

Kai Ming Association Newsletter

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Movement and stillness conspired one day. Movement said "I am life. The constant changing of the sea, the rustle of the wind, the scampering of the lizard on the rock."

Stillness said nothing

Movement went on, "Everything that lives, moves. Life itself is movement and change-growing, running, slinking, dancing..."

Finally stillness answered, "at the bottom, your sea is deep and silent; your wind dances and then returns to calm; the scampering lizard issues from an egg containing its life and essence."

Movement thought for a while then added, "Thank you for teaching me. I see another viewpoint now. But you have to admit, you were forced to speak or I could not know."

Stillness nodded. And from that day they agreed to share equally the secrets of life.

In Chinese martial arts, stillness lies between each activity. Like mortar and bricks, it binds together the actions of the artist. Like silence between notes of music, it renders the notes into melody. Chinese martial arts have always concerned themselves with the world of stillness; in the mist of battle, stillness enables the warrior to regroup mentally and physically. The moment taken to

explore the internal environment, and not be overwhelmed by the external, enables the warrior to look to their stores of energy; to recuperate to regenerate. Without this stillness how can they know they are able to go on. Stillness unifies.

Movement creates punching and kicking, stillness creates root and patience. There are many methods of creating strength and stamina – running, weights, squats, but only one to gain a root.... Stillness.... Stillness practicing by just standing and being present, by sinking and connecting through present awareness.

Standing (zhan Zhuang) is an integral part of tai chi and is more than just standing in the postures, it is about stillness. Through it we develop strength, calm and even self-knowledge. The muscles ache, the body craves movement, the mind beset by a 1000 fleeting thoughts – you itch, you remember a bill to pay, you become angry.

Slowly, this dissolves into a world of attention that draws you into a universe of your own mind and body. After a while, you will have to face the fact that it is stillness itself you are fighting. "RELAX!" you cry! As the aches and thoughts try to seduce you away from calmness. "Mindfulness is wonderful, you just have to pay attention." To be present, to be still, takes practice as we have all been seduced by the wonders of noise and activity.

Stillness will enable you to develop into a **Peaceful Warrior** and you will find that things that bothered you previously no longer get quite the same reaction. The next time you take that first deep breath, get in position and stand still, searching for stillness, consider the journey of self-

discover found without even moving. Next time you feel you have lost your root, realise it is movement that stole it from you and stillness that will return it.



We are currently working on a new "beginners guide" but for now here are some useful points to note, compiled by Ian Anderson - Selly Oak Instructor

Yang Cheng Fu's 10 essentials to correct tai chi

1. Straightening the head & neck
2. Correct position of chest and back
3. Relax (loosen) the waist
4. Differentiate full and empty
5. Sinking of shoulders and elbows
6. Using the mind instead of force
7. Coordination of upper and lower parts
8. Harmony between the internal and external parts
9. Importance of continuity
10. Seek stillness in motion

COMMONLY USED terms you may hear in a class

Bai Huai point

Imagine yourself as "being suspended from above". This point is where the line between nose and spine and ears meet - dissect. The crown of the head, normally. Have a feeling of pressing the top of the head upwards. Lengthens the spine and frees middle & lower back and chest. Chin slightly in, and jaw relaxed. The main point is to loosen head and elongate the spine. This also places the head in correctly supported position. Important as it weighs approximately as much as a bowling ball.

Fair Lady's hand

Important in Cheng Man Ching Tai Chi. The hand is soft, open and relaxed. Not stretched or tense. Fingers relaxed. The hand sits on the wrist and there should not be any tension in the hand or visible on the back of the hand.

Long Quan point

Fold your middle finger so that the tip touches your palm and you find this point. You can visualise this point as connecting to the ground, feet and each hand.

Tigers mouth

Found approximately in the space (web) when your thumb and forefinger are relaxed and slightly separated.

Yong chun point

Point in centre of foot just below to ball of foot. Visualise this point relaxing and dissolving into the ground. Helps to relax feet, ankles, shins and calves

Constant Bear exercise

Key to CMC style Tai Chi practice. Teaches you about moving with correct body alignment, moving from the centre of the body, leading (and loosening) the waist (KUA), weight change , and how not to move outside your own structure. Allows practice of relaxing muscles not used in turning and activating those that are just enough to move. .

