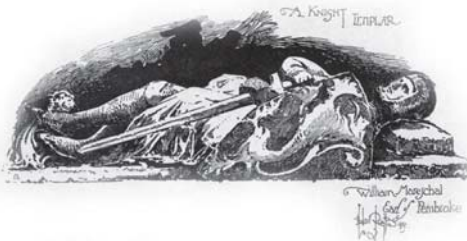




Kai Ming Association Newsletter

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Mindful of "The Greatest".

Each issue we look for something different to share about this wondrous art of tai chi we all so love. This month I'd like to share with you something different; a different take on what it means to be 'Tai Chi' the supreme ultimate, the greatest. This was sent in by Julian Day and look to our own history in England.

Chang San Feng, the thirteenth-century legendary founder of Tai Chi Chuan, bequeathed to us the roots of a form within which every movement, from 'Snake Creeps Down' to 'Ride the Tiger', has a martial application. He gave us the blue-print for the perfect warrior, exquisitely balanced in mind, body and spirit.

Yet, who was Chang's finest exponent, our greatest warrior of all? In modern times, Mohammed Ali or Bruce Lee perhaps? History has more candidates: the Alexander who re-drew the map of the ancient world; Hannibal, destroyer of Roman legions; Ivar the Boneless, the legendary Viking conqueror; Genghis Khan, Mongol creator of the world's biggest land empire and, of course, Napoleon, the little Corsican scourge of Europe.

Or do we have a Chang San Feng devotee much nearer home? Step forward a humble, almost unknown, Englishman from Chang's medieval era. William Marshal was a rather different world champion from today's much vaunted stars. Each of his five hundred combat victories was secured over several days on a battlefield stretching twenty to thirty miles on the unruly border between France and Flanders.

The medieval tournament, a team contest banned in this country by the king at the time, Henry II, because of its high casualty rate, was a savage, brutal, mounted and fully-armoured bone-crushing brawl with prizes of weaponry and horse-flesh going to the last man standing. All a far cry from Sir Walter Scott and Hollywood's portrayal of two well-polished helmeted riders trotting towards one another along a painted fence to splinter a few wooden poles.

William Marshal was the undisputed champion of the real, rather than the fictional, tourney during a twenty-year 'ultimate fight' career. He ground into the dust all-comers from every corner of Europe before joining the crusades to help cast out a more sinister enemy. His first big break had come when, as an apprenticed knight, he saved the life of Eleanor of Aquitaine, former queen of France and now queen of England, in a deadly ambush during which he was badly wounded and captured. The queen paid his ransom and he became court favourite and military mentor to the heir to the throne.

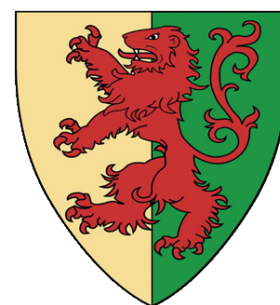
Here was the inspiration for the romance writers; the model for the chivalric code and the man who became Lancelot, Galahad and Percival in their ballads and stories. He was right-hand man to five kings: Henry II, Henry the young king, Richard I, John and Henry III. "The best knight who ever lived," said Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury. The only soldier to force submission from the huge frame of Richard the Lionheart himself, when the Marshal was defending the dying King Henry from his rebellious son.

Here too then was a model of the tai chi dual philosophy of yielding to overcome and being ever mindful of the next move.

How do we know all this? On the Marshal's death in 1219, his son commissioned a chronicle of his life based on eye-witness accounts of those who were with his father. This document

lay hidden for centuries. Recently discovered, translated and quietly circulated to a handful of the curious, it now shines a light on a life that began during a twenty-year medieval civil war (1135-1154) for the English crown between two of William the Conqueror's grandchildren, and neared its end with another civil war, as traitorous and rebellious barons hunted down King John. It was this second civil war, not his champion's crown, that defined the Marshal's true greatness and helped define for the English who and what they are today.

So how did the greatest warrior become the greatest Englishman? When John finally choked to death on a plateful of peaches in 1216, his vengeful enemies had already set up a ready replacement. Their new friend, the Dauphin Louis, son of the King of France, was in London, and his occupying army, busy spreading itself across our green and pleasant land, was poised to usurp the crown from John's nine-year-old son, Henry.



Enter William Marshal. He met the friendless and helpless child on the road, carried him on his shoulders to Gloucester Cathedral - no time to get to Westminster Abbey - and, with no Archbishop on hand, collared the Papal Legate who crowned Henry III king of England, with not a Frenchman in sight.

But the 72-year-old Marshal still faced more continental invaders than had Harold at the battle of Hastings. Was he still unbeatable? The French army had just taken Lincoln. That was as far as they got. Crashing through the city walls,

sword in hand, came the new regent and saviour of England. He and his loyal followers drove the French down to Dover and back across the channel.

His final act of greatness? A re-issue of the Magna Carta, which he had co-authored with Archbishop Langton in 1215 in an effort to mediate between John and his barons. This time, he took out the controversial clause which called for a council of barons to shackle the authority of the monarch.

Thus the seeds of constitutional monarchy were sewn, along with the foundation of English common law and the creation of a blueprint for European democracy. A more lasting victory than the breaking of limbs and skulls on a Flemish field.

On his deathbed, would-be contenders for the soon-to-be vacant title of “the greatest” pressed the frail, but unvanquished, hero for the secret of his martial and military success. They were expecting revelations of devilish and deviously dark strategies. “Seek out your enemy and hew him to the ground”, came the whispered reply. In other words, discover his weakness and vanquish.

