

THE JOURNAL OF THE TAI CHI UNION FOR GREAT BRITAIN

TAI CHI CHUAN & ORIENTAL ARTS

NO. 62

£6.00

*Radical
Relaxation*

TAIJIQUAN UTOPIA

LEARNING TO LOVE THE PLATEAU

QI PYRAMID



EDITORIAL INFORMATION

The Journal of the Tai Chi
Union for Great Britain
www.taichiunion.com

Editor
Mark J. Langweiler

Secretary
Peter Ballam

Editorial Assistant
John Rogers

Treasurer
Aileen Cromar Mandic

Design & Layout
Norah Langweiler
<https://nlangweiler.myportfolio.com>

Executive Committee
Mark Peters (Chair)
Marnix Wells (Vice Chair)
Peter Ballam (Secretary)
Chris Thomas
Tina Faulkner
Mark Corcoran
Wes Mollison

Cover Image: Lao Tzu

Chairman
Mark Peters

Vice Chairman
Marnix Wells

Magazine Address:
225 Murchison Road
London E10 6LT
0044 753 248 3160
mlangweiler@yahoo.com





Table of Contents

4	Letter from the Editor
5	Chairman's Report
8	Radical Relaxation
12	Four Resemblances
14	Taiji Roots
16	Qi Pyramid
20	Six Harmonies of Liu He Ba Fa
24	The Chi Full Diet
28	Taijiquan Utopia
30	Teaching in South Wales
32	An Insight into Internal Arts through Autism
34	Sheng Zhen- Open Heart
35	Tai Yi Tai Chi Chuan: From behind a Closed Door
40	Learning to Love the Plateau
43	Meet the Teacher: Keith Abraham
44	Book Review: Mastery: The Keys to Success and Long-Term Fulfillment by George Leonard
46	The Empty Hand and the Quiet Mind: Obituary of Lewis Galton

Letter from the Editor

I have said it before, each issue of the Journal is unique. We cover a range of topics that I believe the members of the Tai Chi Union would be interested in learning more about. This issue is no exception though there may be an even broader array of articles than usual.

We open with the Chairman's report. Mark Peters, the new chairman, has presented an update on the changes being made, any happenings and ideas that are being acted upon and considered. We look forward to hearing from Mark in future issues.

This is followed by an article by Brendan Lea, an assistant to Peter Ralston. Within the Tai chi community we speak about being relaxed and soft. Yet what does that actually mean? How can we be both relaxed and yet use force? Brendan's examines this and takes us a step further into this rather confusing issue.

This article is followed by an interview with Madam Sun Jian-Yun, the daughter of the founder of Sun style. Bradford Tyrey had an opportunity to speak with Madam Sun while studying with her in the 1980s. While the interview occurred over 30 years ago, the information remains as pertinent today as at the time.

Of on-going interest both from the historical aspect as well as that of our various lineages, are

the roots of tai chi. Where did it come from, how did it develop? These are some of the questions Marnix Wells looks into with his discussion of the origins of our practise.

In contrast to looking back, Al Simon's 'Qi Pyramid' is a new approach to pedagogy, in this instance, a method for feeling qi. Al has been developing new teaching methods for quite some time. This approach, though not traditional, has potential for continued qi development.

Speaking of pedagogy, Patrick Foley writes of something all of us who have been practising for any length of time are familiar with, the learning plateau. In this instance, Patrick describes how we can use this, often frustrating time, to enhance out tai chi, well, really, any activity where we hit a plateau.

We continue to follow the development of Liu He Ba Fa with Stuart Agars. This little known martial art has been passed down for generations, Stuart is the leading exponent of this art in the United Kingdom. These are just a sampling of the articles found in this issue of the Journal.

And, we are re-introducing 'Meet the Teacher'. This was a staple of past issues and will be once again. If you would like to be included, please contact me at the email address found on the contents page and I will send you the criteria.

As always, I hope you enjoy this issue.


EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Chairman's Letter

BY MARK PETERS, TCUGB CHAIRMAN

AGM on Zoom 16th January 2021. This was the first ever AGM held on Zoom with over 70 members applying for the Zoom login and nearly 60 actually attending. We had members attending both nationally and internationally. It was a great opportunity to put faces to names and meet the board of directors. Many members stated they'd never felt able to attend in the past due to the distance and cost of travel. The general feedback was excellent, with many supportive messages being sent afterwards. A number of members offered their skills and support in the development plans, which was great to hear and will be taken up; the more we all work together, the more we succeed. We aim for the next AGM to be a mix of face-to-face and Zoom so we can be even more inclusive.

IMPACT OF COVID

COVID has impacted us all through 2020 and into 2021; some having to close all classes, some moving online and some off/on depending on the changing guidelines for each area. We chose to post links to the government websites, CIMPSA, EMD UK, ACRE etc. as they had specific and up-to-date information.

We ran an online survey to check what members' experiences were of going online only. Key findings were 75% moved online and students actually attended more classes per week, so food for thought going forwards.

IMPACT OF 'HEALTH QIGONG' TRADEMARK

Some members will be aware of the dispute (invalidity action) between members of the Qigong community, including several of our members, and the British Health Qigong Association, over registration of the phrase "Health Qigong" as a trademark

(words only, 4 spellings). Although all parties affected by this may not be entirely happy with the results, an official statement was issued: "The key point in the statement is that the term "Health Qigong", with variations, will be registered as a trademark BUT the registration has been amended to include a disclaimer that: "Registration of this trademark shall give no right to the exclusive use, separately, of the words "Health" and "Qigong"." The full TCUGB position statement is available at: <https://www.taichiunion.com/tcu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/TCUGB-trademark-statement.pdf>

If any member is concerned that a commercial decision or activity may bring them into conflict with the aims or objectives of the TCUGB, they are encouraged to raise the matter informally with the TCUGB board and they will receive advice. We are publishing a list of common terms to help protect our members from future trademark issues.

CHANGES TO THE BOARD

Three board members resigned in 2020, in part due to the trademark issue above. This has given us the opportunity to recruit new directors from our membership. Tony Ulatowski subsequently offered to step down to give another new director an opportunity, I would like to thank Tony on behalf of the board for all his hard work and am sure he will continue to contribute to the growth of the TCUGB. The new directors are: Chris Thomas, Tina Faulkner, Mark Corcoran, and Wes Mollison. They bring a breadth of experience and energy and will play a key part in our development plans.

THANKS TO DAN

Dan Docherty initially formed the TCUGB with Nigel Sutton in 1991, with the help of Gary Wragg, Linda Broda, John Hine, Paul Crompton and Ian Cameron. Dan has been Chairman for many of the years since then, even following health issues (diagnosed with Parkinson's in 2010). In August 2020 he felt ready to hand over the reins to Mark Peters, safe in the knowledge that Mark will keep the TCUGB to its original aims and values whilst updating its profile and functions to better suit members moving forwards. Dan will still play a key part in the Union and focus on strengthening connections with organisations both in the UK and internationally. Thank you Dan, I may lean on you from time-to-time for advice.

FINANCES

Costs have been rising year on year, yet membership levels have remained steady since 2016. This increase in costs of magazine design/production, admin, and expenses etc., set against low levels of magazine adverts or sales, union web-shop sales, and no growth in membership has led to a deficit in recent years.

We, like many organisations, have been hit by COVID, meaning income has dropped even more in 2020. Our aims for 2021 is to address the deficit by reviewing costs as well as growing membership through public awareness. Investment in research, publicity and brand awareness to the wider fields of qigong and internal martial arts will really help. This, along with the CIMSPA project, will make the TCUGB the go-to organisation, which will benefit our members.

CIMSPA

The work with the Chartered Institute for Sports and Physical Activity (CIMSPA) was initially proposed by Keith Sharp at the AGM in 2016. Keith and I worked to investigate and build. At the 2019 AGM, Colin Huffen (CIMSPA) gave a presentation to the board and members about the aims of developing standards across the industry. A position

statement was agreed and published. In 2020 the first Professional Development Committee (PDC) meeting was held with members from the medical profession, tai chi, qigong education and sports professions.

A great deal of work has been done and a public consultation held. CIMSPA stated that the tai chi and qigong technical standards had received more feedback than any other standards to date. Some comments were due to a misunderstanding of the purpose of the standards, thinking they were to control the whole arts rather than specific applications within specific settings. The British Council for Chinese Martial Arts (BCCMA) are involved in the development of the core skills (coaching) portion of the standards, and the TCUGB are developing the technical aspects (tai chi and qigong content).

The process has been a slow bureaucratic one but the end is in sight. The PDC meet again in 2021 and the Professional Development Board in May for official sign off. Further information is available on request.

WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

We have been working on significant updates to the Union website that include: a refocus on our customers i.e. the general public and public sector organisations, adding a useful links page, access to articles, links to social media, more regular news updates and more. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and other developments will continue. Facebook: FB page, open group and closed members' groups have been set up and are running well. They were previously closed due to their focus and direction being lost. With more moderators in place and clearer rules, they have become a useful portal.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS 2021

I have many plans to continue the development and growth of our Union, with the aim to make us the go-to organisation for tai chi, qigong and internal martial arts

both for practitioners and those interested in learning more. I have great faith that with the support of the board and our members we will grow from strength to strength. We aim to increase the Union's public profile, support research, and give real value and purpose.

SHORT TERM (THIS YEAR)

- Update website – add content, links pages, tidy up shop, images, listings. Be clearer on its purpose
- Use social media – share information, collate information for marketing
- Expand more clearly to tai chi, qigong and internal martial arts
- Work more closely with the BCCMA

SHORT TO MEDIUM TERM

- Build links with fellow organisations
- Rebuild website: more mobile friendly, better spread of target groups (e.g. age, interests etc.) members-only area if needed
- CIMSPA project – fitness, well-being and rehabilitation sectors
- Board members with clearer roles for the development of TCUGB
- Health committee – develop clearer standards, members support (e.g. risk assessment templates), training for members (e.g. Advancing & Promotion)
- Editorial committee – part of the magazine review project
- Technical Panel – new members, rotation of members
- Rewrite: Articles of Association, codes

More involvement by our members, in any activities, current or potential, and contributions to our continued development are welcome. If you have any questions or comments, please send to: enquires@tcugb.com

Thank you.

of conduct, members' application forms

MEDIUM TO LONG TERM

- Continue to build links with fellow organisations, nationally and internationally
- Regional officers – help with contact points for member applications, regional events, support to feedback to the board.
- Research projects
- Regional events

There is a lot more this report could cover, but this is already long enough I feel. Just two final points on what drives us to continue to develop and strengthen:

MISSION STATEMENT(S)

- To provide a register of Tai Chi Chuan, and internal martial arts, instructors to those who wish to follow the traditions in depth
- To provide register of Tai Chi and Qigong instructors duly accredited and certificated for the health and wellness of the population

AIMS AND VISIONS

- The TCUGB to be the primary organisation for Tai Chi (Chuan), Qigong and internal martial arts throughout the UK
- To be the repository of all styles of TC&Q and the directory of instructors'/associate members and the source of professional standards with BCCMA & CIMSPA.

Radical Relaxation

BY BRENDAN LEA, ASSISTANT TO PETER RALSTON

I have not found an art as committed to being relaxed as Peter Ralston's Cheng Hsin T'ai Chi. Most teachers say they are relaxed but when it comes to actual playing, fighting, or performing techniques this is far from the truth. So, I wonder why so many teachers say one thing but then seem to fall short when it comes to actually doing it.

I bring this up because the T'ai Chi Classics emphasize sensitivity, yielding, and relaxation. If those sources are believed to hold the "secrets" of T'ai Chi there must be something real to learn, and it is our job as students to figure out if that's true or not. We should work in at least two areas. One should be recognizing and transcending existing fantasies and dogmas related to our art. The other is to radically train and experience what is real in these matters.

My suspicion is that without knowing it, many teachers and students alike, are committed to fantasizing about relaxation rather than training it for real, or don't think it is really possible, especially when trying to use force. I want to invite the reader to consider and understand the implications of both the fantasy and the reality.

A fantasy is a thought about some matter that we wish were true but actually isn't. For some reason this can go unnoticed and it puts

the practitioner in a place that is committed to something unreal. I'm not suggesting this is wrong or right, but that its implications are many. If this goes on unchecked, the person will actually be training something that is not founded on objective reality. Furthermore, since T'ai Chi was originally a fighting art, it should be held to a standard of being functional, or at least consistent with those types of situations.

I learned a lesson in fighting when I was younger. I spent some time in Hawaii training Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and MMA at BJ Penn's school in Hilo. I was given an opportunity to step into a boxing ring with a heavyweight professional MMA fighter named Cabbage to help him train for a fight. One thing I noticed right away is even though he was a large man in an art that people may call crude, he was actually quite sensitive to my movements and timing. I could feel him feeling me. Soon after that I took one of the hardest punches I have ever experienced in my life. One of my hands had dropped slightly and he took advantage immediately, catching me on the jaw. My head snapped and the sight in my right eye went black, even though it was open, and the ground became unstable. I was close to being knocked out. Even worse, Cabbage wasn't trying very hard.

Since that experience, I have a healthy respect for the power of others and first-hand knowledge of the reality of fighting. It helps me consider my own training in terms of something real and gives me a standard to compare my progress to. Holding such questions as, "How can I relax in that kind of situation?" or "How do I remain calm in a fight?" are powerful considerations and move my training toward relaxed effectiveness.

In my experience when I try to be completely relaxed and





attempt a technique the first thing that happens is I fail. If I am playing a martial game the same result comes up. More failure. If I am honest with myself it is true that when I am playing a competitive game, I will have a strong tendency to use strength and muscular tension in an attempt to win!

The main component of effortless power is the effortless part, and it starts with being relaxed. This is a major aspect of Ralston's Cheng Hsin T'ai Chi and crucial to the development of any kind of effortless power. It takes a strange



commitment to something that seems at first inaccessible. The mind, body, and nervous system are programmed for the opposite of effortlessness.

Seeing Peter Ralston in footage from the full-contact World Tournament in Taiwan in '78 was eye opening. Even though he was in a fight, his movements were smooth and graceful. I also remember an instance where his opponent started a punch and Peter kicked him, stopping the attack, before it could land. How perceptive do you have to be to kick somebody before their punch can even get to you? That's impressive!

T'ai Chi hinges entirely upon the player's consciousness rather than upon his external muscular force.

He has mentioned many times that one major secret to having such speed is being able to



relax. After the fights BK Francis mentioned to Peter that he had attended a T'ai Chi conference occurring at the same time as the tournament—which lasted five days—and Ralston was the only person named in the conference. The conference claimed Peter as a T'ai Chi fighter. I suspect the main reason they did so was the unprecedented degree to which Ralston was relaxed while fighting.

On your journey to master this domain, training is needed. One major challenge is that you might not know that you aren't relaxed. There have been many times when I was playing with Ralston, while concentrating on relaxing, and thinking I was completely relaxed, just to hear



him say “Relax!” I couldn’t believe it was possible and yet here he was showing me that I wasn’t relaxed. Even my own perceptions and feelings were incorrect! This was frustrating but extremely valuable feedback.

To further your efforts, I want to share some ways to train being effortless, starting with a basic but very important exercise to experience total relaxation, and then taking this degree of relaxation into your set, and finally bringing it into free-play. My intent here is to open a doorway for training a depth of effortlessness and relaxation that almost nobody reaches.

