



Kai Ming Association Newsletter

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Come and have a go if you think you're soft enough!

Probably 20 years ago Alan Daniel's (a friend and student) coined this phrase at a class and it has been often humorously quoted ever since. This short article is intended to spark your interest in developing this soft approach for real and is based on Professor Cheng Man Ching's three levels – Heaven, Man and Earth.

There are three different levels of T'ai Chi Ch'uan—Heaven, Earth, and Human (Man). The Human Level relaxes your sinews and vitalizes your blood; Earth Level “opens the gates” so that the chi can reach the joints; and Heaven Level exercises the sensory function. Each level has three degrees. The First Degree of the Human Level relaxes your tendons from the shoulders to the fingers. The Second Degree relaxes your tendons from the hip joint to the “bubbling well” [point in the bottom of each foot]. The Third Degree relaxes your tendons from the sacrum to the top of the head (ni wan). The Earth Level First Degree sinks the chi to the tan-t'ien. The Second Degree moves the chi into the bubbling well. The Third Degree circulates the chi so that it reaches the top of the head. The Heaven Level First Degree is t'ing chin. The Second Degree is tung chin. The Third Degree is omnipotence. These are the three levels and nine degrees.

(Cheng Tzu's Thirteen Treatises on T'ai Chi Ch'uan, by Professor Cheng Man Ching, translated by Benjamin Pang Jeng Lo and Martin Inn, pg 75, ©1985 by Juliana T. Cheng)

The term 'Ti Fang' (lift, let-go) is the term given to the unique soft uprooting technique applied in tai chi and is the literal application of “come and have a go if you think you're soft enough”. I want to look at the three degrees of Heaven level, briefly here, as the stages in developing Ti Fang skills through our developing understanding of the Facia. Although Prof. Cheng refers to membranes in his writing and teachings, the facia, itself, isn't really being discussed and explored in sports and movement until around 2014. The facial-web is the membrane that is over the muscles and bones and under the skin. It includes sinews and ligaments and can't really relax, only stretch and resume its natural state, but we can relax our muscles and improve structural alignment to harness it. Relaxation and alignment enables us to stretch and use the facia by working through the three degrees/stages of t'ing chin (listen), t'ung chin (understanding) and omnipotence (divine speed); to connect, neutralise and discharge.

1. T'ing chin – listening or feeling strength. Robert Smith said that Prof Cheng told him “never put more than 4 oz. (ounces) on your opponent and never let them put more than 4 oz. on you”. This can be referred to as “correct touch”. Familiarity with correct touch (4 oz.) is, “When your hands lightly touch him, you must detect a slight wave of resistance in his body. Taking advantage of this wave, you will be able to attack him decisively.” (Tai Chi, Cheng/Smith, pg 88 #3). I have referred to correct touch, as developing constant pressure because 4 oz. is a symbolic rather than factual

figure; it implies light constant pressure. Listening requires the ability to sense changes from 4 oz. to 3 oz. or 4 oz. to 5 oz. i.e. a change in constant.

2. T'ung chin – understanding strength. At this level, the classics say, “if my opponent moves slightly I can hear and understand him”. Prof Cheng wrote, “Even his slightest movements are still easy to discern. If you can hear others before they move then you have reached the level of enlightenment. What happens at this level is merely this: the chi goes through the ligaments, the vessels, the membranes, and the diaphragm, generating, respectively, four kinds of chin: defensive, concealing, ready to attack, and attacking. The joints can extend and contract because of the ligaments. The blood circulates because of the blood vessels. The membranes lie between the muscles and gird the ligaments and bones. The internal organs are all bathed in it. The diaphragm is above the liver. If the opponent's chi originates from the ligaments and is normal, then it means he is defensive. If his chi is in the vessels, then you know he is concealing it and it will change. If his chi is in the membranes and surges up to the surface, it means he is ready to attack. If his chi is in the diaphragm, he is gathering the chi and preparing to attack. At this highest level of t'ung chin (comprehending strength), nothing can be more wonderful. This is Heaven Level Second Degree.” (13T, Lo/Inn, pg 79.1)

3. Omnipotence level – This level has been referred to as conditioned response or divine speed because connection, neutralising and discharge are automatic and without thought. Literally, you/they touch and they fly!

