

NEWSLETTER

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WHAT'S WORKING IN YOUR PRACTICE?

© 1997 By Gene Burnett



Obviously there are no hard and fast rules about what works in tai chi practice. Each student is different and each student grows and changes over time. What works great for one person might feel awful to someone else, and what works great at one stage of training might not apply later on. Certainly there are some general ideas that apply often and others that apply to some types of students more than others. I've enjoyed recent articles by Chris and Victor talk-

ing about things they've noticed about practice. I take their words, not as gospel, but more as a statement of "here's what works for me." Some things I might not resonate with, others make me think "Hmmm . . . that's interesting. I think I'll try that and see if it works for me."

In this spirit I'd like to offer some things that have been working for me in practice lately. I'm always interested in what's working for people so if you have something to share in this regard, perhaps you could submit it to Andy for inclusion in the newsletter. Even if you're not a teacher, even if you're a beginner, you might have found something that works for you that others can benefit from. Sometimes simple things can have dramatic impact.

One such simple thing is practicing barefoot. I find that my foot placement and weight distribution has to be a little better when I don't wear shoes or socks. Also since shoes generally elevate the heels they allow you to "cheat" on low stance moves like snake creeps down. So practicing barefoot means I have to develop better flexibility, strength, and alignment. Also energetically there's just something great about feeling my whole foot in contact with the floor. I can't explain it but it works for me. My feet actually feel stronger. So far I've only done this indoors and, of course, in a well heated space.

Another thing that's working for me is to start each day or practice session in the wu-chi position. Feet about hip width apart, parallel or just slightly turned out, arms loose and relaxed, knees slightly bent, head upright and relaxed, eyes closed. Then I begin to focus on the breath, letting my muscles and joints loosen. As I relax especially the space just in front of my hip bones at the top of the thigh, I let my breath reach deep into my lower abdomen and then rise to fill my whole chest. I don't hold my spine or pelvis in any particular position. (This is contrary to some traditional teachings but it's working for me.) What happens next is a natural, unforced movement similar to what Reichian therapists call the 'orgasm reflex'. No, you don't have an orgasm, but your body moves and breathes in a way that echoes the coordination that can occur during

TEACHING CERTIFICATIONS AWARDED

I am proud to announce that Victor Crandall (Pa Kua), Chris Matthews and Cedar Acosta (Yang Tai Chi) are the 4th, 5th, & 6th to be issued a teaching certificate from the Internal Wushu Arts since it's beginning in 1974. The certificates aren't just awarded for knowing forms but more importantly demonstrating dedication, quality of practice, consistency of practice, and being the supporting pillars of the Internal Wushu Arts.

Other certified instructors are:
#1 Bruce Brown #2 Gene Burnett,
and #3 Joel Hartshome, (Yang Tai Chi)

ANACORTES INTERNAL ARTS FESTIVAL

July 25, 26, 27, 28

NO CLASSES

With the Anacortes festival going there will be no classes on:

July 24-28th

For Saturday only the monthly club fee will be \$42.00. The same is true for the month of August since there will be no classes the last two weeks.

KOOTENAY TAI CHI SUMMER CAMP

August 24-30th

\$425 Canadian \$360 US

This summer the guest instructors will be: Harold Hajima Naka, John Camp, Arnold Porter, and Rex Eastman.

Kootenay Tai Chi Center
Box 586, Nelson B.C.

Canada V1L 5R3

(250)362-3714 phone/fax

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued on page 4)

Tai Chi as Applied to Daily Life

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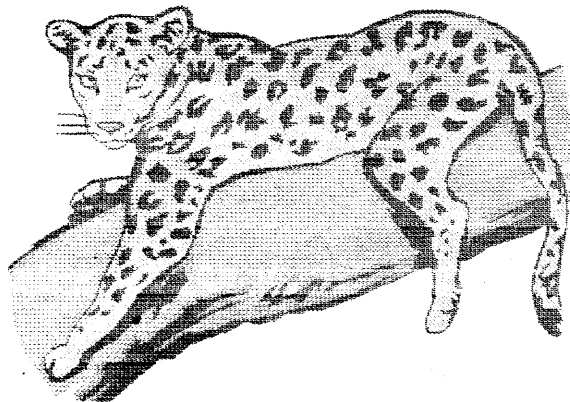
Dear Sifu,

Little did I realize the applications of Tai Chi in daily life. On a Monday night you gave me a Report Card which said: "Focus on yielding in all applications." Tuesday morning I had my first chance to apply your wisdom. My wife and I got into a squabble. But old habits die hard, so instead of using the yielding principle I accidentally applied "sticking energy." What a mistake! It was like going 10 rounds with George Foreman. Needless to say I was eager to go back to yielding. So on the drive to work I practiced diligently. Perhaps I went too far, because by the time I got to work I was in such a relaxed state that the steering wheel felt like putty. As I turned into the parking lot, instead of yielding I inadvertently practiced a timing exercise. This is not a good thing to do with a Mack truck. However, the kind driver gave me some kind of encouraging finger signal that I assume was from a Bagua snake form. I smiled at him to acknowledge his encouragement but he didn't seem to notice.