We have a partner exercise for this in Cheng Hsin. People work in pairs. Person A will grab the arm of person B. Person B doesn’t present the arm or use any muscular tension or help in any way. They are instructed to let go of the arm and be completely relaxed, like an overcooked pasta noodle. Person A will then move the arm of person B around in different ways and at varying speeds, and person B will maintain complete relaxation during this process. If at any time person A feels person B tense up in any way, they can let them know, or let go of the arm suddenly, and if it doesn’t immediately fall like a piece of wood then tension is being used. This gives person B an opportunity to notice any unconscious use of muscles and let go.

Work on both arms for an equal amount of time, then switch roles. This exercise can be expanded to include other parts of the body as well. This will help both parties acknowledge the challenges associated with trying to be completely relaxed. Once that is clear, the students can begin to move toward training an effortless power based on this same depth of relaxation.

Next, you can bring this level of total relaxation into your set by doing the set with what we call a rag doll body. This means the body and limbs are totally limp (except what you use to keep standing, but even then, keep relaxing the legs and pelvis more than normal). You can get a sense of this by keeping completely relaxed arms like in the above exercise and then, using the centre, toss your arms and body through space without any tension. If you can do this, then the exercise becomes trying to toss the limbs into the postures and shapes that make up your set of movements. It is a completely different way of moving, and often looks a bit silly, but it is extremely relaxed and it forces you to move from your centre since the muscles of the limbs are unused.

Another way you can train relaxation in your set is to do a movement in as relaxed a way as possible, then finish the move and hold the posture. While in the same posture, you then

relax and sink even more, often focusing on the pelvis and legs and allowing as much relaxation and sinking as possible in that posture. You will frequently find places of tension that you hadn't noticed before. Then, proceed to the next movement, and repeat the process of relaxing and sinking. You will likely notice the legs will get sore from taking on additional weight in ways they aren't used to.

Finally, you can bring extreme relaxation and effortless power into your free play and games. In a free format, the structure and relationship between the bodies is quick, fluid and changeable. To me, this is the true test of relaxed skill since there is no time to think and your partner is not going along with the programme. If you can relax and be effortless here, then you got it.

For example, Peter tells a story of being in Taiwan and almost getting hit by a car. He was in the street and recognized suddenly that a car was on a course to impact his body. Instead of getting tense he relaxed into the ground and swiftly moved out of the way. This tells me his nervous system is programmed on a deep level to relax, whereas pretty much all other people don't experience this level of control, because when the reality of danger is imminent pretty much everyone automatically tenses up and uses



strength to protect themselves. Try to imagine what depth of experience and what would be needed to program the nervous system such that, in this kind of danger, relaxation is the automatic response.

Even if you never incorporate these exercises in your T'ai Chi practise, there are many huge benefits to training just relaxing alone, such as being much more fluid and versatile. Your movements will take on a quality of softness and smoothness. Your mind will tend to calm down, and you will be able to feel more. You will be less likely to get injured and it's good for your health.

If you bring this into your T'ai Chi set and push hands, you will also benefit from an ability to increase your speed and not get tired as easily. It will also force you to use your centre and find very precise alignments which will increase your efficiency and allow you to apply greater power with less effort.

I hope you can see and appreciate the difference between fantasy and reality. I acknowledge the challenges of trying to train this material. I recommend that you throw yourself into the unknown and stay there until you start seeing real results, as did Ralston long ago in his search for truly effortless power. He struggled to actualize the radical possibility of being completely relaxed while trying to toss or strike opponents. Although he failed to accomplish any results day after day, training 8-10 hours each day, he continued to remain totally relaxed and not use any muscular strength. He did this for almost a year without success until finally he discovered a new way to generate completely effortless force, even though no one around him was doing anything like it – not even his teacher.

Even though most people won't be that committed or put in that much time, you can still make progress if you take it seriously. Over time, a new and real world of effortless power and more effective interaction can occur that is aligned with what we hear from the masters of old: tales of being totally relaxed and having a calm mind, even while fighting; feeling the energy of your partner ebb and flow as you play; and entering a state of no-mind as the body moves effectively from position to position, applying a truly effortless power. As always, the decision to take this on starts and ends with you. Good luck. If you want to go deeper you are invited to visit PeterRalston.com.

Four Resemblances

AN INTERVIEW WITH MADAM SUN JIAN-YUN TRANSCRIBED BY BRADFORD TYREY

The following is from a Question and Answer session with Madam Sun Jian-Yun that occurred in the 1980's and was attended by Bradford Tyrey. Madam Sun was the daughter of Sun Lu-T'ang, the originator of the Sun Style 97 Posture Tai Chi Chuan form.

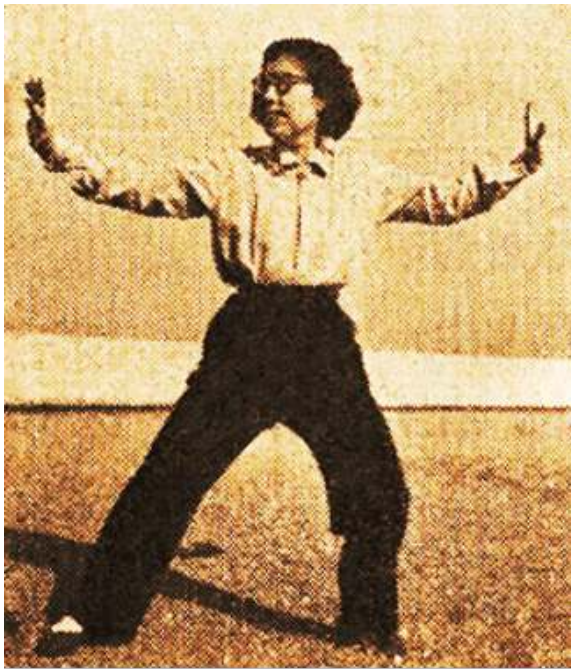
Q: Master Sun Lu-T'ang taught that all movements in taijiquan and the boxing arts that he taught contain 四象 Si Xiang (The Four Resemblances). Would you explain these to us?

A: The four animals that my father principally taught and applied to taijiquan are those taught to him by his revered masters: Hao Wei-Zhen, Guo Yun-Shen and Cheng T'ing-Hua. In the past, it was not uncommon for teachers from traditional boxing sects to have similar training methods, as such knowledge came from related sources. Regarding 四象 Si Xiang (The Four Resemblances), these refer to the characteristics and spirit-essence of four specific animals that are studied and thereby merged into taijiquan. Both physically and in spirit you are to mimic the characteristic actions of each of these four creatures so that one's body resembles the movements of 'four creatures merging into one, the one being a Human.'

1. 象鷄腿 Xiang Ji Tui (Resembling a Rooster's Leg) This is the shape that one's body assumes when standing upon a single leg. Such a posture mimics the standing of a rooster that has raised a single leg with the purpose of 'about to move.' Raising a single leg must have intent beyond merely raising. Raising one leg requires the supporting leg to sink, establishing the foundation and stability from which to 'rise.' This is the dualism of movement among the yin and yang, upper and lower giving birth to and support to the other. 象鷄腿 Xiang Ji Tui (Resembling a Rooster's Leg), therefore, is not merely the standing upon a single leg; it is the overall concept of simultaneously rising and sinking in a unified manner while maintaining one's central equilibrium. Whether the leg rises into a kick, rises to assume a standing posture or rises very slightly with the toes touching lightly upon the ground, all are postures conforming to principles contained within Rooster Leg training. Furthermore, 鷄 ji

(rooster) signifies the heralding of yang essence and hence the inception of movement. Movement of one's body stems from the wellspring of the feet [referring to the Yongquan (Gushing Spring) point] and legs, one side sensing rootedness and contraction, the other sensing lightness and extension. The earth's qi enters through both feet and rises to the crown of one's head [referring to Baihui (Hundred Meetings) point], along this journey, the primordial essence is dispersed through the limbs and organs. To raise one leg like a rooster heralding the dawn enhances qi to surge to the crown-point from where it unifies all things within one's interior. This is the meaning of 象鷄腿 Xiang Ji Tui (Resembling a Rooster's Leg) as taught by Master Sun Lu-T'ang.

2. 象龍身 Xiang Lung Shen (Resembling a Dragon's Body) A dragon's limbs embraces strength from the inherent skill of using the 三折 San Zhe (Three Bends [Breaks]). These three bends act as 弓 gong (bows) about to release an arrow of force. Each bow is likened to a storehouse of strength, accumulating, enhancing, and sustaining itself before releasing natural force. When practising taijiquan, every posture, every movement must adhere to the 三折 San Zhe (Three Bends [Breaks]) so that both 氣 qi and 力 li (force) can be 合 hé (unified) and then released without the slightest hindrance. In taijiquan and traditional Chinese boxing arts these bent regions of the body are further separated into either the 下三折 Xia San Zhe (Lower Three Bends [Breaks]): the bending found in the inner hip region [outer pelvic area], the bending of the knees, and the bending of the ankles; and the 上三折 Shang San Zhe (Upper Three Bends [Breaks]): the bending found in the inner sternum region which includes the rounding of the shoulders, the bending of the elbows, and the bending of the wrists. Additionally, the Upper Bends and Lower



Bends are supportively paired to form the 對三折 Dui San Zhe (Coupled [Paired] Three Bends). These couplings are: shoulders and hips, elbows and knees, and wrists and ankles. Such coupling mimics the 陰 yin and 陽 yang uniting, separate they are but single forces without cause, together their union moves the heavens.

3. 象熊膀 Xiang Xiong Bang (Resembling a Bear's Shoulders) A bear's neck maintains an upright position enabling 氣 qi to follow a vertical pathway to the crown of the head. Hence, one's shoulders must sense roundness and fullness, enabling the shoulders to roll like a great bear's girth in movement while maintaining the neck's upright position. Master Sun Lu-T'ang taught that the practise of 熊膀 Xiong Bang (the Bear's Shoulders) shall unify the neck with the shoulders, shoulders with the upper back, and the upper

back with the waist; all merge into one through devoted training. The shoulders are mirrors of below, that being one's hips. As the shoulders 滾 gun (roll) they in turn draw the hips into a slight 滾動 gundong (rolling movement). As the shoulders and hips 鬆開 song-kai (loosen/relax and open) and roll, their unified action moves the region between them [the waist] to produce 弓腰 gongyao (bowing/bending the waist). Slight 弓 gong (bowing/bending) of the waist enables the body to slightly round unifying the shoulders, hips and waist into appearing to move as one and is commonly known as 象熊膀 Xiang Xiong Bang (Resembling a Bear's Shoulders).

4. 象虎抱頭 Xiang Hu Bao Tou (Resembling a Tiger Embracing [Its] Head) One's body crouches like a tiger preparing to leap from its lair, while the arms and paws of a tiger extend as if to embrace and cover its head in a protective manner. The tips of the fingers, which resemble the outstretched claws of a tiger, lead and merge with one's 心 xin (heart [the mind]) and 意 yi (intent) to produce 力 li (force). This is one meaning of 象虎抱頭 Xiang Hu Bao Tou (Resembling a Tiger Embracing [Its] Head). A further meaning is the tiger's ability to shelter and protect its body from harm through contracting its body. Contraction 合 hé (unifies) the interior, bringing stability and harmony to all movement. Sheltering also refers to embracing and protecting one's yang essence as the head represents the most yang aspect of the body. It is the tiger's nature to guard yang essence hence it seeks 曲 qu (curvature/ bending) of the body to ease 氣 qi within the belly to 沉 chen (sink) deeper into the perpetual churning of the 丹田 tan-t'ien (Cinnabar/Elixir Field).

This article is published with the kind permission of Bradford Tyrey, based in Oklahoma City, USA.

Bradford Tyrey has spent over 18 years in China, with some training in Taiwan, Okinawa (Japan).

As a disciple under Madam Sun Jian-Yun, Bradford not only trained with her, but also received special instruction and notes about Sun Style and her father's work and knowledge. Bradford has published several books on Sun Style as well as on other martial arts and styles.

Taiji Roots

BY MARNIX WELLS

If China's four thousand years can be taken as one hour of a clock, the documented history of taijiquán under that name may be timed under two minutes. How then did it evolve and why suddenly appear at the sunset of the Forbidden City, in the last gasp of the Qīng empire?

Foreign encroachments, military defeats and massive rebellion undermined the complacency of the Manchu elite and the ascendancy of conservative Confucian with their ingrained disdain for the physical and martial arts. On one level this time of cultural crisis spawned the 1900 Boxer Rebellion. This marked the first occasion in which martial arts actually led a rebellion and challenged modern firepower with the supposed invulnerability of qìgōng. The outcome was predictable but all was not lost.

Western ideas of physical culture and sport were taking root. This presented an opening for traditional martial arts and qìgōng for health on a national front. China was no longer 'the sick man of Asia', and the time was ripe for taijiquán to take its place as part of the 'self-strengthening' movement. Offering benefits of enhanced self-defense, longevity and resistance to disease, this 'soft' martial art was amenable for young and old, male and female in China, and eventually the whole world.

With the founding of the Republic in 1910, two giant stars emerged to found the most popular taiji schools, called by family names, which in Chinese come first. These were Yáng Chéngfǔ, grandson of Yáng Lùchán, and Wú Jiànquán, retired from the Manchu imperial guard, whose rivalry culminated in a well-publicised 'pushing-hands' (tuīshǒu) duel that ended in a draw. A third strand came from Sun Lùtáng who combined three – taijiquán, circle-walking bāguàzhǎng and straight-line xíngyìquán – into a theory of 'internal martial arts' which he taught from 1914 to 1924 at Běijīng military academy, where he received the rank of captain. Sun was a prolific writer and chief philosopher, promoting the unity of Daoist spiritual training with practise of martial applications.

Each of the above mentioned grand masters

claimed semi-divine origins for their arts in legends of the elusive Zhāng Sānfēng, a Daoist 'saint' believed to have lived around 1400, from the late Yuán to early Míng period. His sect is centred on Wūdāng mountain in Húběi province, sacred to Xuánwǔ, the 'Dark Warrior'. This narrative was challenged by scientific historiographers, notably researcher Táng Háo whose fieldwork led him to the Chén family home, north of the Yellow River at Chénjiāgōu and the nearby town of Zhāobǎo in Hénán province. At the former location, in the second half of the nineteenth century during the closing years of the Manchu Qīng dynasty, an employee of the Chén pharmacy named Yáng Lùchán, staying in the household of Chén Chángxīng, one night overheard strange noises (of hēng and hā). Peeping through the paper windows, in use before the advent of glass panes, possibly by wetting his finger to make a small hole, he was able to spy into the central courtyard.

There we can imagine he was able to make out the source of the grunts and bumps. Two murky figures in close contact were pulling and pushing each other in the darkness, uprooting, throwing and catching bodies in the air with continuous motion so that no one ever hit the ground or sustained serious injury.

I once had an experience, about the year two-thousand, slightly reminiscent of that told of Yáng Lùchán.

It was at the elegant princely palace of Gōngwángfǔ in Běijīng, where a Chén-style teacher was instructing his teenage son. I was doing standing meditation under a tree, not wearing my short-sight glasses, while the master was teaching pushing-hands to his son who was almost continuously exclaiming with pain. Though I could not turn to see exactly the cause, it must have been due to grappling techniques (qíná) for which Chén-style is known.