By developing an awareness of the facia, we can out-reach and connect to the opponent's facia. The aim is to connect,

draw into emptiness and discharge (Ti Fang). I am finding that by thinking of the fascia as a web/sheath that connects the whole body and chin (intrinsic strength), I am beginning to overcome the accidental use of Li (muscular strength). My aim is not to be soft and empty but to give a sense of softness through 'correct touch', which keeps the pressure at 4 oz. It is a real journey of 'investing is loss' but I'm loving it! Hey, come and have a go if you think you're soft enough!



APRIL RECIPE

One of the often overlooked foods is spinach but I have fond memories of Popeye so as it's non-fatty and available in April I thought I'd share a curry

This vegetarian curry recipe is made with spinach, garlic and lots of wonderful aromatic spices. Spinach is a great base for a no-faff curry because it's so quick and easy to cook, and adds great favour.

INGREDIENTS

100ml sunflower oil
2 tsp fenugreek seeds (see tips)
½ tsp asafoetida (see know-how)
6 garlic cloves, cut into 2mm slices
1kg spinach, washed, cut into 1cm strips and left to dry overnight, if you like, see tip
2 medium onions, halved and sliced into 5mm strips
2 tsp salt
1 tsp ground turmeric
3 tsp ground coriander
1 tsp ground cumin
1½ tsp medium red chilli powder

METHOD

Heat the oil in your largest heavy-based pan with a lid for 2 minutes over a medium heat. Add the fenugreek seeds and stir through the warm oil for a few seconds. Stir in the asafoetida and garlic, then fry until the garlic starts to brown (about 30 seconds).

Add half the spinach, cover and cook for 3 minutes. Add the onions and remaining spinach, stir gently, then cover again and cook for 5-6 minutes until totally wilted. Mix everything together, then add the salt, turmeric, coriander, cumin and chilli powder, gently stirring it in, and cook uncovered for 4 minutes. Taste and season, then serve immediately

Tai Chi Camp

August 4th & 5th 2018

Weoley Hill Village Hall, Bournville
£40 members £60 non-members

Each year we have a focus for the weekend camp and this year is Professor Cheng Man Ching's three levels – Heaven, Man and Earth. I briefly explored the Heaven level in this newsletter but the camp will give us the time to explore each element in more detail through mindfulness, exercises and applications.

Saturday will start will chi-kung and mindfulness and build gradually throughout the day. It will be suitable for all levels and is intended to deepen our love and understanding of Prof. Cheng's unique approach to tai chi.

Sunday is currently planned as a weapons or forms day and more details will follow. If you are interested in san Shou, kwai Taiji (fast Tai chi) or have a particular weapon or aspect of tai chi weapon work you are interested in, please let me know.



I love straight-sword sparring, for example, as it develops sensitivity and footwork. Both Prof. Cheng and my teacher Tan Ching Ngee were passionate about this aspect of sword work. Last year were taught staff and the year before walking stick. This year can be tai chi fan or even general weapons awareness and application.

I look forward to hearing from you. Contact details at the top of the newsletter.



Is This Mindfulness?

Life is like a beef and mustard sandwich.

You can nibble your way delicately through it at a slow and steady pace, or you can occasionally take big bites and suddenly get a mustard "hit" where you go "WOW that was hot but the beef seemed so much tastier".

When you finish, and the heat goes, you have a lasting feeling of satisfaction that stays with you for a while.

If you only nibble you may not even notice the sandwich has gone!

I hope I have never been a nibbler..!
by Jenny Peters

PLEASE NOTE:

Please send your Newsletter contributions for future issues to markpeters@kaiming.co.uk

Advanced Sunday training sessions 2018
Below are the dates for 2018. Sessions run 9.30 to 12.30 and are £30

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure about attending or call Mark on 0121 251 6172

May 13th
June 3rd
August 4th & 5th – camp
Sept 9th
Oct 14th
Nov 11th
Dec 9th – grading day