At work I got another opportunity to practice yielding and flubbed it again. My boss was on the rampage. So as a tirade of words flew my way I accidentally practiced "grounding" them, instead of yielding as if I wasn't there. This made him really mad. "Don't you understand what I'm saying?" he shouted. I nodded mutely, not speaking because all my concentration was focused on grounding his energy. "If you don't answer me, you're fired," he yelled.

This immediately switched my attention from grounding to yielding. I opened my mouth and answered him just in the nick of time. Thank you, sifu, for helping me keep my job. (And I would appreciate it if I don't get another report card for at least a month; these lessons are really hard).

- A Diligent Student



WHY DO YOU PRACTICE?

By atdale

With the recent arrival of Master Gao Fu I heard comments from colleagues and students that struck me as pretty odd. Ones like: "I haven't done the 24 or 48 since Master Gao's last visit" or "I'd better re-learn it before she arrives" or "I'd forgotten how difficult the Chen style was" or "There's a special session getting ready for Master Gao's arrival" . . . how weird.

If the forms and art weren't worth practicing after Master Gao left before, why bother with them at all? Are you practicing just for Master Gao? Why? As a teacher I know one of the joys in teaching is seeing someone continue in their own practice, take what was taught/give and study, research and make it their own art. Why do the internal arts (or anything for that matter) if it's not nurturing your life and worth doing? Apparently the forms weren't worth the effort while Master Gao was gone so is the practice just to get into an advanced class perhaps? As if the lack of practice won't show? Just be around Master Gao? As a teacher it's very disheartening spending long hours working with someone just to have that time spent in vain. Do you know what goes through an instructor's mind when they hear, "I haven't been practicing the form you taught me?"

PRACTICE JUST TO PRACTICE

Will some of you stop practicing once Master Gao leaves? If so what's the point? If the Chen method is so difficult, too difficult to practice without having an 'outside' reason reconsider why it's being studied in the first place. One phrase that's stuck with me since Master Gao's first visit was from the last class she taught the instructors: "Study and practice diligently so my time hasn't been wasted."

Having someone as skilled as Master Gao visiting and teaching is a privilege. Our practice isn't to impress her or someone else, or at least I think it shouldn't be. My practice is to refine myself, my art

(Continued on page 4)

In fighting strategies it is some times desirable to train both sides of your body to effectively execute a technique. An example would be the ability to throw a straight punch effectively with either hand. As techniques become more complex, they are naturally easier to perform on one side of the body or the other. This is a phenomenon due to people being naturally right or left handed. Consequently people will often train one side until they "get it" or feel comfortable with it but neglect to train the other side until it is also effective. This often creates an imbalance in which you will favor one side in execution of your techniques. If you are striving for balance as Tai Chi purports, this is not good.

Let me step back and say that in fighting strategies emphasizing one side is not wrong. One excellent and highly skilled martial artist here in Seattle emphasizes perfection of techniques on your strong side. This training emphasizes the side your body would naturally use in time of stress. He compensates on the weak side by perfecting a different technique. This can be equated to a boxer who only jabs with his left hand and hooks with his right. The idea is to build on your strengths. The opposite strategy, of training both sides of the body to be equal good, gives the fighter more versatility but takes longer to train. The idea is to strengthen your weaknesses. Both concepts have their merits.

The philosophy of the internal arts stresses balance and so strives to train both sides equally. A way to do this is to alternate left and right performance of the technique with each repetition. Some arts do this naturally in their training. Both Pa Kua and Hsing-I practice in this manner. In Pa Kua when you perform a single palm change the next repetition is on the opposite side of the body. Hsing-I is similar in that they alternate left and right as they drill a technique down a straight line. In practicing this way both sides of the body learn at the same time and the confusion of switching form left to right is eliminated.

Another method is to consider right and left side

performance as one repetition. In your mind you should visualize this as one technique not two. This way your mind tricks your body into performing right and left sides as one technique and does not distinguish sides. In our Pa Kua example if someone asks you to do a single palm change you would automatically perform it on both sides and consider it one change.

TRAINING BOTH SIDES

In partner practice have your opponent alternate his attacks left and right after each repetition.