At any rate, if we are to take tradition at its words, the Chén family jealously guarded their family art, which they refused to transmit to outsiders. It was only by this clandestine method, that Yáng Lùchán was able without detection not

only to observe, but somehow memorise and master, their entire system, including weaponry, which he then taught after his travels to Běijīng. In support of this version of the art's first release to the Chinese world, there is ample evidence in Chinese history for intra-family exclusivity. It can be likened to trademark protection in the pre-

modern age. On the other hand it seems certain that Chén Chángxīng must have somehow made an exception in teaching Yáng Lùchán and so lost his family monopoly. Chén-style tàijí only regained its leading role after the communist revolution.



Marnix studied tàijíquán and internal martial arts in the Far East from 1968, with Master Wángshùjīn and his disciple Zhang Yìzhong; Gān Xiàozhōu; Hóng Yìmián; and others. More recently, in this country, he has been learning Zhāobǎo tàijí with Liú Yǎzǐ 'Master Yǎzǐ'. Marnix is a graduate in classical Chinese from Oxford and PhD SOAS. He has published interpretative translations from Chinese of Scholar Boxer, Pheasant Cap Master and Heguanzǐ: the Dao of Unity.



Qi Pyramid

GET MORE FROM YOUR TAI CHI

BY AL SIMON

“I have practised traditional Chen style and Yang style Tai Chi over the years. But I’ve only irregularly felt qi flow. Why?”

I get asked questions like this a lot. It seems that a good number of Tai Chi students struggle with actually sensing and experiencing qi flow in their practise.

Fortunately, the answer to this question is simple.

Unfortunately, it’s not an answer most students – or teachers, for that matter – want to hear.

You see, some people just won’t feel qi flow from Tai Chi, no matter how long or hard they practise. It’s not their fault, though. There is nothing “wrong” with them.

The real problem is in their practise. Because if you want to feel qi flow, you have to realize that Tai Chi may not be the right tool for the job.

THE NATURE OF QI

To understand why this is so, let’s start at the beginning. Let’s look at, think about, and get a feel for the nature of qi.

While many health approaches look primarily at you from a biological and chemical perspective, Qi Development looks at you primarily from an energetic perspective. I think you are aware of this, but oftentimes, people confuse qi with some sort of mystical, magical “energy.” But it’s not. It’s really a little more down to earth and practical.

You can look at qi as the result of all the processes that are happening in and around your body that keep you living. Everything from your DNA, chemical bonding, hormonal secretions and everything at the cellular level, all the way up to your internal organs, your skeletal structure, your skin, how your body moves, your body temperature. Everything that is basically keeping you animated and alive and moving – all of these processes create qi.

But qi is not a “thing.” It’s not “real” in the same sense that your heart is real or your lungs are real. Instead, qi is the result of all these internal processes – everything from the microscopic to the macroscopic – all working together.

YOUR ENERGY SYSTEM “APP”

Let me give you an analogy. Let’s say you own a smart phone. Your smart phone has two parts to it. There’s the physical phone – the actual hardware device you hold in your hand. But there are also the apps you run on your phone. These are the software programs you download to your phone that make it useful.

Now, let’s say you break open your phone’s case and look at the hardware inside. Do you see your apps anywhere in there? No. All you see are circuit boards, chips, your battery, and your network card. Now, it’s true that your apps are stored in magnetic bits on those chips. But even if you break open those chips, you still really can’t “see” your apps there.

Yet, if you power on your phone, you can get all of this hardware to display your apps on the phone’s screen. Once you do that, you can start making calls, sending texts, posting on social media, and everything else you do with your phone.

Well, qi is much like that. If a surgeon cuts you open, he can’t see your qi anywhere. That’s because your qi is more like an app that runs on top of your body’s hardware.

I like to define qi as:

“The result of performing certain activities and observing their results in your body and mind. You can see, feel, hear, and experience qi by performing those activities and observing those processes.”

THE FIVE STEP QI PYRAMID

This definition may seem a bit academic and theoretical, but there’s a practical side here. What happens once you have this more “app-like” definition of qi? Then the question we started with changes.

It’s no longer “Why don’t I feel qi flow?”

It becomes, “What activities do I need to do to feel qi flow?”

Starting in 1997, I began working with my students to answer this exact question. I won’t

take you through the long trial-and-error process that gave us our answers. But within about seven years, we had definitive answers to this question.

We found that a particular “progression” of activities helped immensely with getting our students to generate, feel, and use qi. This qi progression has been one of the biggest reasons for the benefits that our students and instructors have gotten from our Tai Chi and Qigong programmes.

Through working with hundreds of in-person students, and nearly 5,000 online students, we found that there were five groups of activities that gave our students the best experience of qi. We organized these groups into a series of steps.

Those steps are:

1. Open the Qi Meridian System and “Tune” the Body
2. Integrate Qi Meridians with Qi Vessels
3. Connect Managing Qi with Guardian Qi
4. Direct Qi through Four Intentions
5. Harmonize and Align Qi “Super Vessels”

In addition to just listing those steps, I’ve also drawn them out in pyramid fashion.

This gives you a good visual representation of how each step is built on the previous step. I’ve done this to show you that these aren’t five



random steps you can do in any order. There is definitely a progression that needs to be followed, since each step builds the foundation for the steps that follow.

There is actually a lot involved in each of these steps, but let me give you an overview of each one.

After reading this overview, if you’d like to know more about these steps, I have an online video you’ll want to see. It’s of a webinar I gave a while back that explains each step in more detail, along with actual examples from Tai Chi and Qigong. If you’d like access to that online video,

just drop by my website at QiPyramid.co.uk. The video is free to anyone who reads this article.

STEP 1: OPEN THE QI MERIDIAN SYSTEM AND “TUNE” THE BODY

In order to get a complete experience of qi, our first step focuses on developing the qi meridians. These are the pathways in the body that circulate qi.

To that end, we focus on two important skills in this level: (1) learning to circulate qi in the most efficient way possible, with a special focus on compensating for any problems with qi dissipation, and (2) learning to regulate the body according to the practises of tiao shen or “body tuning.”

These two skills are intertwined. Good body tuning helps with qi circulation and prevents dissipating (wasting) qi that you generate during practise. So, to that end, we focus most of our time on tiao shen - a set of skills that teach you how to use the body in an “energy efficient” manner.

To help with these skills, we focus on Waidan Qigong styles. The term waidan (pronounced “why don”) means external elixir.

You can think of the word “elixir” as meaning qi. In this particular context, the word “external” means external to the torso - in other words, the arms and legs. Many important qi meridians are located in the limbs and have access points there. Waidan Qigong styles focus on these meridians, improving the flow of energy through them by focusing on moving the arms and legs.

One reason we chose Waidan Qigong styles for this level is that they are easier to learn. Waidan styles are more like Western-style exercise, as compared to Neidan (“internal elixir” – pronounced “nay don”) styles of Qigong.

In addition, when you combine Waidan styles with body tuning, you often see faster progress up front, especially if you have health problems, illnesses, or injuries.

Neidan styles, the other major division of Qigong alongside Waidan, are more of a “slow build” to health and qi. You’ll see relatively little progress at first, but they provide many long-term benefits. Waidan styles, on the other hand, are often more dramatic up front. While the Waidan benefits do tend to taper off after a time, a majority of students, including the sedentary and physically challenged, see short-term benefits more quickly this way.

STEP 2: INTEGRATE QI MERIDIANS WITH QI VESSELS

The second level focuses more on storing qi in the vessels. If you think of “vessels” like pots, urns, or vases, you get the idea of a container that holds something. That’s what qi vessels are like. You can think of them as “holding tanks” or “reservoirs” for qi. Vessels are pathways where qi is stored, while meridians are pathways where qi is circulated.

To focus more on qi vessels in this level, we use Neidan qigong styles. Neidan, as I mentioned above, means “internal elixir.” “Internal” in this context refers to “inside the torso.” Neidan Qigong styles focus on building up and storing energy in the torso, where most of the vessels are.

In addition to working on storage in this level, we also want to improve connections from the storage vessels to the qi-flow meridians. We do this by using Waidan/Neidan hybrid practises - that is, practises that combine elements from both styles.

By improving qi storage in your vessels, then improving how it is distributed to your meridians, you’ll often create greater internal health, and see long-term improvements and protection against chronic health problems.

The challenge here is that Neidan and Waidan/Neidan hybrid exercises are more complex to practise than Waidan exercises. Practise details become even more important at this stage.

STEP 3: CONNECT MANAGING QI WITH GUARDIAN QI

In the first two steps, we focused on working with qi inside the body. This type of qi is called ying qi in Chinese - which means “managing qi” - because it manages all the functions inside the body.

But we also have qi outside of our body. Specifically, we have a “qi field” that surrounds our body in all directions. This field is called Wei Qi (pronounced “way chee”) in Chinese. That translates to “guardian qi,” because it guards and protects us from pathogens and toxins in our environment. This includes not only physically harmful elements, but also mental and emotional “toxins” from stressful situations and people.

With our external guardian qi, we want to make sure that it can circulate freely and doesn’t stagnate, just like the qi inside our body. We want to prevent blockages and discontinuities,

so one of the main tasks in this step is to sense our external qi field and find ways to keep it circulating. To do that, we learn to extend our internal qi outside of our body and connect it to this external qi.

To that end, we focus in this level on three skills: (1) active rooting, (2) whole body energy threading, and (3) bolstering the guardian Qi field.

STEP 4: DIRECT QI THROUGH FOUR INTENTIONS

By the time you’ve reached step four, you’ve now taken both your internal and external qi to higher levels. Once you’ve done that, it’s time to learn to “do” something with the qi you’ve developed.

That’s what the final two levels are about. In the pyramid drawing, I’ve put steps four and five together, since they are related. But let’s discuss step four first.

If you have read books on Tai Chi, you sometimes come across a Chinese term, jin. It’s often translated as “energy”, but it means something a little different than the word “qi” which also means energy. “Jin” has connotations of “intention” or “focus,” or maybe “directed qi.” I like to use the word “intention,” but you might also call it “energy with a purpose.”

There are dozens of “intentions” in Tai Chi, but most Tai Chi masters agree that there are four primary intentions. These four intentions cover at least 90% and maybe more of what you need to handle any health, stress relief, or Qi Development situations you encounter. These four intentions are based upon the Chinese practise of yin and yang, and specifically of greater yin, lesser yin, lesser yang, and greater yang.

There are Chinese terms for these four intentions (peng, lu, ji, and an), but they don’t translate well into English. Instead we use the Four Elements of earth, water, fire, and air to help you understand the four primary intentions of “directed qi.”

STEP 5: HARMONIZE AND ALIGN QI “SUPER VESSELS”

Over the centuries, various disciplines from both East and West, have identified special energy centres in the body.

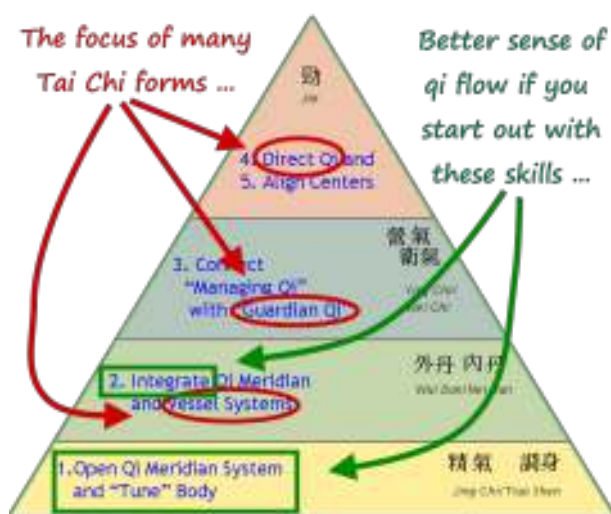
The number of these energy centres vary anywhere from three to twelve or more. For example, many Tai Chi and Qigong styles use three centres called dantien. The Hindu yoga

system identifies seven chakra (their name for these centres). Some Buddhist systems and Western systems identify five energy centres.

Keep in mind, there is no “correct” or “true” number of centres here. These are all just models, and you can use three, four, five, six, ten, twelve, or a hundred energy centres - whatever is most useful to what you are trying to accomplish.

For our work, we chose to focus on five energy centres. These five special qi centres are like super vessels as far as qi storage is concerned. But unlike the regular qi vessels that are just inside the body, these five centres include three inside the body and two outside the body.

Through movement, mental concentration, breathing, vocalization, and focus, you can charge, align, and connect these centres to unleash vast amounts of healing energy.



NOT MUCH QI FROM YOUR TAI CHI?

Now that you understand at least the basics of the Qi Development Pyramid, we can answer the question that started all of this off.

The question was: “I have practised traditional Chen style and Yang style Tai Chi over the years. But I’ve only irregularly felt qi flow. Why?”

And the answer?

Keep in mind that “qi flow” generally means

“qi flowing through the meridians.” But think about what this person has practised - Chen and Yang Tai Chi. Like many Tai Chi styles, those two primarily focus on Neidan work for qi storage. They also work on both improving guardian qi and on directing qi through jin.

This person’s styles fit into steps two, three, and four in the pyramid. But what’s missing? You’ve guessed it. Neither style spends much time on meridian work. They don’t work the meridians in step one, nor do they integrate them with the vessel work in step two. What’s missing is this foundational work.

Now, many Tai Chi styles hope that if you work on vessel storage alone, you’ll somehow store enough qi to “overflow” your vessels, and the resulting overflow will benefit your meridians. It’s like they trust meridian work to happen more as a by-product, rather than as a primary focus.

I would say that this “overflow” approach does work, but only for a small percentage of students, say 10% to 20%. For most of us, we can’t get enough storage to happen to make that “overflow” work, especially when we’re beginners.

Instead, if you work on meridian circulation first, even if your storage is low, you’ll see some dramatic improvements in qi flow right away. Later, as you improve your storage with more Neidan influenced practise, you’ll take that sense of qi flow even higher.

So if you find you aren’t getting much qi flow from your current styles and forms, that’s probably why. You haven’t done enough meridian work first.

But it’s never too late. No matter how many years of Tai Chi have gone by, you can always go back to the basics. I like to call this doing a “pyramid restart.” Take this qi pyramid, start at the bottom, and work your way up, step-by-step.

If you are willing to drop what’s NOT working, start over with a “beginner’s mind,” and use this pyramid to restart your practise, I’m certain you’ll be feeling more qi flow in no time.



Al Simon is a Tai Chi and Qigong master with 35+ years of experience, and a three-time inductee into the United States Martial Arts Hall of Fame. You can get a free video on the “Qi Pyramid” – with demonstrations of this approach using Tai Chi and Qigong – on this website: QiPyramid.co.uk.

Six Harmonies

OF LIU HE BA FA

BY STUART AGARS

INTRODUCTION

For years, the principles within Liu He Ba Fa (in Mandarin), Lok Hup Ba Fa (in Cantonese), or “Six Harmonies Eight Methods” (hereafter abbreviated as LHBF), also known as Water Boxing, has been practised and passed down secretly to indoor students. This is why the story of LHBF has been shrouded in mystery for over 900 years.

To this day, LHBF remains an extremely rare internal art containing well-guarded sets of principles and requirements that have only begun to reach the public light since the end of WWII in the Far East.