Standing post (e.g. Lift hands, Play Guitar, Preparation,)

Allows you to develop posture and in Chinese medicine standing quietly and attentively is considered a very healthy activity for several reasons. Postures lift hands & play guitar practice 'rooting'(relaxing) through foot, ankle, shin, knee, thigh, hip/pelvis/ waist, lengthen spine etc.

Ming men point

Think of a point on the spine roughly inline with naval and practise a feeling of filling this point when you breath in.

Dantien

Very important. Just below the naval and a couple of inches inside is where your attention should be focuses in all practice. Considered to be the point where CHI (bio-energy) can be stored. Pay attention to it when you move.

Sacrum/coccyx

Essentially, the lower part of the pelvis and spine ... have a feeling (yes it's getting repetitive??) of rolling it under your bum .. naturally .. as it just resting gently on a high stool.

Breathing

Natural breathing - simples!!! - in through nose, out through nose , slow and easy. Just don't forget to breath. Like a balloon, let the body expand when breathing in, and deflate when breath out.

Where to look when you practise

Soften your gaze, and take in all your surroundings. Practise using peripheral vision. Because it is sensitive to movement. Look where you want to go but move your gaze and body together.

Jöse lined with naval

For most moves your nose stays in line with your naval. There are exceptions (i.e. Lift hands - where your waist is 45 degrees and nose faces where you look.)

Tongue on roof of mouth

Close your mouth gently and let your tongue rest on your upper pallet. This aids release of saliva (in TCM saliva has a healing quality) and relaxes the throat.

Chi – bio-energy

Life force (Skywalkers - Force) , bio-energy essentially. Practising the form helps release energy around the body and can assist with health in various ways.

Sink chest - pluck the back

This means simply to relax the shoulders down naturally, and allow the chest to drop down (as opposed to a soldier standing to attention with chest thrown forward, shoulder blades pulled in towards each other). Don't slump or collapse though.

Sung

See above. There is no real translation but the closest possible is relaxed and alive. A state of readiness, liveliness and alert in both mind and body.

Fear - relaxation – (less fear – more relaxation, etc etc)

Fear has a lot of disguises and is also very natural. If we didn't feel fear we would not survive as a race. However, the fears we face have changed for instance from Sabre tooth tigers to incompetent bankers, from searching for firewood to stressing (a fear disguise) about paying the bill for the heating! Same feelings, different cause.

Tai Chi helps to relax mind and body which can lessen the feeling of fear and help you to be aware of the " thousand faces of fear" when it comes knocking. Our martial practice develops from a point of relaxation, and gets more relaxed.. become a peaceful warrior.

Can an afro really help your tai chi?

Here are the views of 3 long term students...



Mark – "since trying the afro, I have found a greater sense of root and self awareness"



Graham – "I first experienced the power of the perm when I wore the teddy-boy wig at the Unstone Grange fancy dress party.... Women were drawn to me like a magnet and my creativity grew exponentially in direct proportion to the quif. An Afro was the obvious natural progression"



Nigel – "I looked a right T**t.... or so I thought.... but I must admit that the added gingeriness of the afro seemed to unleash something deep within me.... I gained a new sense of self-worth, a greater sense of connection to those around me and a lovely warm head!"

Doing tai chi with the afro really expanded the field of awareness of everybody in the trial; background whispers and giggles could be heard more clearly; when practising partner work, the partner seemed to melt and be unable to fight back, root or even divert their attention from the afro to the exercise and hence were easily beaten.

The true power of afro-chi is yet to be explored in a medical controlled trial but watch this space

THE QUIET CORNER

New monthly feature, contributions welcome.

Eight forces sustain creation:

Movement and stillness,
Solidification and fluidity,
Extension and contraction,
Unification and division.



Recipe Corner

Don said he wants to develop his contribution into a hints and tips so lets all look forward to next months contribution. Jenny has written this months recipe which I love!