You then perform the technique to each side. This is simply the partner version of the first method above. Often times with partner practice, you will want to "get it" on one side before you try it on the other. This is not wrong, however, if you alternate sides with each repetition the technique will "flow" better once it kicks in. Also your "weaker" side will sometimes perform the technique more effectively. This happens because it will use less strength and the "other" side of your brain. In alternating sides, the learning process balances easier. If you are like most people, you will naturally develop a fondness for one side or the other while sparring. I know I prefer striking with my right palm because it feels stronger. Another way to train the weak side is to emphasize using it exclusively for several training sessions until you are confident enough to utilize it. In partner practice you would want to execute your techniques on the weak side only. Boxers practice this by literally tying the strong hand behind their backs and sparring using the weak hand. The concept is to utilize one side only until it becomes a strength or at least is no longer a weakness.

It is important to distinguish in your mind the difference between "feeling" weak on a side and ability to execute techniques on that side. It is the nature of being human that you will always feel stronger on one side of your body. However, this does not preclude you from executing effective techniques on your weak side. The ability to execute a technique is simply a matter of practice. Strength has nothing to do with it. In fact execution can often be more effective since the weak side tends to blend and ride better than the strong side. So train, practice, and enjoy.

(Gene's article continued from page 1)

orgasm. As the breath moves in and down, the pelvis tips gently forward and the lower back arches a bit. As the breath moves upwards, the head tips slightly back and the throat moves slightly forward. The effect is similar to a bow being drawn. As the breath moves in, the spine, like a bow, curves back. As the exhalation occurs the 'bow' returns to its natural position. In this case, this means that pelvis drops and "levels" out a bit, the throat moves back slightly and the head returns to a neutral upright position. This repeats and can deepen and relax with each breath. It's very important that all one focuses on is relaxing the muscles and joints, and allowing the breath to be deep, full and natural. Do not force the breath with will power. Just get out of its way. The "movements" described above occur as a by product of relaxing and breathing. You don't need to "do" or "move" anything intentionally. In fact, in this exercise, "intent" gets in the way. I just work on letting it happen. When it is happening the body feels loose, relaxed, open, and connected. After all, what we're doing is letting the body move with the natural rhythm of our breath. Surrendering, in effect, to a universal movement. In other worlds you are moving with or being moved by the universe! So starting each day or practice with 5-10 minutes of this exercise really works for me. I find that my "outer" body settles onto or into my "inner" body. I can then move with or listen to that "inner" body. (A key skill in good tui-shou by the way.) I feel more open, connected, receptive, quietly energized and relaxed.

Which brings me to another thing that's working for me and that is not to make decisions about whether, or what, or how to practice from an "ordinary" state of mind. First I do the above exercise for 5-10 minutes, then from that place I listen to what will feel right today - my usual routine? Just chi kung? Section 9? Something new? Skip practicing altogether and rest? Go for a walk? Dance? I find that listening to this inner self enhances my practice in ways that listening to my ordinary outer self cannot.

Another thing I've been enjoying lately is working on lifting my chest and tucking my pelvis a bit more in all exercises and forms. I've discovered that my chest has been somewhat collapsed and my lower back arched and that my neck and head were thrust forward - causing - tension and pain. With this news focus my balance has improved a lot and the tension in my head, eyes, neck and jaw is much less. It's not so much chest out as chest slightly up. It's really just an upright spine not a full military "attention" stance. I noticed this while doing the form wearing just a pair of shorts and watching in a mirror - another thing that works for me occasionally.

And finally one last thing that's been working for me is to see my "practice" from a larger or wider perspective. My practice is to explore and study the connections between mind, body, spirit, heart, breath, energy, movement, nature, art and consciousness. This takes many forms and tai chi chuan is one of them. A simpler statement might be that my practice is to be my self. And this leads me to study these connections. My priority has shifted to this larger practice which includes but is not limited to tai chi. It is still central and important to me but it is not the be-all, end-all of practice. With this perspective I find I'm more relaxed in my tai chi, less controlled and forced.

I hope some of this speaks to you and that you're inspired to share with others (including me!) what's working in YOUR practice.

(Continued from page 1)

ALL SEATTLE TAI CHI PICNIC

July 13, 1987, noon till?
at: Meridian Park (Good Shepard Center) Picnic Shelter
information Chris: 789-9223

FORM COMPLETION'S:

Sifu's Yang short form:
Sonia Cole
Sara Clark

JULY 31st PA KUA CLASS

SPECIAL GUEST

Special guest visiting:
Sifu Joe Crandall, co-author of
"Classical Pa Kua Chang: Fighting systems and weapons". This will be an unusual opportunity to visit with someone his level of skill in Pa Kua Chang.

