



Kai Ming Association Newsletter

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The first day of the 2012 Chinese New Year is on January 23, 2012 in China's time zone. This day is a new moon day, and is the first day of the first Chinese lunar month in the Chinese Lunar Calendar system. The exact new moon time is at 15:40 on 23-Jan-12 in China's time zone.

The Year 2012 is the 4709th Chinese year. The Chinese believe that the first king of China was the Yellow King (he was not the first emperor of China). The Yellow King became king in 2697 B.C., therefore China will enter the 4709th year on January 23, 2012. Also, the Chinese Year uses the cycle of 60 Stem-Branch counting systems and the Black Water Dragon is the 28th Stem-Branch in the cycle. Since $(60 * 78) + 29 = 4709$, therefore 2012 is the Water Dragon year, which is the 4709th Chinese Year.

Some web sites say the year 2012 is the 4710th Chinese year. If you cannot find the explanation as to why, here is a possible answer for you. The Yellow King's inauguration was held in the spring of 2697 B.C. But the day that was used as the first day of the year was the winter solstice, which was around December 23rd, 2698 B.C. Today's January 1st meant nothing to the Yellow King. If we count that extra eight days in 2698 B.C., then year 2012 is the 4710th Chinese year.

2012 is the year of Dragon. Some people say 2012 is a Black Dragon or Water Dragon year. This is because the Stem-Branch Calendar is connected to the Five Element theory. Chinese calendars used

the Stem-Branch system to count the days, months and years. There are 10 Stems and 12 Branches in this system. Stems are named by the Yin-Yang and Five Elements (Metal, Water, Wood, Fire and Earth).

A dragon is a legendary creature. All legendary stories about Chinese dragons are from the sky, which means heaven in China. The image of dragon is blurred, misty, mystic, occulted, noble and un-touchable. For China, it is the symbol of power from heaven. The Chinese emperor was considered the son of heaven. An emperor has the authority to send command to Dragons. One Chinese story mentioned an emperor killed a dragon in his dream. After 581 AD, Chinese emperors began to wear imperial robes with dragon symbols. During the Ching Dynasty (1644-1911 AD), the dragon can be seen everywhere on the roofs, doors, pillars, bridges, utensils in the forbidden city. The most powerful dragon is the five-clawed dragon. It appears only on the yellow imperial robe. Because of this, Dragon is one of most auspicious animals in China.

The traditional greeting is - gong xi fa cái (pinyin) or gung hei faat choih (Cantonese) which loosely translates to "Congratulations and be prosperous".



THE TAI CHI TREE.

A what? Imagine if you can, our illustrious leader, Mark, hanging from the branch of a tree. No, not a lynching, nor a charity parachute jump gone wrong, but as a decoration, bauble, call it what you will.

Sit back, relax, and read on.

A couple of months ago, two of my "pupils" at The Hub, which is attached to the Hazelwell Church in Kings Heath, asked to speak to me after one of our Friday lessons. Canon Alan Priestley, and his wife Pat, are regulars and Alan explained about the "Tree Fest" that was held in the church every December. Local people, clubs, businesses, etc, dressed up a Christmas tree, which was then displayed in the church for a few days in aid of charity. Alan wanted to do a Tai Chi tree, and asked if I could give him any information to help. The following week I took along some of the books I've collected in the past couple of years, and he was delighted with them. He also came along with his camera and after explaining to the group what he wanted to do, everyone was happy to be part of "the tree."

Fast forward to the first weekend in December.

After my last lesson on Friday afternoon, I popped into the church, armed with camera, and what a sight. There before me was the biggest collection of Christmas trees I've ever seen (except in a Swedish forest) and all of them were decorated from top to toe. I counted 48 of them, and each one had lights and was decorated according to who/which group had provided it. The Royal British Legions tree was decorated solely with poppies and lights, and a local dentists had tooth brushes, tooth paste and teeth (only sweet ones) hanging from the branches. One of the larger trees was decorated by Guy who works at The Hub and recently climbed Mount Kilimanjaro, in aid of charity. There was even one from the Moseley Rugby Club, and another from a local Cyclist Touring Club group. Now where was the Tai Chi Tree? A few minutes searching and there it was, in all its splendour, Mark hanging prominently



from a couple of its branches. Not literally of course, but as photos taken by Alan. What he'd cleverly done was to photograph the sign that we display outside The Hub every Friday to advertise the group, and has Marks Picture on both sides. These, along with pictures of the group, Prof Cheng, and various short sayings/ articles from books, all laminated, were hanging from the branches.