Lentil and Spinach Dhansak - serves 4



Ingredients

25g of Margarine (use a good lower fat with Omega 3 in if you want the healthy option)
1 Red onion, finely chopped
2.5cm piece of root ginger, grated or finely chopped
2 teaspoons Curry paste, (or to taste)
1 Vegetable stock cube dissolved in 600ml (1 pint) boiling water
85g Red Lentils
2 Carrots, chopped
1 Sweet Potato, cut into cubes
350g Basmati Rice
225 Bag Spinach Leaves
Finely grated rind and Juice of ½ Lime or Lemon
Lime or Lemon zest to garnish

Melt the margarine in a saucepan, add the onion and ginger and cook for about 5 mins, stirring occasionally, until soft.

Add the curry paste and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Gradually add the vegetable stock and bring to boil.

Stir in the Lentils, carrots and sweet potato and simmer gently for about 15 minutes until tender.

Meanwhile, cook the rice according to the packet directions.

Stir the spinach leaves into the cooked vegetables until they have just wilted and then add the lime or lemon rind or juice.

Serve the vegetables with the rice, garnish with lime or lemon zest.



Smooth, Soft, Relaxed – it has to come from inside

One of the students at a class said to me after I demonstrated the Form – “that looked so smooth, why doesn’t mine look like that”.

Coming home that night it struck me that it may have looked smooth to her, but it didn’t **feel** smooth to me. So after 10 years of Tai Chi’ing and people saying be relaxed/soft/etc here was a different angle for me to focus on and refine ☺.

I quandered over this for a few days and then realized the feeling, the smoothness, the relaxed-ness (whatever you like to call it) has to come from “inside”. You can’t be externally soft until you are internally soft.

I then quandered on what “internally soft” meant, and how to get it ☺.

In the meantime when doing my Qigong or Form exercises I tried to feel where were the internal hard angles, hard points, sudden movements, stuck bits. This over time has helped me to focus on those areas and to try to soften them; to work on why they felt hard. This often led me to doing the move but doing less – even more less ☺. And to feel more the balance, posture, transition – and not just “do the move”. It helped me focus on the bad habits I had developed.

My quandering brought me to realize that mental softness is what makes internal softness, which in turn allows external softness.

The mind and thoughts affect everything – and have to be balanced, relaxed and aware – leading to softness. The sharp (or rather the not so smooth) edges of your mental feelings have to be managed, worked on, focused on, and “let go” so you can be more and more soft inside and then externally. We all know it is very hard to always do this in daily life. However, as we know, Tai Chi is not just

applied in the class or when Tai Chi-ing, it extends in all ways to your daily life. How you move, how you feel, how you touch, how you interact.

So hopefully slowly, slowly, more of that mental (internal) smoothness, softness, relaxedness can and will become more and more a part of everything you do and feel. Hopefully that will extend out to all those you meet and with whom you interact –leading to a better life for you and for them.

By Alan Sanson

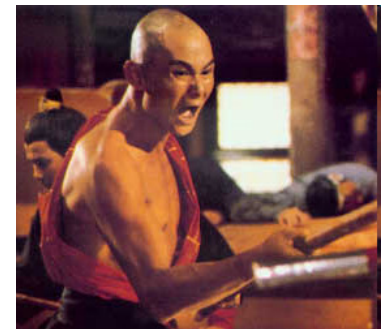


SHAOLIN MONKS

DID YOU KNOW THIS?

In days of old, graduating from a Shaolin Temple needed much more than being skilled enough to snatch a pebble from the master’s hand.

The aspirant had to be successful at the exit examination, which was a brutal rite of passage.



He had to fight his way through the senior Shaolin monks, known as Dashanmen (literally translated this means “fighting mountain gate”)

It is not really known when this practice was ceased, but there is evidence of a Dashanmen as recent as the 1920s/30s. Around this time a novice called Xu Shiyou failed this task.

He resorted to sneaking out and, despite never becoming a real Shaolin Monk; he did go on to become a great fighter and a personal bodyguard for Mao Zedong.

Since then, the Dashanmen has been depicted in so many movies that it has become more like fantasy than fact.

Today it only exists as a modern group-sparting form—regularly seen as a standard finale in many Shaolin shows.

With this ritual gone from the Temples, what constitutes a real Shaolin monk has become somewhat ambiguous.

Over the last 2-3 decades, the Shaolin Temple has gone from “rags” to riches in a sudden rebirth.

In the process of moving back to its former glory, it has faced many challenges.