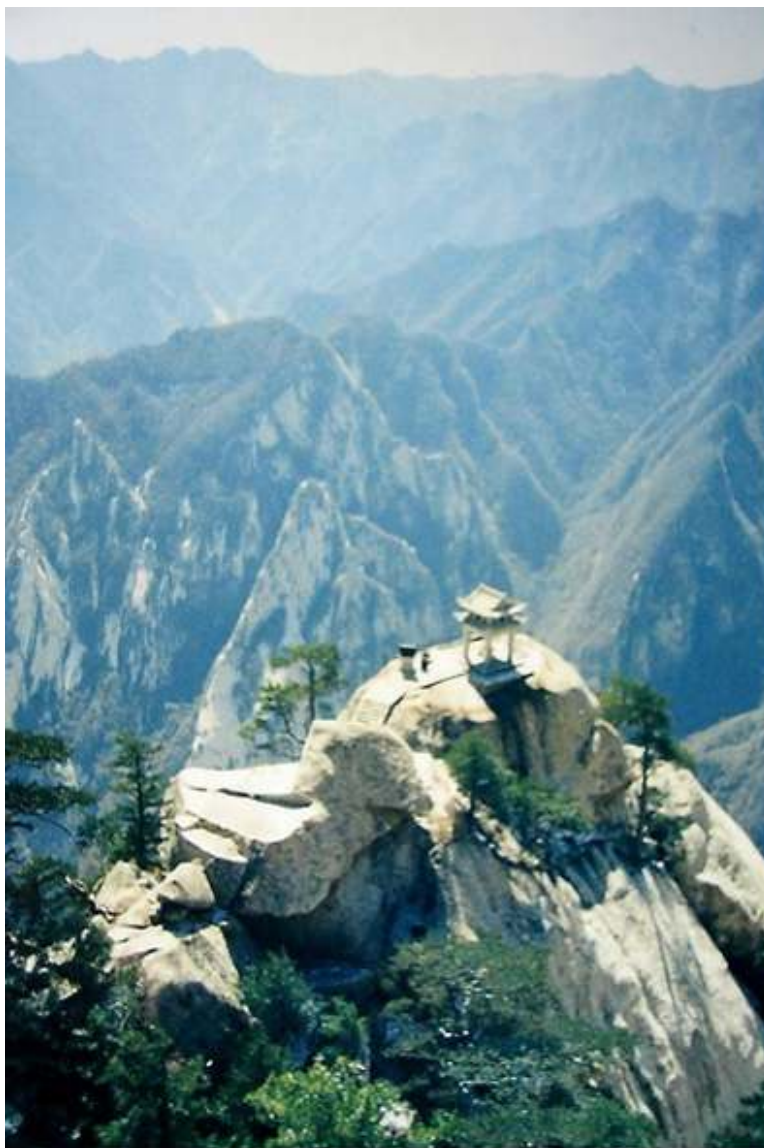
In the last issue, I gave a brief overview of the Origins and Principles of LHBF. This article explains the Six Harmonies of LHBF.

Let me start by telling you the full name of LHBF (take a deep breath)

The full name of LiuHeBaFa is “Hua Yue Xing Yi Liu He Ba Fa San Pan Shi Er Shi”. It’s a really great name as it fully explains the system. The name can be broken down into small sections (I have underlined the sections for clarity, and the name can be understood like this:

- “Xing Yi” means mind and nervous system;
- “LiuhebaFa” Means Six Harmonies and Eight Methods;
- “San Pan” means “Upper, Middle & Lower” i.e. 3 Height levels;
- “Shi Er Shi” means 12 Styles of fighting.

What first drew me to LHBF was the comprehensive theory on body mechanics. The full theory of LHBF has been written down in a collection of stanzas called ‘The Five Word Poem of Liu He Ba Fa’ accredited to Li Dong Feng. It



“Hua Yue” is the name of the mountain where LHBF originated.

is called the ‘Five Word Poem’ as each stanza is made up of five words (a bit like a Haiku poem in one way). My good friend Ruth Hampson and I have translated a copy of the ‘Five Word Poem’ into English under the guidance of my Master Hui Kit Wah.

In this article, I explore the Six Harmonies of LHBF in detail and discuss each of the harmonies in clear easy to understand terms.

The internal arts, I believe, try to explain the same thing: how to improve body structure, how to move the body in one piece and how to link

the mind to the movement. Abundant and diverse benefits follow from practising these principles in all of our affairs!

The Six Harmonies of LHBF are:

體合於心	Body and Mind Combine
心合於意	Mind and Intention Combine
意合於氣	Intention and Chi Combine
氣合於神	Chi and Spirit Combine
神合於動	Spirit and Movement Combine
動合於空	Movement and Emptiness Combine

1. BODY AND MIND COMBINE

My Master taught me formally like this, he said “The body is divided into 3 plates; Upper, Middle & Lower. Each plate also has 3 sections e.g. for the upper body / arm, we have – Shoulder, Elbow & Wrist. The Mind is the central nervous system, it controls everything: feelings, eyesight and body. Your Heart / Mind¹ is the Emperor and your body are his soldiers. Your mind places an order and your body carries this out.

The best way to find this first Harmony, from my experience, is to stand in Jarm Jong, the standing pole meditation stance, and scan up and down your body. You can immediately appreciate two things, (try it, you will smile at its simplicity): A. that you have a Body and B. that you are thinking about it – in that instant of realisation Body and Mind are in Harmony. Both Simple and Complex in an instant, we can be grateful for this wonderful harmony.

2. MIND AND INTENTION COMBINE

The second harmony of LHBF is Mind and Intention combine and we all can do it. For example, imagine you catch a ball in mid-air. Mind and Intention combine perfectly, imagine the mathematical equation required to explain this! Ralph the rescue dog, always has Mind

¹ Sometimes my Master interchanges Heart / Mind which can be a long topic on its own! Mind here means the highest level or consciousness. We all have many things going on in our mind, multiple thoughts all at the same time, like a committee meeting! however in the martial arts way we only want one thought at a time in our Mind (and Heart).

and Intention co-ordinated when he catches his ball. His Mind and Intention are fully engaged together in one action. And I am sure that Ralph the rescue dog doesn't do calculus!

Another good example of Mind and Intention Combine is to imagine a tennis player, they want to learn to hit perfect return volley, so they practise like this:

- Be in a Ready Position
- Head & Eyes Looking
- Start Moving, keep looking
- Hitting Hand Ready
- Non Hitting Hand Ready
- Whole body moving
- At the time of impact whole body turning
- Hit through the target, keep looking



“Intention goes first, Chi Follows”

Illustration by Helen Evans

I am sure the astute among you noticed that I used martial arts key points list here to demonstrate that this is a transferable skill.

We all must have at least just once kicked a good shot, hit a ‘sweet’ ball, downed that difficult pool ball, even tossed that ball of paper into the waste paper basket! Everything was just so! (and 1,000 times not quite just so!).

Like the first Harmony for martial arts, we only want one intention at that time.

3. INTENTION AND CHI COMBINE

The third harmony of LHBF is Intention and Chi combine.

My Master taught me “Because of course it starts with everything! You want to move right? If you want to do something and move, then your Intention goes first. The Intention is the first. The Chi then follows the intention of what you want to do. If you want to punch, at that moment, your body is not actually moving, but you have started already (like placing the order) – energy is starting and the energy flows from your shoulder, elbow and wrist. At that time your Chi is floating (running) and if you combine together the



*“The Tiger’s Chi & Spirit Combines”
Illustration By Helen Evans*

Intention is also running, so your hand is moving.

In the martial art way Chi is Force.

I love it when we talk Force in martial arts, as Newton’s second law is; $\text{Force} = \text{Mass} \times \text{Acceleration}$.

And is this important for LHBF? Yes, for sure! It is important because LHBF concentrates on moving while maintaining body structure, and moving means to have speed or velocity, and

in Newton’s second law, acceleration is velocity squared!

In martial arts, chi can be considered as force. In the old Chinese martial arts way, you can say that the “Fist is behind the brain”, so if you want to punch, you have Intention first, then with your body structure, you can execute the movement.

This all may seem obvious, but when you are asked to break a wooden board, or spar with someone who is much bigger and stronger than you – you have to learn to ignore the wooden

board or not care that the opponent is bigger. Cast your mind back to your coach – can you hear them saying “Wait, Move, GO NOW !!!! Punch through the target!

The Way is like this.

4. CHI AND SPIRIT COMBINE

On a daily basis, food and exercise builds the Chi for your body. Chi provides the energy for your body’s daily work.

Spirit is expressed through the body from inside out (and comes from your body and mind health condition). People can easily lose their spirit working too much, feeling stressed or if you are ill – that feeling of being deflated or flat. Spirit is like the presence of their body. If they are healthy and happy then they have a strong spirit like a young tiger- strong. In the west we may say ‘zest for life’!

Chi and Spirit can be treated separately but they are interlocked like father and son. Two individual bodies flowing with the same type of blood. They are complementary.

When I practise my LHBF, just one section of footwork (the side stepping) raises my spirits.

5. SPIRIT AND MOVEMENT COMBINE

I think this is the easiest one to translate. When you see a fantastic performance, and it moves you – you can see Spirit and Movement in harmony. Spirit and Movement can be like a stunningly beautiful Jet Li performance or Jackie Chan doing a complex stunt routine, and also is occasionally seen when I am late and running for the Leeds to York bus as it sets off from the station 2 minutes early.

5. MOVEMENT AND EMPTINESS COMBINE

The Huffington Post describes ‘emptiness’ as the most misunderstood word in Buddhism! But don’t worry, it is easy! In the LHBF way, Emptiness refers to acting naturally, my Master would say – “without burden – your body and mind do not carry any weight. “

Each harmony is a concept, a feeling and I do hope everyone gets something from it - you can stack each harmony on top of each other. You do not have to stack them in order or do them all the time.

One of the main things I love most about the Six Harmonies of Liu He Ba Fa is that once you learn them, they can’t be un-learned, and in fact, I bet that anyone who reads this says – I was doing that anyway!



“The

Phoenix Spirit & Movement Combines”



The Chi-Full Diet

BY CHARLES SHAHAR

Food is an important energy source, and this fact is well understood by biologists, who can describe the mechanism by which food is converted into energy and used by the body's cells. But food is also a source of a much more subtle energy. Certain foods are rich in chi, and when they are ingested, they help vitalize and energize the system from the level of cells, to the organs and larger structures.

The very fact of eating foods high in chi also has important purifying and healing implications. Scientists are discovering how certain substances in foods can prevent major illnesses from occurring. But they fail to take it one step further, by understanding how chi prevents degenerative forces from advancing in the body.

What is amazing is to compare a 60-year-old who has been negligent about their food intake with one who has maintained a diet rich in chi and other refined elements. The latter will have more energy, will be mentally sharper, and physically much more able and healthy. The whole process of degeneration due to the natural aging of the body will be slowed drastically if good dietary patterns are maintained throughout one's life.

In fact, the bloated or distorted looking bodies of some people in their older years, and often sooner than that, reflect nutritional habits that have taken a heavy physical toll. Years of poor nutrition, eating heavy foods, hard to digest foods, overeating, cigarette smoking, and alcohol dependency, can all have profoundly detrimental consequences on the subtle energy balance in the body.

FOODS WITH ENHANCED CHI

There are a number of foods rich in chi. Live foods, such as sprouts, have substantial chi content. As a testimony to their richness, I have seen freshly grown alfalfa sprouts literally glow,

bathed in a greenish aura. Eating live foods is about as close as one can come to ingesting pure chi, and their directly vitalizing properties are what make them so beneficial. However, as part of a balanced and complete diet, they should also be combined with other raw and properly cooked foods.

Fresh honey is another food that glows with vital energy. When I visited India several years ago, I tasted fresh milk that came straight from a cow, and it had an effervescence that was unmistakable.¹ The cow roamed freely and was respected and nurtured faithfully. In short, the animal was healthy, happy, and radiating with chi, and its milk reflected that fact. I have also noticed that organic kefir (fermented yogurt) seems to be high in vital energy.

Vegetables and fruits are high in chi, particularly if they are organically produced. However, one must still be alert when buying produce in terms of their freshness. For instance, there is a noticeable decline in the quality of vegetables if they have been refrigerated or in transit for a long while, and have begun to grow slightly dull or rotten as a result. Compare these to the same vegetables freshly picked and with their stalks still attached.

How can one tell whether an item has much chi? The colour often gives it away. The more vivid or vibrant the colour, the greater the chi content, and the higher its nutritional value. This rule can be violated if artificial means are used to enhance the colour, or to make the product appear shiny or fresh. A mild example of this are apples that are waxed to give them artificial lustre.

Another way of noticing whether a product has much chi is by the taste. There is a

¹ I don't necessarily recommend drinking unpasteurized milk. Although the process does compromise the chi to some extent, there are other health risks involved when drinking milk that has not undergone this process.

difference in the taste of food which has less chi, often because the process of decay has set in. It may taste more bitter or sour, depending on the item, whereas the chi-filled food generally has a more pleasing flavour. The same goes for smell; the aroma of foods rich in chi is usually more vibrant; foods which lack a smell or smell rancid often have less chi.

Any fresh produce will carry chi. A peak chi period happens for fruits and vegetables when they reach maximum ripeness. At that point, their colour is most vibrant, and their taste and smell are most pleasing. If you are vigilant, you can even see a kind of effervescence that surrounds them, a sheen that makes them particularly attractive and worthy of our consumption.

After peak ripeness is reached, the life energy of fruits and vegetables then begins to withdraw, and the bacteria responsible for the degenerative forces will take over. Bruises and moulds are simply signs that the fruit has passed its maximum vitality, and that the process of decay has begun. The eating of decayed foods should be avoided, because this not only introduces unhealthy microorganisms into the body, it interferes with the proper absorption of chi in your system.

One of the most accurate ways of knowing when fruits or vegetables are chi-deficient is if they begin to decay even before they ripen. This type of produce will never reach a peak chi period, and I don't recommend eating them as a result. This sometimes happens with the poorer grades of fruits and vegetables. It is worthwhile spending more money on higher quality, chi-filled foods.

Any item which is refrigerated for a long period of time will tend to lose much of its chi content, and the same pertains to cooked food. Overly cooked food usually means the chi has been drained almost entirely. I have seen people boil their vegetables until the contents turned white. It would have been better to drink the juices as a soup, and then at least some of the vital nutrients would have been ingested.

If vegetables are to be cooked, this should be done lightly, so their vibrancy can be maintained. People who boil the life out of their vegetables are eating dead food. A steamer is a nice addition to a kitchen, or even a pressure cooker, as long as the foods are not

overly cooked. Microwaved foods actually seem to retain chi if not overdone, but the concern is more with the radiation these gadgets emit.

Aside from length of cooking, foods such as leftovers are often chi-deficient, simply because they have been refrigerated or re-cooked to the point where their vitality has been compromised. A food will also lose chi if it has been cooked and there is a significant lapse before it is eaten. A refrigerated or storage area should always be kept clean, free from spoiled foods and their odour.

Any vegetable which is organically grown usually has more chi than one which is not. The taste, colour and smell of the food is usually a testament to their higher chi content. Such produce will often stay ripe longer, that is, have a longer peak chi period.

It is interesting that all processed foods lack significant chi. This includes white sugar, flour, most breads, pastas, cheeses and cereals. The vitality of these foods gets lost in the processing, which is why natural foods are always recommended. Items stored in tin cans are also usually chi-deficient, as are frozen foods and pre-cooked meals which have to be re-heated.

The foods low in chi are generally heavy, tasteless, and nutritionally deficient. Chi-deficient foods have a tendency to weigh down the organism, to clog up the digestive tract, and to promote the formation of bodily toxins and excess fat.