I took a few photos, and returned again on Sunday after instructor training, complete with wife, to take a few more photos. The church became packed, with people everywhere, filling in the quiz sheet. Question 1. On which tree are people "Painting the Rainbow?"

I saw a few of my group there, but I couldn't get any of them to stand in front of the tree standing on one leg! Ron, where were you?



I'm told the tree generated a lot of interest, so I await the New Year to see if we acquire any new members. That's not what it was all about really, but with the admission fee, and mulled wine, mince pies etc for sale they must have collected a goodly sum for Charity.

After all it is Christmas isn't it?
Charlie Skinner

The Natural Foot

While I was waiting for a mot on my car I picked up a magazine in the waiting room that just happened to be on top of the pile, it was a copy of the times eureka supplement, as I was browsing through it when an article about natural running caught my attention.

The article was about a study that had been carried out as to why 79% of people that run get injured, and that modern running shoe design is contributing to a problem to quote the article. "Millions of years of human development that have honed our ability to run have been largely ignored in the last four decades?"



It went on to compare the San people who still run bare foot and have no word for knee degeneration and endurance injury's are rare; elsewhere however studies have shown that between 20% and 79% of most other long distance runners suffer a lower extremity injury each year. Are shoes to blame?

The article then goes on to compare how shod runners heel strike when running and bare foot runners land on the forefoot which is less stress full to the knee. This is when what was described all began to sound familiar and struck me how principal methods we use in tai chi apply to so many different activities that we undertake on a daily basis .

Further reading of the article stated the training methods that were recommended to improve the running gait starting with "The key to this is the feedback system linking the feet to the brain which enables the body to adjust and control shock absorption".

Not all people who run shod suffer injury and have adapted to shod running and suffer no problems but those who do would properly benefit from changing the way they run

The article then goes on to describe how Dr Dave Clarke and Darren James at London South Bank University are researching barefoot walking and are believers in retraining our feet to walk properly before we can run. "We want to

train the foot to appreciate more information". Says James.

What is described next as a method to retrain the feedback in the feet you will have heard this every week at a tai chi lesson, William Chen has written an article about it called The Three Nails. Does this sound familiar.

1. Practice on a variety of surfaces your brain and feet will start to communicate,
2. Posture is everything.
3. Keep your chest and head upright be stable but untensed,
4. Take shorter strides and try to make your steps quieter,
5. Your weight should move from heel to big toe in one smooth motion.
6. Be patient

We practice this at all times when we are engaged in tai chi practice but this is a natural way to perform everyday tasks such as walking running shopping, etc.

So next time you practice beginning at the start of your form and as you shift the weight to ward-off left and ward-off right appreciate the information you receive from your feet and feel the changes in your feet as your balance shifts around in your foot . Perhaps all the researchers needed to do was attend their local tai chi class as you all know the root of tai chi is in the foot.

Dave Holloway – Instructor, Bournville & Barnt Green



THE QUIET CORNER

Improper body alignment is another way we can create unnecessary discomfort and tension.

It becomes impractical because the body must use unnecessary muscular contractions to hold itself in an unwarranted and structurally unsound position.

Be Natural, be balanced, be relaxed

Luck or Destiny?



My name is Dave Allen and I have practiced Tai Chi for over twenty years, beginning my 'journey' with Master Chu King Hung at his school in Notting Hill, London. I now run a full time Tai Chi Studio in Great Bentley, Essex. This is the story of how, in 2002, I came to open the studio (originally in Wivenhoe, Essex) which involves a series of events that must be much more than the usual 'stroke of luck' that we often experience in our lives. If you believe in destiny then read on because I really believe that what happened here was much more than 'luck' – other things have changed drastically in my life but for now I have concentrated on my Tai Chi path. Therefore this article is by no means an advertisement for the Studio or me but just a story from a man who through the practice of Tai Chi found a completely new way of life.