These include political intrigue, commercial exploitation, and some cultural misunderstandings.

This in turn has raised questions about Shaolin's latest incarnation, confusing some about what it means to be a REAL Shaolin Monk.



There are several touring Kung Fu shows billed as Shaolin Monks.

Some of these "pop" tours around the world spotlight bald, robe-clad athletes who, despite their obvious martial skill, might or might not be "real" monks.

Whispers of some fakery abound.

There is no denying that fake monks exist. A few years ago there were some in the USA claiming to be "ordained priests of Shaolin" who didn't even speak Chinese! Fakes can pervade all martial arts, but when it's a man of the cloth it becomes a highly charged situation.

One of the authentic monks Shi Decheng grew up at Shaolin Temple and has been a leading martial emissary around the world.

He is unperturbed by Shaolin's growing pains and feels the more people who wear Shaolin robes the better.

If they have a keen dedication to practice and a joyful heart, he sees them as vehicles for the Shaolin culture and the essence of Zen to be passed on.



MAO ZEDONG discouraged religion, but Deng Xiaopeng's Open Door policy of the late 70s permitted free religious practice again.

This was when Decheng first went to the Temple in hopes of becoming a monk. The temple had been burned down to its foundations by a warlord in 1928.

There had been some restoration in the Kuomintang period, but Mao's Cultural Revolution of the 60s had reduced it once again to a dilapidated state.

At this time almost all the temples in China were in ruins.

During this dark time in China's history a few monks did live at Shaolin Temple. They had grown up there and continued to live their entire lives there despite the hardships.

They had little left but faith to sustain the lineage.

Gradually a post-Cultural first generation of initiates started to filter in to join them; one of these was Dechung after persuading Shi Suyan a great master there to take him on as a disciple. Many came and left, unable to endure the difficulties to become a monk.

Continued in the next issue...



Ronnie-Gong



Coming soon.... Details of the rare training system Ronnie-Gong. Taught exclusively in Kings Heath on Friday lunchtimes and occasionally in Bournville on a Thursday. Ron is looking to take on a few select and dedicated closed-door students to learn this secret art and continue it regardless of need. Ron is only in his 50's but the years of hard training have taken their toll.

His two most senior disciples are Charlie and Clive who many of you already know. They haven't progressed fully because they refuse to wear the uniform of kung-fu baggy pants and winkle-picker shoes.

Hopefully in the next issue Ron will share some of his wisdom.

Watch this space.....

Training for 2011

Workshops are held in Hopwood Village Hall, Hopwood, South Birmingham unless otherwise stated.

As with all our workshops **we offer a £5 discount from the listed price when courses are paid in for full** at least a month in advance. Places are limited and a £10 deposit is required to book your place.

February 27th – Tai Chi Cane short form

There has been a great deal of interest in the tai chi cane (walking stick) but some worry that it is too long to remember and practice. With this in mind we have developed a shorter form that keeps to the essence of the original plus makes learning and applying more accessible. Spaces will be strictly limited so book and pay you deposit as soon as possible.

10am to 4pm £70 members and £90 non-members

March 12th – Painting the Rainbow training

– this session continues the development of the painting the rainbow program which specifically focuses on the application of tai chi and chi-kung for rehabilitation. It is a teacher training program, take a look at:

www.paintingtherainbow.co.uk for more details.

This session will focus on Mindfulness based chi-kung.

June 5th – Fan Short form

– this form was developed from the long form as taught by Master Tan Ching Ngee. The form holds to the essence of the original but enables the learner to apply the skills in a shorter time. It is open to all; if you need a fan please order in advance. Wood and silk fans are £15, Metal and silk fans are £20. Please ask your instructor if you'd like to see a fan beforehand.

Spaces will be strictly limited so book and pay you deposit as soon as possible.

10am to 4pm £70 members and £90 non-members

July 23rd to 25th – Tai Chi camp

– Last years camp was a great success with people attending from other clubs as well as ours. The focus will continue to be deepening our application of Cheng Man Ching's approach to tai chi chuan. Other areas covered will include mindful walking and form, tai chi short stick, key principles (e.g. dong-dang and use of 4 ounces). More details to follow; again please ask your instructor as booking forms will be available in the New Year.