Of all the foods, meats have the least chi. The moment life withdraws from the body of an animal, the chi dissolves as well, and the remains begin to decompose. Eating meat is equivalent to ingesting food which is not only in the process of rotting, but for all purposes is completely dead! The dullness in the colour of meat, its odour and texture, are all signs of the lifelessness it represents, and the type of vibrations one takes into their system by eating it.

TUNING INTO THE CHI

I often say a prayer or briefly close my eyes and meditate before a meal. You cannot adequately absorb the subtle chi in food if you are feeling weary, irritable or distracted. A calm pause has the effect of raising the vibration of

your vital body² — meaning that not only are the physical processes related to digestion given a chance to function optimally, but the more subtle process of how efficiently you absorb the chi in food is also maximized.

If you are in a rush and eat hurriedly, very little of the vital elements in the food will be absorbed effectively. If you are engaged in an argument while you are eating, this will likewise compromise your ability to efficiently absorb chi. Even much talking during a meal will compromise the absorption of vital elements. Eating is actually an internal process that requires a focusing or centring of one's mental and emotional faculties.

The absorption of chi in food is done through the solar plexus chakra, which is located in the upper abdomen, just above the belly button. If you are experiencing some discomfort there due to emotional turmoil, this will have implications for how efficiently the chakra will be able to assimilate the chi in food. If you regularly eat heavy or dull foods that clog up the digestive tract, the chakra itself will get congested or obstructed and your chi absorption will be compromised.

While comfort foods, such as ice cream or pasta, may help you feel more grounded — or feel more “full” emotionally if you are feeling empty or lonely — they are also usually heavy and promote a clogging of chi. Sometimes, we overeat because we intuitively believe that more food will provide more fuel and therefore more energy. But overeating often has an opposite result: weighing down the person, clogging the system, and promoting lethargy and inertia.

The bottom line is that it is possible to be sensitive to the flow of chi in the body and to sense when it is being compromised; whether by the food we ingest, or how and where we eat it. One way to do this is to pause before a meal and to create calm conditions while the meal is progressing.

² *All living beings have an energy field surrounding them, which is labelled here as the vital body. The quality and texture of this vital sheath depends on a person's health, their robustness, and their general vigour.*

THE CHI IN RESTAURANTS

The food provided in a restaurant is permeated by the vital energies projected into it by the cooking staff, and by the general atmosphere of the establishment. When you ingest food, subtle changes happen in your aura, and how effectively you absorb the energy (chi) within the food will reflect how much you resonate with the ambiance of a restaurant and how comfortable you feel there.

I am often sensitive to the subtle energy projected by the servers. They will deposit their positive or negative energy into the food. When they bring a menu, take your order, address any needs you have, and bring a meal, they will leave energetic residues on everything they handle and around their vicinity as well. These residues will have an impact on your vital body and the way it absorbs the subtle energy of food.

An amiable waiter will generally inject much chi and positive emotional energy into the food simply by handling the dishes and cutlery. It is amazing to see this process. There are literally currents of energy running from their hands into the food. They do it unconsciously. The food is actually much more charged as a result.

In contrast, a tired or lethargic waiter will draw some of the chi out of the food, and will leave a mass of stagnant vibrations, known in feng shui practise as ‘si chi’. A very upset or irritable waiter will not only withdraw chi, but will inject everything they touch with nervous energy, called ‘sha chi’. This represents “food poisoning” on a different level than what is commonly understood regarding this term.

The cook's vibration is a particularly important element related to the energy of food. A vegan restaurant I frequented before it became mainstream was located at the end of an alley, wedged between two buildings. The ambience was not terrific; it had a kind of punk-grunge feel to it. However, the cook was amazing. When he took brief breaks he played the Pan Flute, he often smoked marijuana, and he had a wonderfully sweet disposition. He put much care and love into his food, which was brimming with chi. People would wait in line for long periods because they loved the food.

Contrast this energy with that of temperamental chefs who terrorize their

kitchen staff; or cooks that have a grudge with management; or those that put their own coarse vibrations into the food at a greasy diner. In all these cases, the food is permeated with their negative chi. When you ingest their food, you also internalize these vibrations, which have an impact on your vital body.

It is difficult to say what that impact will be. It may result in feelings of lethargy or anger that seem to arise right after the meal for no apparent reason. If you are feeling depressed or worried for the rest of the evening, it may have something to do with such unwanted elements in the food. Or you may simply feel enervated by the food, and tired enough to want to go to bed early.

In fact, sometimes when you get an upset stomach after eating at a restaurant it may not simply be an issue with the type or quality of the food, but the subtle vibrations injected into it by the kitchen staff. Any food that is manipulated by hand is susceptible to this type of vibrational transference. I sometimes used to leave a restaurant wondering why the meal did not agree with me. I now know that my solar plexus chakra was literally churning trying to deal with the negative energies permeating the food.

I have become quite adept at putting my

hand just above the chakra and drawing out the offending energy. I also do the same with negatively charged food just before I eat it, or I charge it with chi if I feel it needs it.

Finally, restaurants have various levels of chi depending on the type of food they serve, their atmosphere, and the dispositions of their staff. The most chi-full establishment I have frequented was a vegetarian restaurant run by the Sri Chinmoy spiritual group. The vegan restaurant I patronize likewise has a wonderful effervescence about it. I feel charged just by walking in there.

The most inimical vibrations I have witnessed were at a steak and ribs restaurant, where the air was permeated by a brown fog. The chi was literally choked from the atmosphere. Restaurants such as greasy diners and steakhouses are pervaded by si chi or stagnant vibrations. At the opposite extreme, most fast food restaurants are chi-compromised, since this subtle energy doesn't have a chance to settle and the food itself is largely devoid of vital elements. The bright artificial lighting also promotes sha chi, or overcharged energy, that burns out the vital body.



Taiji Quan Utopia

BY FRED BEHAR

Utopia is a striving towards an objective that is beyond reality. It is the vision of an ideal which bypasses reality and therefore might seem unattainable. A utopian, or 'utopianizer', is someone looking for an ideal that is seemingly inaccessible. Taiji Quan, as described in the Classics, is a utopian practise.

This can be explained by the fact that Taiji is more philosophical than martial, at least as this word is generally understood. It is martial in the sense that it fights our unconscious side, our dark, instinctive, emotional side, and this with the tacit aim of allowing our conscious, bright, reasoning, reflective side to prevail. In this way, it is an internal martial art (i.e. turned towards our inner self) that is practised together with a partner in a meditative state, close to what some call "the flow".

In the Classics, Taiji Quan is based on Taoist principles, non-action and non-being. As such, it is a philosophical art that reaches into psychology, because it brings about significant changes in our outlook on life, as well as in our behaviour and personality.

Mastery of this art remains beyond the ability of ordinary people, because it is actually based on non-knowledge, the innate knowledge we all have at birth before we experience anything. Taiji teaches us to unlearn; it attempts to bring us back to a state of mental vacuum similar to that of a newborn.

It is a practise during which we discover, learn and act in the present moment. We are in the present moment, when comparison and the predefined do not exist, when the emerging movement remains new, pure and unique.

It is a utopian practise because our consumerist society, which exploits the instinctive side of our brain and our self-centredness, is the antithesis of the Taoist philosophy at the core of Taiji Quan.

Unfortunately, Taiji as it is practised today, reflects our society. Indeed, by giving pride of place to the movements, which are performed through muscle contraction and against an opponent, it strengthens our instincts and our ego. By contrast, Taiji Quan as described in the

Classics leads to humility and the dissolution of the ego through the practise of non-action.

Let's note in passing that, according to a survey, 90% of the population consider themselves to be 'above average'. By considering themselves superior without even having a reference point, those 90% can be regarded as self-centred people governed by their instincts.

It may be utopian to want to change society, as it is utopian to want to reinstate the practise of Taiji Quan as described in the Classics, because this Taiji does not enhance the ego. Quite the contrary, it aims to change our worldview by making us leave aside our dark side, our instincts and our self-centredness, in order to lead us towards our bright side, a spiritual awakening, where our advanced cognitive functions regain control of our life. (Let us not forget that the subconscious mind dominates 95% of our lives.)

Through the practise and "mastery" of this Taiji, one realises the futility of violence and strength, because the more strength the opponent uses, the stronger the response will be. It is the action of the opponent that causes their defeat, so the opponent ends up being afraid to attack. It is the victory of non-violence over aggressiveness. If the majority of people reacted in this way through life, one would witness a change in mentality and a decrease in violence. It would be the victory of man's advanced faculties over instinctive primary functions; it would prove the superiority of reasoning over raw force.

One could draw a parallel between this practise and the law of Karma, where bad deeds boomerang. This leads to moral life principles, to another way of thinking, which could be summed up thus: "Don't do unto others what you don't want done unto you" and "Your freedom stops where that of others begin."

If those principles were put in practise, as it is said in the Tao Te Ching, the world would be a paradise, the law would be in our hearts, all things would be in harmony. The world would transform itself, people would be happy in their daily lives, they would live in harmony and be free from desire.

However, even the mere thought of such a world is out of reach for 90% of the population, because they cannot conceive of a world different from theirs.

Self-centredness is characterised by a tendency to look at everything from one's own perspective. Self-centred people focus mainly on their own interests, think their opinion is the only valuable and valid one, and see themselves as a model to be liked and followed. Self-centred people want to believe that they are the masters of their destiny and of their Taiji, and so they have altered the practise to make it accessible, so much so that it has lost its soul and its principles.

Unfortunately, both our world and Taiji as it is practised today are dominated by primal instincts. Today, violence only meets violence, ensuring its perpetuation. Primal instincts breed violence in an endless cycle.

As long as Taiji is in the hands of self-centred people governed by their instincts, it will not be able to return to its original purpose, which would require us to pursue the path of our evolution, the one that would lead us to wisdom.

It is through evolution that we emerged from an animal state to a human one. It is evolution that shaped our cognitive functions, turning us

into conscious beings capable of reasoning.

But, not unlike a Taoist sage who wants to plant the seeds of doubt in those who believe that they know, although I myself do not have the ultimate truth, I would like to get some people to start doubting. Unfortunately, most people will be blinded by their self-centredness, unable to glimpse any other truth than the one they have, simply because they would have to question themselves and are unable to do so.

I would like to be inspired by Taoism, but maybe I am just a utopian, aspiring to an ideal practise as described in the Taiji Quan Classics, far from the constraints created by our instincts. Or I might be a utopian simply because I have faith in human intelligence and I believe that the current trend can be reversed.

If that is the case, then I am indeed a Taoist and a utopian, because I do have faith in human intelligence and hope to guide people towards a reasoned and mindful practise, away from the current practise where force and voluntary movement are the rule, and which for that reason is the direct opposite of the principles enshrined in the Taiji Quan Classics.

Fred Behar began his martial art studies in 1975. He has been studying Taiji since 1985 and teaching it since 1991. He practises the Taiji style of Yang Jian Hon, as well as "The Way of Non-Force" in push hands, which follows the principles advocated by the Taiji Classics.

"Taiji Quan and Tao" is a Facebook public group open to all practitioners wishing to explore the links between Taiji Quan and Taoism.



Teaching in South Wales

BY DAN O'GRADY

I teach Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan in the South East region of Wales. I have been practising tai chi for 11 years. Prior to this I did learn some Shingitai Aikido but that was over 25 years ago and so there is little to tell on that score. I have had a long-term interest in Daoist philosophy and so was well aware of the health benefits of practising tai chi. Following a trip to China and being impressed by the number of people participating in all sorts of moving exercises, I thought it time to find out more about this art.

In 2009 I joined a Wudang class. The Sifu provided a rounded and grounded experience, incorporating the chuan, chi gung, pushhands and applications in almost every session. This proved to be a valuable beginning to my training. After 4 years I felt the need to develop in a new direction by taking that oft quote adage “one learns through teaching”, seriously.

By coincidence (or synchronicity or whatever) I discovered that Sifu Dr. Mark Langweiler was running a college-based course aimed specifically at teaching tai chi chuan. A fellow student, Laurence, made the jump from the Wudang class at the same time. An immediate challenge was that of making the transition between tai chi styles i.e. Wudang to Wu. I had to learn to make smaller movements which, at first felt strange but very soon became natural.

Laurence and I were prepared for and were certified to teach Wu style tai chi chuan at beginner's level. This happened in August 2015 at the Archway Wu Academy in London. The accreditation, provided by Grandmaster Wu Kwong Yu, took place on the hottest day of that year and the requirements were exacting (as they should be if one is responsible for teaching others). I also received helpful feedback for further development.

Both Laurence and I continued to attend Sifu Mark's classes and teaching the sessions when he was unable to be there. We discovered that we had a different approach to the teaching role. Laurence will take a class if I am not available, but he doesn't relish teaching. I, on the other hand, love teaching. Before retiring from work,

my job was concerned with overseeing the development of social work students in practise based settings. In both the work and martial art settings I get a real pleasure from seeing people develop. When one sees a student working hard on the refinement of the form or asking question that they have obviously given a lot of thought to, therein lies the reward for me.

Whilst continuing in Sifu Mark's class, Laurence and I decided it would be good to have a class closer to home; home being Ferndale in the Welsh Valleys. This is not to be confused with the Wu Style Academy in Ferndale, Michigan U.S.A. The choice of venue was not difficult because in Ferndale there is a nice, refurbished Chapel that is owned by a male voice choir. It is far more airy and warm than some of the practise halls that I have had the pleasure of learning in. The next thing to consider was recruitment. Our first promotional talk, at the local Women's Institute, was an unlikely setting for gathering students for martial art training. So we turned up with a power point presentation and crib notes. We delivered our spiel and received a surprisingly positive response from the group. So, although people from other walks of life have subsequently joined the group the original W.I. influence means that the class does stop for a halfway break of tea and more often than not home baked cakes. This venture began in March 2017.

Matters ticked over nicely for some time but as we all know, “the only constant in the universe is change”. Mark, our Sifu, for reasons not connected to tai chi, upped and moved to London. It was something of a blow to lose that weekly teaching, but I determined to keep what Mark had developed going. I inherited his class and Laurence co-taught with me in Ferndale. I was also asked to take over a class based in a Gym in Merthyr. Life became quite busy. Then Covid arrived and life became very much less busy.

When it was apparent that the virus was spreading, I stopped classes even before we were required to. Initially, I made some short clips on the form and chi gung for students to pick up from Whatsapp and the Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan

South Wales Facebook page. As time dragged on, inertia set in and I did less than I would have liked for the students. One positive spinoff from the Corona chaos is that online learning has taken off in a real (and I suspect continuing) way. I am now receiving individual training again from Sifu Mark, which in turn will benefit the students when we are able to meet freely again. This is where I am today. This is a brief resume of an 11-year journey. The questions that arise are, what have I learned so far, what do I need to learn and what is the future for Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan in the South East area of Wales?

There is the obvious learning one might expect in a tai chi environment i.e. the form in various incarnations the 108, the round 54, push hands, applications and a bit of chin na and so on. There is however learning that is specific to the individual. You and I may be being taught by the same Sifu but what we take in and how we respond is likely to be different.

In the course of my journey, I have met the Grandmaster Wu Kwong Yu, 5th generation gatekeeper of Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan, on 2 occasions, as well as a number of his senior disciples. The depth of teaching encountered has convinced me that Wu Style Tai Chi is the one for me and that I will not need to go looking elsewhere for instruction.

Conversely by being trained as a competition judge I have come to respect the value inherent in different styles of tai chi. The main styles have common foundations and the principles of the tai chi classics are evident in them. Mind you, I have seen some pretty wild stuff billed as tai chi as well. When that happens, I take the advice of Grandmaster Wu to heart "Just smile and walk away".