The story began around 1988 when because of a knee problem I had to stop training in one of the external martial arts – I worked as a London cab driver at the time and found Master Chu's school through an article in one of the trade papers. I was hooked on the art straight away and to my surprise my knee toughened up over a few months and by the time my specialist appointment at the hospital came through it was decided that no surgery was required. As many of you know Tai Chi journeys swing back and forth and I eventually became an instructor with Master John Ding at his 'Academy of Tai Chi Chuan' in South Woodford, Essex, while also running a few classes in local schools and halls.

In 2002 it was decided it was time to leave London for a quieter life so we moved to Wivenhoe (just outside Colchester). Originally the plan was to continue working the cab for a couple of days a week staying overnight at my sons home in Goodmayes to save the long drive back. However, it soon became obvious that this plan was not going to materialize

– several weeks passed and I never once drove down to London to work and with funds now getting low it was necessary to 'change track'. I decided the cab had to go; at first I thought of getting it MOT'd and using it as a private car for a while but it failed the test and with money being tight I drove it to a scrap yard in Colchester and left it there. I walked back along the river (about 3 miles) with the most extraordinary feeling of freedom, with no idea what the future held but somehow sure that everything would be fine.

I noticed there were several shops in Wivenhoe High Street for rent and decided to enquire about them. I met with a most charming lady who after showing me around several of the properties asked what sort of shop I was thinking of opening. Now, to be honest I probably know more about brain surgery than I know about retail but I said I was thinking about maybe a music or art shop which, apart from Tai Chi are the other two interests in my life. She enquired if I had a business plan in place – I looked blankly and it became obvious I had absolutely no idea what I was talking about. 'What else do you do?' she asked. 'Well,' I replied, 'I teach Tai Chi.' To my utter astonishment she said that she had the ideal place for me – very reasonable rent in a unit in the local business centre. It was small but would be able to take about 9 students at a time so I grabbed the opportunity with both hands and within a year a larger premises was required.



Destiny stepped in once again; during a tea break in a Sunday morning class I happened to mention that I needed a bigger place and one of the students said 'I know of a unit in a business park out in Great Bentley.' Once again I went to have a look and not only was the place twice the size of the Wivenhoe studio it was also cheaper rent! You could say I fell on my feet once again. I moved to the Great Bentley unit and eventually moved to an even bigger unit on the same business park.

Well, that is the story. Maybe it doesn't seem so amazing to you but all I know is that once I let go of the past (the cab) the future opened up to me. Once I learned to 'go with the flow' all sorts of opportunities opened to me – I now also play in a local band as well as running the studio which also incorporates 'alternative therapies' and life is good so this is a story of how Tai Chi changed a life. Over the years I have met many fantastic people through the art and made lasting friendships and look forward to making even more in the future.



Over the coming issues we thought it would be interesting to look at the key writings of the founders and influencers that have brought us to where we are on our tai chi journey and inspire us to continue our search for effective application of tai chi chuan in its true sense. In this issue we've chosen to start with:

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FROM HUANG SHENG-SHYAN (HUANG XINGXIAN)

HIGH OR LOW STANCE IN THE TAIJIQUAN FORM?

Within the art of Taijiquan there is no distinction between high and low postures, but is rather based on the idea of 4 "balances" or equilibriums:

1. balance in the magnitude of the posture or movement, such as both sides of the body must have "balanced" amounts of spatial displacement (expansion in all directions) when moving;
2. accuracy/precision - achieved simultaneously by all parts of the body;
3. bodily balance when moving or turning;
4. steadiness particularly when moving.

External and internal balance or harmony must be cultivated so there is no slanting of the central axis of the body. When jin (energy) is needed the bent back knee will move up or straighten slightly, though the height of the body remains unchanged. This is so yi (mind-intent) and chi can 'close' centrally, instead of coming up while the bent knee is used to adjust accordingly.

The yi is used to lead the muscles in relaxing. Joints, muscles, and ligaments must then be loosened, relaxed, and "thrown" open, but still be linked.

The body is then erect and comfortable. Yi is also used to 'move' Taijiquan principles to all parts of the body. Having achieved the four balances the question of high and low postures is then answered through mindful feedback when practicing taijiquan.

