

THE JOURNAL OF THE TAI CHI & QIGONG UNION FOR GREAT BRITAIN

TAI CHI CHUAN

& INTERNAL ARTS

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Ba Duan Jin

The slow approach

The beginning

Tai chi and modern-
medicine

Tai chi combat

A weekend retreat



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Contents

Comment page 4

From the board page 5

Partner up page 7

Qigong pages 8 – 9

Taking it slow pages 11 – 14

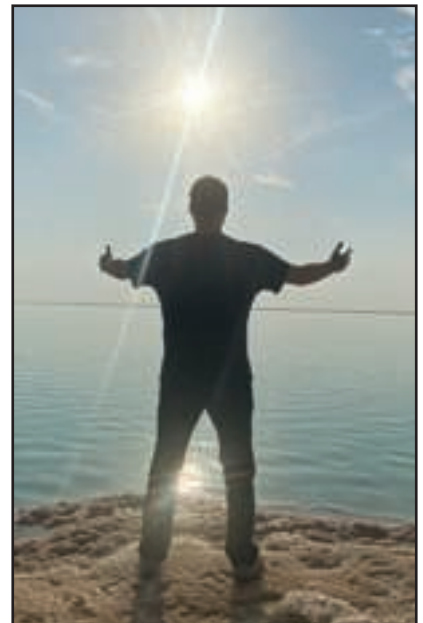
Legacy weekend page 16

The beginning pages 17 – 20

Modern medicine pages 21 – 23

Combat pages 25 – 28

Odds at the end page 30



Continue to improve

As we write our usual update for the magazine, we are finalising our preparations for the members' meeting on 25th November and reflecting on the year behind us. If you missed the meeting then we are planning on putting the presentation on our website along with notes from the meeting. We know that for many Covid still casts a long shadow be that grief at the loss of those we care about or the struggle to rebuild classes in such difficult economic conditions.

Having delivered on our commitments from the last meeting as well as other changes, looking ahead we constantly challenge ourselves to understand what additional support members may like from their union through these times.

The improvements of the last 12 months have been well received and whilst we are aware of other ideas from the Facebook forums and your emails, we will be asking our members what else they would like to have. We will listen and look for assistance to see what is achievable. If you suggest an idea, be aware we may come back to ask you how to implement it.

Of course, none of this could be achieved without the support team who actually do the work. It may surprise you to know that we have just one part-time employee, the amazing Aileen Mandic, who keeps the union running on a day-to-day basis and the board on its toes (we think she enjoys this last part of her role a little too much). We are lucky to have a small, dedicated team of volunteers who have contributed thousands of hours at no cost to help implement the changes you have seen. John Roper and Suse Coon deserve a special mention and thanks for producing the magazine with Robin Gamble being a regular writer whose support is very much appreciated.

Continuing to turn the union into a more professional company is going to require more help from people with business skills who can do the work with the priority being

marketing and social media so if you have proven recent experience in these areas watch out for future announcements as we expand our support team. Reliance on significant volunteer goodwill is not a sustainable way to run a company so we will be looking at how we can

afford to have proper contracts in place to fill support team roles and pay the going rate. We have already done this to good effect for the website changes where we have made targeted use of professionals to do specific tasks. The board will remain unpaid volunteers.

We would like to take this opportunity to make you aware that we are rolling out automated electronic renewals and replacing the paper letters and membership cards with emails and electronic (PDF) certificates for all. It's a good example of how the invisible work behind the scenes is bringing visible improvements for members. In this case, investment in new software over the last three years has made it possible to replace the previous automated but paper-based process.

We have concentrated above on matters within the union but we are very much a community-focused company outwardly looking at how the internal arts can benefit others whether through vigour in baguazhang, xing yi chuan and tai chi chuan, or some slow relaxation from qigong and internal martial arts routines.

It has been heart-warming to hear from Ray Pawlett, Catherine Birkinhead and Phil East about their work within their communities. As a union, we are all privileged to support them and look forward to hearing from more of you about how the Gerda Geddes Fund can benefit those around us.

Finally, we wish all of you a peaceful Christmas season and hope the months ahead bring contentment and calm. We look forward to working with more of you in the year ahead. 🇬🇧





Dmitry Sokolik – in the beginning

page 17



Tai chi is a partnered art. In an age where the human touch is being driven out of everyday life, we should revel in the partnered play of tai chi. But I think many people are scared to do this, worried about injury, or not wishing to associate themselves with 'fighting', writes Nick Walser

There was apparently a note on the original manuscript of the tai chi classics, describing Chang San Feng's intentions: "He desired the whole world to attain longevity, and not only martial techniques."

I don't believe that the founders of tai chi intended for 'the youth to do martial practice, and the elders to do handform only'.

My contention is this: in tai chi, we have a martial art that is purposely intended for older people. Not just as solo movements, and not just as very gentle pushing hands. This is tai chi as a free-flowing, dynamic partnered game of strikes, parries, locks, knees and more.

It is this game that Chang San Feng intended us to play as tai chi.

There is a hint given in the classics as to the overall purpose of tai chi: "The spectacle of an old person defeating a group of young people, how can it be due to swiftness?"

Leaving the poetic licence of this aside how indeed can an older person succeed? Surely older people will easily get injured? And surely many older people aren't strong or fast enough to play these sorts of games?

Luckily, tai chi is designed to allow us to play a martial arts game with little fear of injury or mishap.

According to Chen Wei Ming, Yang Cheng Fu said the following: "...tai chi free fighting is different from other arts because it is based on adherence and listening whereas the free fighting of the other martial arts lacks these sensibilities." In short, tai chi is used up close.

Being in contact paradoxically makes training safer because we can feel the attacks, rather than having to judge them visually, and are therefore more likely to intercept them. In our practice, we maintain continuous connection with our opponent (this differs from the current qi-based fashion of shoving the opponent away into empty space). This close-up way of working serves to limit the power that can be brought to bear in any technique.

We combine this with the fact that tai chi trains precise, light and measured movements.

These attributes are perfect for ensuring we do not injure our opponents, by delivering all the techniques that tai chi offers, but with care and control: qualities of the seasoned martial artist, and a way of embodying the famed tai chi precept of 'invest in loss'.

As we improve, we build the ability to flow. Flow in turn

builds rapport and awareness, further lessening the chance of unexpected blows.

At ages 50 and 43, my training partner Ian and I could hardly be considered old. But we are thinking about the next 20 or 30 years, and what this looks like as martial artists.

We have been inspired in part by a man named Bobby Taboada, a Filipino martial arts instructor. He can be seen on YouTube, moving with grace and skill. He is in his mid-70s. Does he hit as hard as a younger man? Probably not. Can he do all that his younger students can? Probably not. Can he play meaningfully within his martial arts style, and test his opponents? Undoubtedly.

I think that more is possible at these middle and later ages than we give credit for. Let's keep playing, let's keep exploring and testing ourselves and our tai chi friends, for as long as possible.

Many of us possess the basics. Fixed step pushing hands is a good basis for partnered practice but it does not express anything other than the most basic qualities of tai chi. We can get much more creative. And have much more fun. 🇺🇸



For inspiration, please check out our YouTube channel Greysteel Tai Chi @greysteeltaichi3940. Our intention is for others to try out the method of training offered in the videos, and to provide us with feedback, criticism and comments. So watch it, try it, and get in touch.