I have learned not to try to be clever as a teacher. If I don't know something, I tell the class so and I try to find out for them. I believe it is helpful for students to realize that the teacher is a student too. If I make a mistake and the

class laughs, I laugh as well. People learn if they are enjoying themselves. Leave your ego at the training hall door.

It has become apparent that there is no end to the depth of the chuan, the sabre, the sword, and so on. When the structure is learned then refinement begins and continues for a lifetime. Whilst this may feel somewhat overwhelming for someone new to tai chi, I take comfort in the fact that there is always more to learn.

In learning the form, we are all different and have our own strengths and weaknesses. I believe that I am reflective and can work diligently on developing and refining skills. I am convinced however that I have invisible elastic bands connecting my shoulders to my ears. Keeping my shoulders relaxed is a challenge. It's fine on stuff I am familiar with but when Sifu Mark is teaching me something new or refining something I am familiar with I hear "oh and while you are doing that, drop the shoulders". I think that is helpful to be honest with ourselves as to what we do well and what we need to spend more time on.

The focus for future learning for me is to refine the Chuan. The next goal is to reach a level of competence to teach at intermediate level.

To say that Covid has interfered with the development of classes in South Wales is a complete understatement. This I am sure is true across the globe. As things stand the Ferndale hall has systems in place and has been approved for Tai chi to re-start. The downside to this is that the social distancing measures mean that only 5 students can safely train there. When some semblance of normality returns the plan initially is to keep the classes in one venue and to build numbers in that setting. Although classes have taken place infrequently, the contact I do have with students reassures me that we will be up and running as soon as is practical: the commitment is there.



An Insight into Internal Arts Through Autism

BY NICKY FAWCITT

Within Tai Chi, Bagua and Xingyi Quan there are many different styles. Reacting and responding to how the movements make you feel, following your own direction and rhythm can be very similar to listening to music and tapping out a beat or a groove. But in martial arts your body responds to your own internal rhythm. In autism and other associated sensory conditions, I sometimes struggle to make a connection through communication and giving what is deemed as a correct response to individuals.

This can be so frustrating and can be soul destroying leaving me feeling frustrated, angry, lost, isolated and disconnected. However, through the beautiful form of Tai Chi and the twirling waves of Bagua's song it all becomes so clear and unblocks my pathways and channels. I have always been autistic and my brain functions differently especially in social situations and communication. The movement allows me to completely let go of the constant missed signals to my brain. I do not know what it is to be a non-autistic entity. It does not mean that I am slow or stupid, it just means that I communicate in a different way to others. So when I am performing the form, whether it is Tai Chi, Bagua or Xingyi Quan, my internal pathways clear and relax and let go.

My mind, body and spirit unfold quickly and softly, or slow and graceful like weaving an untold web or a rainbow of dance, groove and rhythm. No matter what size I am or what injury my body has, I become unbroken, unhinged like a butterfly through a world of cosmos and unimaginable grace. Different environments also contribute massively to my mind's connection to my body and spirit. If it is stormy and gusty, my movements are fast and precise, unpreserved and practised, flowing like clear running water into a stream, river or ocean. Riding and surfing the powerful waves of an unchained melody of sequences and movements. The soft graceful flowing touch of Yang Cheng Fu's Yang style Tai Chi, its raw step by step integrated movements



of beauty or Wang Shujin's smooth elegant whirlwind dance of Bagua Linked Palms enables me to strip away my stress, anxiety, anger, worry and isolation. I become focused, determined and centred, separated from any autistic frustration and disconnection.

After attending a social event and experienced lots social interaction I often feel tired and drained. When I went to Hong Kong last year with Ashley James Cheeseman, friend and Sifu, along and other friends from our Tai Chi school, we would go out during the day full of adventure and thought. Then in the evening most people would want to go out for a meal and explore the beautiful night sights of Hong Kong. I spent several evenings in my hotel room resting away from others. Not because of I wanted to be away from my friends but because of the sensory overload of the humidity and heat of Hong Kong. As well as the massive journey I made from the United Kingdom to a such an amazing city that touched my heart in more ways I could ever explain. It opened my autistic

mind even further to create Tai Chi Simplicity and develop my teachings of the internal arts and Qigong to people who have learning and physical disabilities, sensory associated conditions, mental health problems, dementia and autism. To be able to build a bridge between two worlds. To give people the knowledge and opportunity to learn something new, magical, ancient and wonderful. To bring the internal arts and autism, disability, mental health, dementia, sensory associated conditions into an equal world of kindness and wonder. Some my friends and students would often say to me I did not know that you were autistic and many people would say it only affects you very mildly. My reply would be that is because I have worked so hard for my autism to only affect me mildly. But that is what it appears to be on the outside. On the inside my brain can go into overdrive, especially in social events. And I often do not give the correct social responses. This may seem like I am being rude or uninterested, but this is not the case. my brain functions very different to others. I am often trapped in a mind bubble of isolation and awkwardness due to my poor response to social and intimate situations. Through Tai Chi meditation and relaxation, I am able to invoke a relaxed reaction through stillness, mindfulness and physical movement to prevent me from being overloaded with a sensory emotional and environmental response.

When I went on a day trip to Lantau Island I remember feeling so drained and tired due to the heat, sensory overload and social discomfort but I was driven on by wonder, adventure and



support from my friends. Being surrounded by the iconic beautiful mountains and views of the old buildings and magical ways of life, my travels took me up to Po Lin, the world's tallest Buddha statue. If I wanted to get closer and join my friends at the top I would need to climb two hundred and sixty eight steps in extremely hot and humid conditions. This was then in my mind I started to build the bridges of two worlds coming together. I managed to get to the top of Po Lin and saw such a wonderful, beautiful touching site. I stood by three smaller Buddha statues and looked out across the mountain peaks and I thought to myself 'my chains are unbroken and an autistic mind in Hong Kong is seeing the world differently'. A place what had touched my heart and made me understand so many things including my connection with the internal arts and qigong. Ashley stood next to me like a teacher would his pupil and he said as a friend 'I am so proud of you and the journey you have lead and what you have become and for what you are about to do'. That moment I felt whole, proud and complete. My friend, Richard, has also stayed and supported me along my hard, long journey never once doubting my teachings. Forever loyal, both men and friends gave me hope in being accepted by society as an autistic internal martial arts instructor and able to accept by myself as more than an autistic entity but as a teacher, friend, student and most importantly as Nicky.

Sheng Zhen - Open Heart

BY RACHEL DAVIES

The recent Deyin Taijiquan Institute's Easter festival was delivered online due to the COVID-19 restrictions. As part of the line-up of seminars, the Institute welcomed very special guests, Grandmaster Li Junfeng and Master Li Jing. Who joined the festival live from America to deliver an introductory workshop on Sheng Zhen meditation, a practise developed by Grandmaster Li. Sheng Zhen can be translated as 'Unconditional Love' or 'Open Heart', this principle is at the core of each of the Sheng Zhen meditation practises, all developed to cultivate a positive state of wellbeing.

Grandmaster Li is well known in Wushu circles, achieving international fame as the coach of the Beijing Wushu team, where he coached Jet Li amongst other top athletes. He has also featured in films as an actor and action director, in addition to writing numerous popular Wushu books. With an interest in meditation, he diligently studied with spiritual masters who taught him the Union of Three Hearts method. Based on his experience, diligent study, and practise, Grandmaster Li developed Sheng Zhen. He has conducted workshops all over the world to share his meditation practise and has developed various resources on Sheng Zhen.

Assisted during the Easter festival workshop by his daughter Li Jing, who, in addition to her Wushu accomplishments, has academically focused on Chinese cultural knowledge of the heart during her doctoral study. Her research is deeply embedded in the development of Sheng Zhen mediation.

Giving participants a comprehensive taste of his mediation system during the workshop, Grandmaster Li introduced a series of standing and seated Sheng Zhen moving meditations. Each movement, carefully designed to soften the body, was demonstrated and displayed, with participants able to take part. The softness and grace of the movements was very calming, and each set was very relaxing due to rhythmic practise and vocal cues from both teachers. It was a very unique and special workshop for the online Easter festival, which is available for all to view, as the whole festival was live streamed on YouTube.

In addition to welcoming Grandmaster Li, the Deyin Online Festival featured workshops by Master Lai Jian Hua of the Shanghai Sports University, Sam Ma Tai Chi Instructor and TCM Acupuncturist and Master Tary Yip founder and chief instructor of the Deyin Taijiquan Institute (GB).



Tai Yi Tai Chi Chuan

FROM BEHIND A CLOSED DOOR

BY SHIFU WANG YUNKUO AND BRIAN CORLESS



Tai Yi Tai Chi Chuan: A snapshot of its history as a closed-door style.

In a conversation with Wang Yunkuo in Sydney a few years ago, Mr Gao Xiaojun, former President of the Chinese Wushu Association estimated that there were about 80 styles of Kungfu, including rare styles of Tai Chi Chuan, which were unknown to the broader Kungfu community and that a number of these had been lost to China in the diaspora before, during and after the cultural revolution.

One such style, Tai Yi Tai Chi Chuan, is practised by Master Wang Yunkuo at his Kungfu-Republic school and Traditional Chinese Medicine clinic in Sydney, Australia. Shifu Wang learned this style as a young closed-door student in his hometown in Shandong province and brought it to Australia when he emigrated in 1997. Shifu Wang said that he learned from his teacher Grandmaster Shifu Duan Yang, who was a closed-door student of Duan's father, a Kungfu Grandmaster and Doctor of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Wendeng district of Shandong province.

According to the oral history of the style, as passed down to Shifu Wang, Duan Yang's father

was on his way home from work one day and saw a Taoist monk who was ill in the street. He took the monk home with him, nursed him back to health and in return the monk chose to pass on the tradition of Tai Yi Tai Chi Chuan to him on the condition that he only taught this martial art to one closed-door student, as had been the tradition for over 30 generations of this style. The father, in turn chose his son, Duan Yang as the student to pass on the secrets of Tai Yi Tai Chi Chuan and he, in turn selected a young Wang Yunkuo as the next generational lineage-holder because of Wang's skills and commitment to Kungfu.

Wang Yunkuo began his journey in Kungfu at age 6 under the tutelage of his grandfather, a renowned Kungfu master who played "painted face" characters (using his Kungfu prowess) in a Chinese Opera troupe. A young, energetic Wang soon developed a passion and talent for Kungfu, and at around 11 years of age his grandfather introduced him to one of his closest friends and Kungfu brother, Shifu Duan Yang, and thus began Wang Yunkuo's journey in Tai Chi Chuan.

Shifu Wang recalls "Shifu Duan Yang taught me a completely different approach to practise, and his actions sometimes seemed as soft as cotton in spring and sometimes like a hammer hitting a rock. His movements were tough and extremely fast, like lightning". He adds, "When we trained at night in the moonlight, Master would wear a white cotton gown, and he took on the aura in his boxing, like seeing the gods of the ancient stories descend to earth, which for a youngster like me, was truly amazing."

In traditional Kungfu culture, being a closed-door student can have two meanings. One meaning is that when this student is selected, the door of that lineage is closed to anyone else and that student becomes the generational lineage-holder into the future. A second, more obvious meaning, is that the student is taught behind closed doors and out of sight of others. Both meanings applied to Wang's tuition in Tai Yi Tai Chi Chuan and his lessons took place every night behind closed doors as Duan Yang wanted to



protect the secret of this art from others. Shifu Wang was told not to perform this martial art in public or show it to anyone else, including his Kungfu training brothers, until he was at least 50 years old, and after turning 50 he began teaching Tai Yi Tai Chi Chuan to students in his school in Sydney. As there is no single student to carry on the tradition in his school, Shifu Wang, now 60 years old, does not want his style lost to antiquity and has opened up his teaching to the broader Tai Chi community.

Wang Yunkuo is also a 6th generational lineage-holder of Seven Star Praying Mantis from Shifu Chen Dejing (陈德敬师父螳螂拳), the 5th generational teacher, and from Laoshi Liuxue Hai (螳螂拳师爷名叫刘学海) the 4th generational teacher of this famous Shandong style. Shifu Wang remembers Shifu Duan Yang as a highly skilled martial artist who also excelled at Praying Mantis Kungfu and Changquan and even when he was over 70 years of age he could still train in Tai Chi Ball using a 15kg ball.

Shifu Wang clearly recalls seeing an incident where one of his older Kungfu training brothers secretly arranged for an Eagle-style Kungfu master to challenge Shifu Duan Yang to test Shifu's skills. Duan Yang learned of this and was angry that the brother had arranged this test behind his back, and agreed to meet the challenger, but before the challenger could lay

a hand on him, Duan Yang grabbed him in the abdomen, near his liver, and the challenger fell to the ground vomiting. Shifu Duan Yang revived the challenger by having him "drink a mixture of cigarette ash and water" and the challenger was amazingly revived and left.

Afterwards Duan Yang was still very angry with the training brother and said to him: "If you want to know my abilities, I'll teach you right now". With that, he placed his hand over the brother's scalp, as if gently grabbing the rim of his head with his fingers and applied what seemed like only a little downward pressure for a few seconds, and then told the brother to go and not come back. Shifu Wang saw the training brother the next day and could see that the brother's neck and spinal area was severely bruised and discoloured from his Shifu's touch. Duan Yang agreed to help treat the injuries but would not take the brother back as a student again. To this day, Shifu Wang, who has trained in both Western and Eastern medicine, does not understand, nor can he explain the power of what he saw, nor how a touch on the scalp left such visible bruising on the brother's neck and spine. Shifu Wang said that at the time, he was too scared to ask his Shifu how he did this, for fear of also making him angry.

Of course, this style was not always known as Tai Yi Tai Chi Chuan, and even the term Tai Chi Chuan is relatively recent in Kungfu nomenclature. According to its oral history, the traditional name of Shifu Wang's style was Huà Yuán (画圆) or in English, "drawing a circle" because of its focus on the internal cultivation and expression of qi according to Taoist principles. An example of this is in the opening movement of the Tai Yi Tai Chi Chuan form where the focus is on qi sinking in the dantian and the separation of qi into yin-yang components allowing "rising energy" to move towards the crown of the head and "falling energy" to move towards the feet, with the spinal column (阴阳柱) experiencing qi as if drawing a "bowed instrument".

Shifu Duan Yang identified this style as a form of Tai Chi Chuan after seeing a performance of another (government-approved) style of Tai Chi Chuan and by identifying the principles and tenets of both as being the same. More recently, Professor Jiang Bailong of Wuhan Sports University, an eminent figure in Chinese martial arts, observed Shifu Wang's performance of Tai Yi Tai Chi Chuan and complimented him on his high level of Tai Chi Chuan skills.

Shifu Wang says "...my master told me that



this style was taught over 30 generations and that there was only one student chosen each generation to carry on this style in secret.” However, much of its history is lost in the oral tradition of closed-door teaching and from his recollections of conversations with his Shifu and from his own research, Shifu Wang believes that this style has its ancestry in the Taoist tradition from writings in the I-Ching (易經), Yin-Yang (陰陽) theory, Bagua (八卦), Wu Xing (五行), Hetu (河圖) and Luoshu (洛書) charts. Interestingly, Shifu Wang says “I can tell you 100% though, that my master told me that his style of Tai Chi Chuan did not originate from the Chinese government recognised styles such as Chen, Yang, Wu, Sun or others”, which suggests a separate, parallel history to the other more common styles of Tai Chi Chuan that we see today.

