Shoulders and wrists to open the elbows
- Elbows and palms to open the wrists
- Wrists and fingertips to open the hands

#### More complex combinations - multiple joints

- Crown of the head and the sacrum to open the back and neck
- Shoulder and tips of the fingers to open the arms and hands
- Feet and waist to open the hips, knees and ankles
- Crown of the head and the feet to open the neck, back, waist, hip, knees and ankles

It is best to practice opening the joints as a standing meditation practice. As with the practice of learning the correct body structure you will find that you will have to take your time to learn to open the joints. Begin your practice with opening the spine. You can start with each vertebrae and open them one at a time and then work on holding the entire spine open. After you are comfortable with that then add the neck. One visualization that helps with this is to focus on water flowing from the tan t'ien to the sacrum and out the legs to the earth while at the same time focus on fire flowing from the tan t'ien to the crown of the head and out to the sky. If this is difficult then focus just on the water flowing aspect. Besides helping to learn to open the back this by itself will help to ground you and develop your rooting ability. As you become more comfortable with opening the back you can extend your study to the remaining joints and later to the practice to the movements of the form.

One thing to note on the opening of the joints is to make sure you are clear on the direction the joints open.

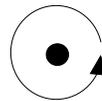
In particular the shoulder joint opens towards the sides of the body, not towards the front, back or the ground.

The classics say:

The motion should be rooted in the feet,  
released through the legs,  
controlled by the waist,  
and manifested through the fingers.

If the timing and position are not correct,  
the body becomes disordered,  
and the defect must be sought in the legs and waist.<sup>1</sup>

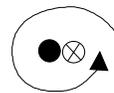
If you are having problems with your form you need to look at what the legs and waist are doing. Remember to treat the body as if you are pivoting about your center. In this case we are referring to the center that extends from the crown of the head down through the spine to the sacrum and not the center as in tan t'ien.



Using the center of the body as an axle

Allowing the center to move or translate through space will in loss of balance or a feeling of discomfort or uneasiness with the movement. This is shown in

the diagram below where the original center is shown as the circle with the x and the final position of the center is shown as the black circle. As a result of the center shifting the circle has lost its symmetry and the body will lose its balance.



Shifting the center of the body when turning

You also need to pay attention to the difference between the waist and the hips. The hips should maintain their relationship with the

forward toe and face in that direction. The waist however is free to turn away from the forward toe and should be used when the body needs to be turned. Turning the waist and not the hips will ensure that the knees are maintained in correct position and that the center of gravity of the lower body does not move. This coupled with turning the waist as if the center is a rod running from the crown of the head to the perineum will ensure that the turning of the upper body does not affect the center of gravity.

<sup>1</sup>The Essence of T'ai Chi Ch'uan, The Literary Tradition by Lo/Inn, Amacker/Foe

# HOW TO GET PRETTY GOOD

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I occasionally get asked how I developed a certain skill or how I learned to do something. What I am relating here is my opinion on how to develop your skills so you can advance in your art. These are my opinions based on my experience. Please consult your teacher before trying this at home. I am a professional (not really).

You often hear your teachers telling you to practice. Andy frequently says "Practice, practice, practice." However, how you practice makes a big difference in your skill level. I have found that you can get pretty good awfully fast if you simplify your practice and do two basic things. These are drills and practice consistently.

## 1. DRILLS

Skill comes through constant repetition of the techniques. What you need to do is pick a very basic technique and drill it to death. Examples of some drills are the "Rise, Drill, Overturn, Fall" exercise in Pa Kua, "Splitting" in Hsing-I, or "slanted flying" in Tai Chi. Pick a drill that is short with only a few movements. The techniques should then be practiced over and over again until you can do it in your sleep. The basic guideline is that you need to perform 10,000 repetitions (old jungle saying) before the movements are yours. Start off doing the technique slowly and correctly. You are ingraining the movement into the body and its muscle memory. It is vital that you do the drill correctly otherwise you will ingrain poor techniques that will not work when you need them. It will also be difficult to correct the movement because your body will have picked up the bad habit. Speed will come over time as your body gets used to the movement. Practice exact movements, repetitiously and let your body pick up speed as your skill with the drill improves.

## 2. PRACTICE CONSISTENTLY

The interesting thing about practice is that consistency is more important than length of time. The drilling practice sessions does not need to be very long but it does need to be consistent. In general there should be no more than one day gap between training session. I have found that if you drill something 5 to 10 minutes every day. You will have far better results than doing the same drill 2 hours straight once a week. Do the math. I have found that if I am drilling something I really enjoy, I can go for a half hour to forty five minutes and not notice the time. The key is to drill only as long as you can do the technique correctly. As soon as the technique becomes sloppy, stop. This is the point that your body is fatigued as far as that

technique is concerned. Further drilling is detrimental and will actually hinder your progress. This is because you will be training the body with incorrect movements forming bad habits.

How long does it take to get pretty good? This again depends on your consistency of practice. If you do a drill 10 minutes a day, every day, you can expect to see significant results in three months. After six months you will be excellent at it. After a year doing the same drill you can actually cut back your practice of it. It will only take about 10 minutes once or twice a month to maintain the skill. What if you are not a fanatic like I am and you actually have a life and don't practice at home? First **Pa Kua is life**. If you are not practicing Pa Kua you don't have a life anyway (just kidding). You can still make use of the concept by practicing one drill every time you come to class. So if you only com to class once a week, you should spend 10 minutes before or after class drilling the technique. Do this every class and do not change drills. You should see some dramatic improvements in about six months (24 practice sessions).

The psychology of doing the drilling is kind of interesting. Initially the slow repetitious practice can be quiet boring, tedious, and frustrating. Stick with it. As your persistence takes over, your body will start to do the drill automatically. You can trance out and go through a session in no time. Your imagination will start working and the drill will actually become quiet fun. As your skill improves your pleasure in doing the techniques increases and your body feels good doing it. One day you wake up and say "Hey, I'm pretty good at this."

## SUMMARY:

1. Pick a simple technique to drill.
2. Drill it consistently.
3. Drill exactly and correctly.
4. Be persistent.
5. Enjoy.