MASTER GAO'S CLASSES

Beginning Chen - Tu&Th 6:15-7:15
Advanced Chen - M & W 6:15-7:15
Chi Kung - Sat 10-11am
\$80 monthly / \$45 one day a week
\$15 per class fee
\$100 monthly Tai Chi & Chi Kung
in Madison Park area
contact Gao Li: 325-6364

(Why? continued from page 2)

and deepen my study. I know there is always something to be refined and fortunately with a Master the level of Gao Fu I'll be able to get feedback on what needs attention. I don't expect and wouldn't want just a: "Your form is OK" or "You're practicing correctly." I hope that my practice over the years, between her visits, will have gotten my choreography down so time isn't wasted on where the foot, hand and postures go but will go toward working on deepening the internal (the Tai Chi of it). Anyone knowing the form can tell you directions and postural clues but only one at the level of Master Gao can take you beyond. However, if the form isn't well absorbed into our body we really won't be able to go much deeper than the surface level of the movements since they'll still be new.

P.S. Do you practice between classes or only during the class? Forget it, that's another article!

Internal Wushu Arts
 Summer Festival
 July 25,26,27,28th

ANACORTES CHAMBER OF COMMERCE VISITOR INFORMATION
 819 Commercial Avenue
 Anacortes, WA 98221
 (360) 293-3822
 (for maps and more information)

WASHTINGTON PARK

ANACORTES

conference site

20 minutes west of Mount Vernon, Washington (1hr 30 minutes from Seattle).

20 minutes from La Connar (art community)

Ferry Terminal to Victoria B.C.

Camp Fees:

water & electrical hookups: \$15.00 per night

no hookups: \$12.00

Showers: \$.0.25

Wood bundle: \$3.00

Laundry: wash \$1.00 Dry \$.075

Campsites cannot be reserved, first come basis. Pets permitted on leash. 14 day camping limit

DECEPTION PASS STATE PARK

5175 N State Highway 20

Oak Harbor, Wa 98277

(360)675-2417

Reservations: 1-800-452-5787

camping, picnicking, boating, fishing, hiking.

246 campsites and 306 picnic sites

Pets on leash.

10 day camping limit

BAY VIEW STATE PARK

1093 Bayview-Edison Road, Mt. Vernon

Reservations: 1-800-452-5787

100 campsites, 10 hookups, showers

water & electricity

Places to stay:

The White Swan Guest House

1388 Moore Road

Mt. Vernon, WA 98273

Peter Goldfarb, proprietor

(360) 445-6805

www.cnw.com/~wswan/

Albatross Bead & Breakfast

5708 Kingsway West

Anacortes, WA 98221

(360) 293-0677 res (800)622-8864

Anacortes Inn

3006 Commercial Avenue

Anacortes, WA 98221

(360)293-0209 res 800-327-7976

Fidalgo Country Inn

Anacortes WA

800-244-4179 res 360-293-3494

Island Inn & La Petite Restaurant

3401 Commercial Ave.

Anacortes, WA 98221

res 360-293-4644

(a dinning treasure but spendie. A 3 hr meal with a Dutch gourmet cuisine.)

The Marina Inn

3300 Commercial Avenue

Anacortes WA 98221

360-293-1100 res 800-231-5198

	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY
9:00		Dancing Dragon Harold	Fu style push hands John	T'ien shan Chi Kung Andy
10:00		Silk Reeling exercises Michael	Helping partner open for chi Michael	Opening for Chi Michael
11:00		Body Mechanics of Tai Chi Bob	Master Gao Fu	
NOON	Meet at picnic area			
2:00	Dancing Dragon Harold	Free hands Andy	Body Mechanics of Tai Chi Bob	
3:00	partner cane Andy	Opening for Chi Michael	Pa Kua 8 elbows Andy	
4:00	Ssu Hsiang Pa Kua John	Ssu Hsiang Pa Kua John	Ssu Hsiang Pa Kua John	
5:00	Body Mechanics of Tai Chi Bob	partner cane - Andy		

INSTRUCTORS: John Camp, Michael Gilman, Bob Iden, Harold Naka, Andy Dale

POSSIBLE GUESTS: Master Yueng, Dave Harris, Master Gao Fu

BEGINNING: Friday 12:00 meet at Washington Park picnic area

FEE: A donation of \$5.00 per session to the instructor (special guests \$10.00)

(the instructors may have books, t-shirts, videos or other items available to purchase.)

LODGING & FOOD: Participants are responsible for their own lodging and meals.

Directions:

- ⇒ Take I-5 to Highway 20
- ⇒ Follow 20 to Anacortes / San Juan Ferries
- ⇒ Follow signs to the San Juan ferries (through Anacortes).
- ⇒ As road heads to the ferries get in the left lane Sunset Avenue(it looks residential) and follow this road. It ends at Washington Park.
- ⇒ Friday we will meet at park picnic area.

schedule subject to change