Tai Yi Tai Chi Ball: Training for martial arts and better health.

An important part of training in Tai Yi Tai Chi Chuan is the use of a ball which has also been a traditional training method in other Chinese martial arts throughout history. As part of the Taoist tradition, and originally known as “揉圓功”, “團圓功”, “揉球功” (English transl. ‘rub or kneading circle work’ or ‘rub ball work’), these Tai Chi Ball exercises became popular training drills for Tai Chi Chuan and were often taught in secret to advanced level students who had attained a high degree of competency. This high-level training also applies to other Kungfu skills and when added to other Tai Chi Chuan training exercises such as Tui Shou, Sanda (Sanshou) and Chin Na drills, yields excellent results.

Shifu Wang says that Tai Yi Tai Chi Ball exercises and forms are based on ancient Chinese philosophy and Yin-Yang (陰陽) theory, where “...holding a ball in both hands and using the

waist as hub, while tracing the steps of the Bagua (八卦) reflects the ancient Chinese concepts of holding the universe in your hands”.

According to oral history, Tai Yi Tai Chi Ball exercises are said to have developed in China in the Song dynasty (960-1279) by Taoist monks who practised techniques to promote longevity and better health. Shifu Duan Yang was a skilled practitioner of Tai Chi Ball and made it an integral part of his Tai Chi Chuan training. Shifu Wang recalls seeing a 30kg metal ball in his Shifu’s home which his

Shifu used for training when he was younger. As he aged, Duan Yang continued to train in Tai Chi Ball into his eighties using a lighter clay or pig’s bladder ball filled with soybeans which was easier and less strenuous for him.

In traditional Taoist Tai Chi Ball training there are two main types of training methods: yin and yang training. In Tai Chi Ball practise, yin training uses a light ball with slow movements, whereas yang methods use a heavier ball with fast movements using force, including throwing and catching the ball. In ancient times, male practitioners of Tai Chi ball mainly used yang training methods involving applications of force, whereas female practitioners used yin training methods often with an inflated pig’s bladder which was tied at each end and allowed slow soft movements with the ‘ball’, that required more use of the dantian. Male practitioners traditionally used a clay ball that was hollow and often filled with soybeans to add weight and enhance force





generation. Often the soybeans would fall out of the ball onto the floor which made training more difficult as students needed to have a lower posture, stronger legs and upper body and better grip to train on the slippery floor, thus enhancing their skills. Other training balls have included metal, stone and wooden balls.

In history, Tai Chi Ball training was a more advanced training method for advanced students who already knew the Tai Chi Chuan forms and were ready to have a deeper level of understanding of *qi* and its applications in the training forms. For the Tai Chi Chuan enthusiast, Tai Chi Ball techniques are valuable in deepening an understanding of *qi* and applying the eight methods of Tai Chi Chuan, viz.: *pěng, lǚ, jǐ, àn, cǎi, liè, zhōu, and kào*. Shifu Wang says that Tai Yi Tai Chi Ball exercises are also for self-defence and martial arts applications, "...they are not just to make the body stronger and develop *qi*, but to develop techniques for self-defence applications". For example, "...the way that you hold a Tai Chi Ball in the hands should be the way that you hold your hands and body when dealing with an attacking opponent". It is a technique for fighting, not just for better health. Shifu Wang is proficient in Chin Na, having been a self-defence instructor in the Chinese Army for 10 years, and says that Tai Chi Ball is a great training exercise for Chin Na techniques.

Nowadays, anyone can learn Tai Chi Ball and there are many good demonstrations that you can see, but according to Shifu Wang, many people want to learn Tai Chi Chuan quickly without understanding the deeper level of knowledge of Tai Chi Ball training. For them, Tai Chi Ball

training may be difficult, and it is important to learn and be competent with the basic foundation exercises of Tai Chi Ball with a suitable size and weight of ball.

Shifu Wang says that in order to practise Tai Yi Tai Chi Ball, the style that he teaches, it is important to choose the right ball for you so that you engage internal energy (*qi*) and not rely on muscle strength alone. A ball that is too large in diameter and/or weight can cause injury and a ball that is too small will not provide a sufficient training effect. For the young, physically active exerciser a ball weighing between about 3kg (7lbs) and 10kg (22lbs) with a diameter of about 30cm (12in) (range: 28 to 32cm) is suitable. The beginner can choose a lighter ball to get used to the exercises and learn the first Tai Chi Ball form.

The size of the ball can also be determined by measuring the approximate distance between the Lower Dantien and Tangzhong acupoint so that the ball is neither too small nor too large to rotate. As a rough guide, Shifu Wang recommends that serious practise of Tai Yi Tai Chi Ball needs to happen for a minimum of six times per week beginning with about 36 to 60 repetitions of each stationery foundation exercise. He says "...when you begin to introduce footwork into your Tai Yi Tai Chi Ball practise, take nine steps back and forth initially adding an extra step after each 2 weeks of practise." Practising the Tai Yi Tai Chi Ball Form can be repeated as often as needed to complement your Tai Chi Chuan practise. Shifu says, "...in my style, my master told me that the Tai Yi Tai Chi Ball Forms must follow the principles and movements of the Tai Yi Tai Chi



Chuan Forms so that each training complements the other.”

As well as its martial arts applications, Tai Yi Tai Chi Ball exercises and forms have several health benefits for practitioners of all ages and levels. One benefit is described as “ten fingers linking the heart and mind to muscles and strength”. Regular practise of Tai Chi Ball requires the hands and fingers to control the ball as the ball rotates. This requires flexibility and strength in the tendons, muscles and joints of the fingers and hands to coordinate the fine motor movements required to move the ball with the body. There are over 100 acupuncture points in the hands and rotating the ball in the hands in Tai Yi Tai Chi Ball exercises provides a means of massaging these acupuncture points and enhancing the flow of qi in meridians.

Training also requires good upper and lower body posture and the coordination of force directed from the feet through the knees, hips, waist, and spreading to the shoulders, elbows, hands and fingers to rotate the ball for a whole-body exercise. By following the circular movements of the ball, the muscles, tendons, joints and bones work in a curved, spiralling direction in the body. Through regular practise and by gradually increasing the weight of the ball, increased muscle strength, joint stability and flexibility will follow. Careful practise of Tai Chi

Ball with an appropriate weight is required to prevent injury to ligaments, muscles, joints and bones.

Secondly, another benefit that he describes is “*harmonizing the inner organs*.” This is an effective training method that involves all of the body’s physiological systems, and in particular the respiratory, cardiovascular, endocrine, nervous and skeletal systems. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, rotating the Tai Chi Ball in the hands while breathing naturally and following the Taoist principles of yin-yang theory and meridian qi flow will allow the five internal organs to have great vitality and longevity. In western medicine terms Tai Chi Ball enhances cardiovascular and cardiorespiratory function by strengthening the heart, blood vessel and lung function and in the interactions between the cardiac, respiratory, hepatic and nervous systems. Through improved blood flow, Tai Chi Ball exercises also improves liver function, muscle, joint and ligament function, and in conjunction with improved endocrine functioning, also aids the immune system responses. Other organs to gain benefit from Tai Chi Ball exercises include the spleen, kidneys, stomach and digestive system, and the reproductive organs which makes it a complete exercise package for all.

***Shifu Wang Yunkuo is a Doctor of Traditional Chinese Medicine who trained and worked in hospitals in China before emigrating to Australia where he runs the Kungfu Republic Academy and Live Well TCM Clinic in Sydney. Apart from his high-level of Kungfu and Tai Chi skills, Shifu Wang is proficient in Chin Na, Hanging Baskets, Iron Palms, Iron Arms, Duck Rings and a range of Kungfu weapons. Brian Corless is a Clinical Psychologist and student of Shifu Wang.*

Shifu Wang has published a Manual and DVD on Tai Yi Tai Chi Ball Foundation Movements and Form #1.

*For more information about Tai Yi Tai Chi Chuan and Tai Chi Ball, and obtaining a copy of his book/DVD, email Shifu Wang at enquiry@kungfu-republic.com.au and/or have a look at his website at:
<https://www.kungfu-republic.com.au/>*

Learning to Love the Plateau

BY PATRICK FOLEY

Most of us know that the path to true skill comes not just from attending many classes, or reading many books, but from practising what you have learnt. Taijiquan, first and foremost, is the Art of Doing; and it is often a challenge all in itself to maintain a focused practise regime, let alone having to deal with the dreaded 'plateau' where, despite all your efforts, no progress is apparent. Overcoming and actually learning to enjoy this period of apparent stagnation is critical to making progress.

Hand on heart - have we not all experienced that time during our study and practise of a complex task, when you just want to give up in frustration? That elusive technique or quality of feeling just remains, well, elusive - seemingly unachievable. You are totally aware that effort is required to make a breakthrough, but making that effort just doesn't seem to be worth the effort. And of course, there's always a good reason for it too. In today's world, many of us are conditioned not to acknowledge any situation that implies stagnancy, loss or failure; there can only be continuous success, or the instant apportioning of blame when we can't have it. There cannot, under any circumstances, be a plateau, where things just...are; and yet, this is truly the way forward for anything that appears insurmountable.



Path of Endless Gratification vs. Path to mastery

So let me set a backdrop to the issue, using a little of my own personal experience. In the summer of 2020, after 3 months of lockdown and the loss of much of our core teaching business, I caught Covid and though I had relatively mild symptoms, the long 'tail' of recovery lasted for perhaps another 2 months. Though I was still helping manage our school

and teaching online during this period, that's all I could manage - I lost all incentive to progress in my own practise. I just couldn't find a valid enough reason to continue with it; my energy was low; my body non-responsive and my thoughts unclear. As the effects of the virus slowly cleared out of my system, I realised there was more to this than met the eye. I was also in this 'holding pattern' because I was not physically connecting up with my Taijiquan community - over this period of lockdown and travel restrictions, I would normally have attended several workshops with my Sifu and practised many hours with my peer group students, not to mention regular interactions with hundreds of our own students. I realised that it was largely this constant feedback loop of personal connection that kept my practise going, and I was not really achieving it on my own.

In a very subtle way, I had truly plateaued, and at first could see no easy way out of it. And that was the problem - I was looking for an easy way out. I was allowing the limitations I felt to hold me back, rather than recognising that they can in fact be the greatest teachers of how to successfully move forward. By changing my perspective of the situation, I realised that I was depending too much on others and not focusing on what I could achieve quite simply on my own. Being isolated from my 'normal' Tai Chi world was actually an opportunity to explore topics and practises I would not normally make time for. Reading books, catching up on notes and watching videos, even just being out in the garden or countryside were all much more available to me. By allowing this additional exploration to take place I was in fact augmenting my 'usual' understanding of things and deepening my skills.

This understanding crystallised after a private Zoom session with my sifu, Sam Masich, which led me to read a very thought-provoking book



Loss of community and peer support can easily cause you to plateau

called “Mastery”, by George Leonard. The main premise of the book is that in order to be on the path of mastery in any discipline, you need 5 ‘keys’ - instruction; practise; surrender; intentionality and the edge.

What I would like to focus on in this article is the ‘key’ of practise, particularly with the view of practising toward mastery. Not all of us want mastery of course; we may be perfectly content to just enjoy the social aspect of our chosen discipline, do our exercises and stay healthy - nothing wrong with that. Some of us want mastery, but expect it to be handed to us on a plate (“surely now that I have done 100 lessons, I am by default a high level practitioner?!”). Mastery means you are making your own path, not always expecting to be rewarded with climax after climax. To actually be satisfied with the fact that sometimes, you just have to keep swimming, and be where you are. You have to learn to love the plateau, and when progress is made, you don’t get bound by it, knowing that a new plateau is just around the corner.

Be grateful for the opportunity to deepen what you already know.

The thing was, I already knew about how to stay on the path to mastery. Many years ago I managed a small manufacturing company making futon bed bases, and probably spent as much time on the shop floor as in the office. The bases were made from 2x1” pine slats that had to be cut to length then sanded, chamfered and end-finished on a high speed router and industrial belt sander. There were around 40 slats to each base, and over 4 or 5 years we must have made many hundreds of these bases. After you had prepared your first 20-30 slats, you basically knew how to do the job - the angle to hold the length of wood; the amount of pressure to use; how to keep your

fingers away from the abrasive high-speed belt. I don’t know how many of those slats I sanded over the years, but I suspect it was many thousands. But here’s the interesting thing; I never really got bored with the job. Yes, I did get very tired, very sore and often quite stressed trying to meet deadlines - but never bored. There was no room for boredom. If you did not pay attention to the job, to each slat, you could easily lose the shape and waste the material, or even worse injure yourself quite badly (ever let go of a piece of wood that’s pressed down on a high-speed belt sander?).

Seeking a consistent finish to each and every repetition was the key - getting just the right uniform chamfer on each edge; rounding off the ends so they blended into the main length; the list goes on. You had to stay present to the work, not ‘gap out’, and that was what made it interesting, sometimes even meditative. After a couple of years of this, I started to be quite pleased with the result; but there was always room for improvement!

Taijiquan and Qigong practise is no different. Much of it is spent on the plateau - just doing the same thing again and again and not feeling like you are being rewarded.

The trick is to start to notice that the reward is in doing that thing again and again and again.

It is an important change of perspective. This is even more the case the longer you have been ‘in the business’. When you have been studying and practising for many years, it is very easy to become a ‘legend in your own mind’. This is quite a natural trap to fall into. All of us to some degree have a need to feel that all our efforts have come to something, and that as a consequence of those efforts we are a more accomplished and empowered human being. Just thinking that we are capable of doing something complex (‘the legend’) does not mean we can actually do it. Ignoring the opportunity to open up and be honest about where we are in our journey tends to leave us on the plateau, often without realising it.

We have to accept change, because if we don’t we can once again plateau in our practise. Our resistance to change and the acceptance that change is often a “2 steps forward, 1 step back” process is rooted in the natural condition of homeostasis. This is the body’s (and society’s) natural instinct to constantly readjust to keep the



Stay present and do not be distracted.

status quo so that no debilitating change occurs. To quote George Leonard, “the problem is that homeostasis works to keep things the way they are, even though they are not very good”. If we want to improve at something, though, we have to change, and this is precisely when homeostasis kicks in and a natural resistance to that change takes place. So what can we do about that?

Here are some of my thoughts on how to make the most of the practise plateau when it next presents itself:

Think about what you want to do, what you need to do, what you actually can do. Visualising your practise is a valid way to create the intent to

practise, and prepare for change. Write it down if it helps clarify your intentions - you then also have a checklist to work with.

- Make time to do it, but don't make time a burden. You don't have to practise for hours at a time, but you do have to practise. Little-and-often is much better than too-much-then-nothing-at-all.
- Create a space that you can be comfortable in, that minimises distractions, and allows you to bring about the changes to your routine that are needed to make progress. Create some routines, like making your favourite tea, to help zone you into the session and anticipate it with pleasure.
- Make changes to your techniques gradual so you don't shock your system into resisting.
- Don't compromise on the details. Stay present to the task you have set yourself and try not to base it on achieving something you know (deep down inside) you are not ready for.
- Whenever possible, take advantage of your community connections to discuss the problems you are having e.g. discussions with like-minded colleagues face-to-face or online.
- Work hard at it with an open heart - don't let your mind return you to complacency and stagnation; effort is not a dirty word.

Above all: Breathe; Stay Calm; Find Centre and the way to connect with your Qi. Let the Taiji process begin, and stay with it; the practise will surely look after itself.