To expand on this, low stances in taiji can be more cardio-vascular but can also break the principles of looseness and relaxation so it is essential to practice with a clear goal in mind ie aerobic workout or sung (relaxed balance). Through regular attentive (mindful) practice you will develop a natural flow and stance; Taiji, in technical terms, is a sophisticated form of whole body Neuromuscular/skeletal movement re-education. With good use, the body moves easily - with balance and coordination; both mental and physical; it develops proprioception and kinaesthesia which are essential for everyday life. Cheng man Ching is often quoted as responding to the question "when do my legs stop aching?" with "when you stop improving". With this in mind, stances should be low and loose enough to work/activate the relevant muscles enough, yet high enough to still move freely and in-balance. Explore what the 4 balances mean to you and if in doubt, ask!



CHEESE BAKED ASPARAGUS.

Asparagus has had a high profile year as a great tasty vegetable and now seems to be within the financial realms of us all due to increased availability at a good price. I thought maybe you would like a recipe for it that is a simple and tasty change from steaming it which is a bit hit'n'miss with the cooking time.

Also cooking this way the Asparagus will absorb the flavours as it is baked, and help scotch the 'it's a bit of a bland vegetable' theory

INGREDIENTS

450g of Asparagus
Grated zest of half a lemon
¼ teaspoon of salt (if you require)
Freshly ground black pepper
1 tablespoon of butter.
3 Tablespoons of grated Parmesan (I just use whichever cheese I fancy at the time and grate it)

Method——Heat oven to 450F/220C/
Gas Mark 8.

Wash Asparagus well under cold tap and snap off woody end, (they tend to snap easily with little pressure of fingers at the right point)

Use the olive oil to grease a shallow ovenproof dish and arrange the Asparagus in it. The spears do not need to fit in a single layer, but it's better not to pile them up too high, so make sure your dish can accommodate the spears in a couple of layers only for even-cooking. Sprinkle the grated lemon zest over the asparagus, season with salt and pepper, then dot with butter.

Finally top with the grated cheese and cover with foil.

Bake in the oven for 10 minutes, then remove foil and cook for a further 10-15 minutes until the baked asparagus is tender and the cheese is slightly golden.

This dish will serve 4 people as a side dish or 2 people as a simple supper served with some crusty bread. Simple but very tasty.

NOTE—Another great way to ensure you do not overcook Asparagus is to stand a bunch of spears in a saucepan of boiling water (I just leave the string or elastic band round) then secure a piece of foil in a pyramid shape (or something resembling one!) and steam this way for around 10-12 minutes.



KAI MING (Open Minded)



I (Jenny Peters) read the following words in an old magazine from the USA and I believe they had taken it from a book produced in Malaysia.

When Mark was looking for a name for our club he spent a long time researching (along with others in the club at the time, who could read Mandarin or Cantonese) the language and etiquette of the Chinese culture, and found how important it was to have the correct characters used together properly.

It was a great learning curve but it was well worth the effort to convey our feelings as a group of people joined under

one banner to promote all Tai Chi that has the true spirit of the art and share the way of "The Good Heart"

I noticed how relevant this extract was to the name of our Association so thought I would add this to our newsletter.

"Taijiquan is not a martial art meant for bragging or antagonistic purposes.

A Taijiquan exponent needs to understand the principles and philosophy of it.

No one should deviate from these principles and this philosophy.

The movements can be developed and modified but the principles are eternal.

The external forms may differ from person to person, but the principles are standard and unvarying.

Because of this, there is no basis for differentiation by schools.

Instead, a spirit of a single family should prevail.

Common interest in the art should take precedence over personal interest.

An open attitude should emerge, bearing in mind the intention of the founder and our predecessors to propagate the philosophy of Taijiquan throughout the world so as to improve the health of mankind physically and mentally.

When written in Chinese, the word 'crisis' (Wei Gee) is composed of two characters. One represents danger and the other represents opportunity.

JOHN F. KENNEDY



Banish those aches and pains

When Doctors asked arthritis sufferers to do an hour-long tai chi class twice a week, they cut their pain levels by half in just 12 weeks, whereas people spending the same amount of time doing simple stretching exercise only reduced their pain levels by a fifth. Patients with osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and fibromyalgia felt better and moved more easily after taking twice-weekly classes in Tai Chi. This was reported in Health Magazine in late 2011. "It was incredible," said lead study author Dr. Chenchen Wang, an associate professor of medicine in the rheumatology department at Tufts Medical Center in Boston. "You could see them change every week. They became very happy. I felt very, very excited to be with them." It is great that more and more research is being done into tai chi to encourage its acceptance by the medical profession.