Patrick Foley began his exploration of taijiquan in the late 1980's, after 4 years of judo, jujitsu and karate training. His main focus was on Wu style and Daoist neigong practises, and he started teaching these in 2004, under the name of Longwater Tai Chi. He began his Yang curriculum training with Master Sam Masich in 2010, and was accepted as an indoor student in 2019. He is also a Senior Instructor in the TCUGB.

Meet the Teacher

KEITH ABRAHAM

1. How long have you been practising and what lead you to start?

I've been practising the Internal Arts for seven years now. I started shortly after I left the military, while I was working for an investment bank in London. I was struggling to heal from my combat experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan and felt myself unravelling. I resorted to the Internal Arts almost as a last chance and I'm very glad to say that it paid off.

2. What does tai chi mean to you?

Tai Chi and my other Internal Arts practises provide me with space and time allocated to my own benefit and healing. I am only responsible for my own movements, employing the appropriate principles of breathing...There's no place for me to concern my mind with paying the bills or other external responsibilities. It is a practise for me to focus all my attention on and reap the benefits accordingly. It is also a practise whereby I heal myself from my physical, emotional and psychological traumas and so it is profoundly important to me.

3. What is the most important aspect of the practise for you?

I believe that so long as I employ the appropriate principles and continue practising and progressing, the Art itself will give me whatever I require at that stage of my development. So, I just keep practising... So long as the principles are in place, it's really just important to continue practising.

4. Who or what inspired you? Who inspires you now?

My own trauma and suffering inspired me to start training. I was in a very difficult place and I remain very grateful to these Arts for healing me to the degree they have. Now, I'm inspired to progress in the spiritual aspect of the practise, but I am also inspired by my students and their own healing journeys and experiences. Their hard work and witnessing the benefits they are reaping is incredibly inspiring and rewarding.

5. Do you have any personal goals in tai chi?

I intend to continue my healing journey although I feel I have made significant progress already. More than I could have ever dreamed of, to be honest. In addition to progressing further along the spiritual path, a big goal for me now is to introduce it to my former colleagues in the military and finance industry because I'm aware of just how much many people in those communities could benefit from a practise like Tai Chi.

6. What do you think of tai chi's current popularity?

I believe the Internal Arts as a whole will continue to rise in popularity and I'm excited by that

prospect. I'm wary of it turning into an industrial complex like Yoga seems to have but I believe it is still a net positive and therefore to be supported. There are excellent teachers of these Arts out there and so I believe the knowledge will continue to be retained and shared in a healthy way.

7. Where would you like tai chi to go in the future?

I would like to see schools adapt more of the practises. It's important to introduce these benefits from an early age so we arm our societies with the tools needed to process difficult experiences and emotions in a healthy way and to maintain healthy bodies, too. As I mentioned before, I would love to introduce more Veterans and my former colleagues in the City to Tai Chi and the Internal Arts, too.

8. As a teacher, how do you feel about the martial aspects of the art?

I focus less on the martial aspects of Tai Chi, for sure. But I will always explain the application when introducing a movement. It definitely helps students understand what they are doing, at least mechanically. But then that same physical structure will also prompt and promote the other benefits that we can take from the practise, so I believe it is important, yes.

9. How do you feel about competition in the art?

I've successfully competed at the last two London Tai Chi Competitions but am now in a place where I believe the true benefit of competition is found only in the lessons our partner teaches us through our shared and combined practise. Competing against scores is no longer of interest or benefit to me.



Book Reviews

MASTERY: THE KEYS TO SUCCESS AND LONG-TERM FULFILLMENT

BY GEORGE LEONARD

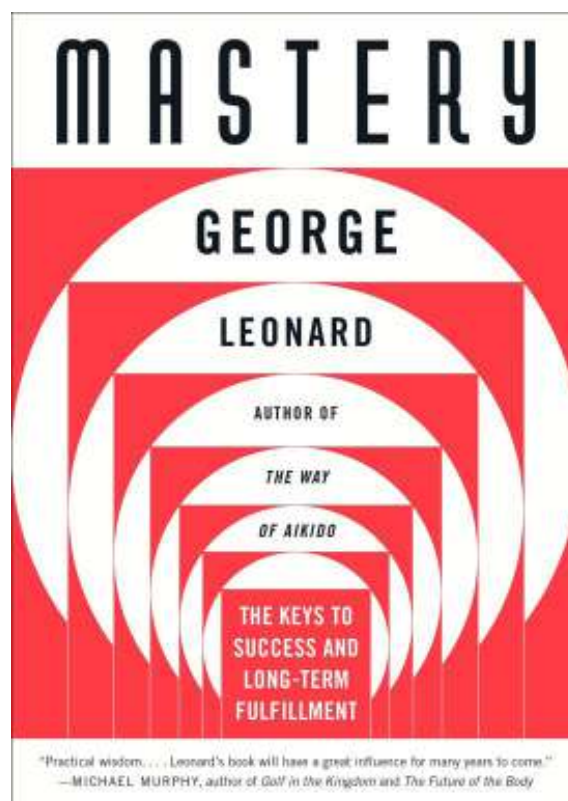
REVIEWED BY PATRICK FOLEY

First published in 1991, you may already have read this book, but if you haven't, it is definitely one for your bookshelf. It is a small book, well written and a very satisfying read. Although the content can be generically applied to the discovery of human potential in any subject, George Leonard's background in the martial arts (he was a 5th degree black belt in Aikido) makes it especially helpful in understanding how to more fully embody your Taijiquan and Qigong practises, in order to seek 'mastery'. It certainly ticks many of the right boxes for me.

Divided into 3 sections, Leonard provides very detailed, informative and motivational ways to discover a) what the Master's Journey is; b) understand the 5 Keys required for that journey; and c) what Tools you have at your disposal along the way. What really made this approach work for me was the way this book is very much a description of a personal journey; it is simple, honest writing and it is very convincing.

The author covers a broad range of material, including some social commentary on how the American (read any solely profit-orientated) system is designed to keep us firmly off the path to mastery and continuously focused on self-obsessive behaviour and instant gratification. In my experience, this is far more of an obstacle to staying on the path of self-fulfilment than you might first think, and a difficult one to admit to. I did struggle with some of the content, for instance when Leonard introduces us to his LET (Leonard Energy Training) method and describes some techniques for cultivating Ki (or Qi), as well as some of his real-life comparisons which didn't work for me because I think they were very

personal to him.



But the real gold is to be found in the first half of the book, where Leonard defines how we typically approach learning a new skill, and introduces us to the 'dabbler', the 'obsessive' and the 'hacker'. When the author asks you if you can identify what category you might be in, I was amused to find that in my long battle with trying to come to terms with what Taijiquan really is about, I have probably been all three! Breaking out of these modes of perceived skill-attainment

means acknowledging that the path to mastery is a difficult one, with (generally speaking) small bursts of progress always followed by periods of apparent stagnation on the 'plateau'. The key to consolidating that progress and continuing to benefit from the material is 'Loving the Plateau', and this is in my view a critical chapter of the book. Leonard then goes on to describe the 5 'Keys' that can help us stay on the path.

Key 1: Instruction; get the best instruction you can by identifying the right teacher for you.

Key 2: Practise; this is the true path to mastery, learning to love your practise as much as you love your life.

Key 3: Surrender; always have the mind of a beginner they say, and this, along with accepting the demands of your teacher and the discipline itself, is essential for progress.

Key 4: Intentionality; you need to be fully conscious in your practises, and Leonard makes the additional point that focused visualisation of the skill you wish to acquire can help make it reality - I find this a challenging concept but there is plenty of evidence that it works, for instance, in

professional sport.

Key 5: The Edge; as my Sifu Sam Masich says, "Practise for mastery allows you to move beyond the constraints of form and to personalize and internalize the art." I really appreciated seeing how Leonard also recognises this distinction, where we look to explore the edges of the envelope of conventional practise and make what we do our own. It is dangerous territory, where it is easy to lose sight of principles, but all true mastery does have an edge!

The last chapters give us some tools to facilitate the journey into mastery. These include recognising pitfalls, how to increase your energy, overcome resistance to change (homeostasis) and master the commonplace moments of daily life.

Categorised as 'Psychology / Self-help', George Leonard's *Mastery* is also a very philosophical look at how we can bring mastery into ordinary life, knowledge presumably gained in his Zen and Aikido studies. It is by no means perfect in its descriptive content, but I would certainly consider it worthy of being a classic read.



The Empty Hand and the Quiet Mind

OBITUARY OF LEWIS GALTON
1932-2020



It is said in the Classics “Non-action is Wu-chi and action is T'ai-chi. When chi stirs in the void T'ai-chi is born and divides into yin and yang.” The void is the origin of all phenomena, mental as well as physical. The deeper we look into the composition of physical phenomena the less we see anything that has ‘real’ or graspable substance - and yet the physical is demonstrably graspable. This is the paradox of the existence of things and our struggle to go beyond the paradox to reach reality results in mental conflict. In truth, Illusion and Reality are one - both being fundamentally void - but the thinking mind, valuing rational explanation above the intuitive leap, obscures this simple fact.

Quite a few of us will know the words of the ancient Zen analogy that goes something like this: “When it is at rest, the mind is like the clear water of a still pond. When thought arises it is as if the mud at the bottom of the pond has been stirred up.”

Similarly, the Dominican monk Meister Eckhart wrote in the 13th century: “Stand over flowing

water and you cannot see yourself. But, supposing it is clear, when it is collected and is still enough for a reflection then you can see your form in it.”

The stream of thought prevents us from seeing our real self.

The mind, in which all thought arises, can also be likened to either a razor-sharp sword or a blunt, dull-edged one. A sharp sword can be used to cut, a blunt one cannot. Succinctness of mental and physical expression derives from the clarity of a sharp mind, vagueness from one that is dulled. In the sphere of martial arts this translates into either dynamic action or mere activity.

When the mind of a martial artist is razor-sharp, focus is not a fixed concentration: that would make one unable to react instantly to an opponent's strike. It is, rather, all-encompassing awareness of the environment in the present moment, while anxiety, stress and fear are absent. It is identical to the Wu-chi referred to above: the mind not stirred by thought.

A sword is sharpened on a whetstone, the mind

is sharpened in stillness. The stillness essential to the perfect sharpening of the mind is found in meditation. It is by meditation that we can learn how to liberate ourselves from tension, the passions, and a wearisome treadmill of circular thoughts. Only in this state of freedom can we respond instantly and positively in every situation. Life is a matter of challenge and response, whether in the field of martial arts, creativity, or carrying out the most mundane chores. The nature of our response will depend on the degree of mind-body unity we possess and this, in turn, will depend on the extent to which we have control of our mind.

Meditation at a modest but absolutely consistent daily level leads us eventually to stand in front of the locked door beyond which lie the secrets of the Empty Hand (weaponless martial art). Meditation at an advanced level is the key that unlocks that door and allows us entry into the room of the Quiet Mind and, ultimately, into the tranquility that resides within movement.

(Extract) Copyright: Lewis Galton 2017

Having two daughters, Marian (a practitioner of Lishi tai chi) and Elizabeth (who practises Zen Mahayana Buddhism), Lewis was always keen to empower women in self-defence. In his youth he had practised boxing, judo and all-in wrestling but when those and physically hard building work took their toll, aggravating a school rugby injury, he followed Marian's suggestion and found a tai chi teacher - and "the path with a heart" to which he dedicated himself for the next forty years. By the time I started training in tai chi I had moved away and only saw him occasionally. On those visits, though, he was keen to see my form and always saw just what I next needed to improve. He was always happy to give advice by phone: as well as covering in conversation many aspects of practise, he set me a goal of a length of time to sit, and once I had done that regularly for a while he would always say "But that's really no good, you should double it." Doubled, it was the same... He took pride in being able to catch flies, unharmed, in his

hand to put them out the window, in looking after the big trees in his garden, on demolishing a wall with his bare hands (it's on YouTube), but about his skill in Tai Chi Chuan he was modest and to those interested he wanted open-handedly to pass it on. I was lucky to these memories and miss most his gentle generosity as a teacher and his lightness of expression.

His student Debbie Whiston paid him this tribute: "It was a chance of a lifetime to meet my Tai Chi instructor Lewis Galton 16 years ago. He was a fantastic teacher who would always place importance on meditation and over the years he would throw me bits of Dharma pointings which seemed like riddles, but the seed was planted and I now realise just how the two go hand in hand." "See?" He would say, "Straight from Mind!" - after a move which I never saw coming.

I can't express how grateful I am to have shared this lifetime with him. God bless you Lewis! And thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

Lewis studied Tai Chi Chuan under Liu Suuchi (at Liu Academy in Ealing 1980 until it closed in 1982), Master Chu King Hung (ITCCA, to 1993) and John (Teah Cheah) Ding (JDITCCA to 1998).

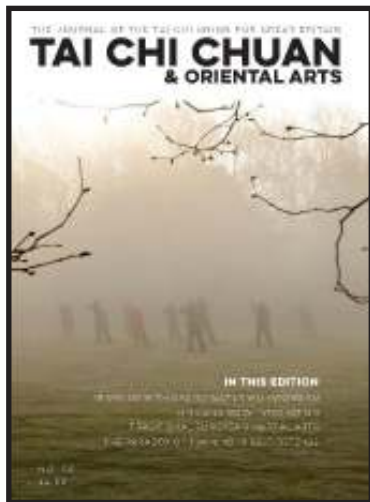
He formed Thames Valley Tai Chi Chuan Association in 2007 (later affiliated to the British Combat Association) teaching Yang Style Long Form, with emphasis on application in self-defence while also stressing that the most disarming weapon is a smile. "Retiring" in 2018, aged 86, he afterwards gave occasional lessons at home.

His introduction to Zen Buddhism (also by Dr. Liu) was in 1980 and he continued practising for the rest of his life. From 1994 he attended every week at the Lotus Temple in Kingston, Surrey.

Born Bombay (now Mumbai) January 1932. Died at home in Teddington July 2020

His niece, Abigail Galton, studies and teaches Paul Lam's Tai Chi for Health in South West Scotland.

BACK ISSUES SALE



TCC NO. 58

Grandmaster Wu Kwong Yu
Mind & Body Integration
Traditional European Martial Arts
The Paradox of Training Self-Defense



TCC NO. 57

Grandmaster Sam Chin
Balance & Tai Chi
Taijichuan: The Art of Mind & Body
Metarobics & The Future of Tai Chi

Miss an issue? Want to complete your collection?

1 Copy £2.50
2 Copies £4.50
5 Copies £6.00
10 Copies £8.00

Send your order with a cheque payable to the TCUGB to:

Tai Chi Chuan & Oriental Arts
62A Greenrock Road
Bishopton
Rentrewhire
PA7 5JB



TCC NO. 56

Grandmaster Wu Kwong Yu
The Great Heaven Circuit
Ki and the Upcoming Year
QiGong for Health



TCC NO. 55

You, Your Mind, & Taiji
Discovering Professor Li Deyin
Tai Chi Caledonia, The Beginning
The Senses as Embodied Knowledge



TCC NO. 54

11th Competition for Tai Chi Chuan
Brush Knee or Push
Medical Tai Chi
Movements of Heat and Mind

NEVER MISS ANOTHER ISSUE! PURCHASE AN ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION OF

THE JOURNAL OF THE TAI CHI UNION FOR GREAT BRITAIN

TAI CHI CHUAN & ORIENTAL ARTS

WWW.TAICHIUNION.COM/MAGAZINES/