Simple, from the man who simply was “the greatest”. But the Marshal made one last move which should resonate with the tai chi movement. As he left this world, he received the monastic tonsure of the order of the warrior Knights Templar. His tomb is the showpiece of London’s Temple Church. How pleasing that would be for the monks of Henan’s Shaolin Temple, who first adopted the flowing sequence of “the movement of the five creatures” - bear, tiger, deer, ape and bird - as a health-giving practice seven centuries before him, to know that their warrior successor became England’s invincible lion.

Julian Day – Erdington Student



Its that time of year again when we need to be planning the **Kai Ming Christmas Party**. Last year we all went to Flavourz and the feedback was excellent...

It's a buffet restaurant near Junction 2 of M5 and serves 4 regions of food – Indian, Chinese, Italian and Mexican – plus has a fun relaxed atmosphere and is great value at around £15 per head.

We also had Christmas meal at lunchtime rather than in the evening which was really well received so we are planning this year to be a lunchtime event too. **The date will be Sunday 11th Dcemeber and the time 2pm.**

We need £5 per person mimimum deposit ASAP and the balance no late than 30th November

Please let your instructor know what you would like to do or contact Mark & Jenny on markpeters@kaiming.co.uk or phone 0121 251 6172



Boxing with the Masters

I had been involved with Kaiming learning the Chen Man-Ching style of tai chi chuan for a number of years which provided a great foundation for relaxation and martial application, amongst many other benefits. I became more fascinated as to what this ‘chuan’ aspect was all about as it is most often translated as ‘boxing’ or ‘fist’ yet when Mark Peters discussed and demonstrated he explained it as being so much more. The founder of Kaiming, Mark always encouraged us to explore other approaches to martial arts to inform our practice. There is a tradition of boxing in my family which seemed to by-pass me. Therefore, at the grand age of 41, I decided to join an amateur boxing club,

which provided recreational classes, in order to learn the art of ‘hitting without being hit’. Being in my early forties ensured my amateur career was over before it started. However, I learnt the basic foot work whilst learning to jab and move, and maintain my guard, amongst a whole series of other seemingly impossible fundamental requirements. I must have demonstrated enough enthusiasm to be allowed to take part in what was known as ‘squad training’ with the amateur boxers; a much more intense experience. The initial involvement reminded me of tai chi’s idea of ‘meditation in motion’, as there is no greater facilitator of being present than having someone throwing various combinations of punches at your head and body. Whilst I loved the experience, I was keen to learn how western boxing had been incorporated into other people’s systems. To that end, I was fortunate enough to participate in workshops on boxing run by Peter Ralston and Grandmaster William CC Chen.

Peter Ralston established Cheng Hsin, promoting a system that included the principles of ‘effortless power’, ontology and body-being. Peter accumulated a wealth of martial experience from a very young age becoming a black belt in Judo, Jui jitsu and Karate by the time he was 20 as well as developing an interest in T’ai Chi Chuan, Pa Kua Chang, Hsing and other arts. In 1978 he became the first non-Asian to win the full-contact World Martial Arts Tournament in China. He successfully trained with a number of reputed practitioners in their respective arts, and boxing was no exception. Peter trained at a tough gym in New York, where he developed his own ideas around boxing. Seeing how Peter was seemingly impossible to hit and was able to respond at oblique angles, whilst having vast amounts of stamina, others soon adopted his method.

After attending a number of Cheng Hsin workshops on Body-Being studies, tai chi and sword play, I was familiar with some of the rudimentary ideas of Cheng Hsin. I was intrigued to know more, so I attended a weekend in Holland one day of which was an introduction to Cheng Hsin boxing. Whilst I cannot do Peter’s

sophisticated explanation justice, looking back at my notes, the basic tenets seemed to be based around stages of progression. Initially, participants were introduced to the idea of getting the hand to move upwards without any power or, more esoterically, without use of the arms or shoulder. We were then encouraged to feel where the alignment just catches before falling away, whilst learning to play with distance. We were then expected to build on the previous two exercises only this time connecting with the centre. This was incredibly challenging, as to become remotely familiar with the first element alone would take six months. In the following stage we were meant to feel compression in the foot and hips. Power would be generated by letting oneself be compressed into the ground. We were also introduced to partner work of 'cutting', making it more difficult to be punched.

Finally, we had some light sparring with different people. This was interesting as some in the group had not boxed before. One of my sparring partners started doing a crab-like walk which made him virtually impossible to miss, very strange. A great deal of the people I sparred with had their arms down and no guard, I can only imagine in order to switch off the muscle. It left them somewhat vulnerable, but did improve their foot work. This was a really enjoyable experience and a great workout, without the obligatory bruising and associated pain.

The opportunity arose to train with Grand Master William CC Chen in Hanover, including a boxing workshop. William Chen was a disciple of Professor Chen Man-Ching and spent a number of years in Taiwan as Chen Man-Ching's teaching assistant, entrusted to train others. When William Chen moved to New York to set up his own school he met up with Chen Man-Ching again. Training independently, he continued working on internal work and developed his own ideas around tai chi in relation to body mechanics. His articles include 'The mechanics of the Three Nails' which examines the role of the foot in rooting. At the time of the workshop Grand Master Chen was keen to explore the role of fingers, an interest that subsequently

culminated in an article entitled 'Tai Chi Fingers as a Work of Art'. I was keen to find out how a reputed fighter might approach and incorporate boxing into their system, from someone who had worked closely with Chen Man-Ching.



Prior to my arrival I was informed the weekend sessions were going to be filmed for a DVD which served as collection of William's Chen's ideas thus far. In the boxing workshop we were taught many things about the ideas underpinning, and application of, various techniques. These included the idea of not reaching out and hitting something, instead having the energy come in and meet the person in order to absorb the object. There was an emphasis on the energy coming from the big toe (part of the three nails in the heel ball and large toe rooting idea). The jab was discussed in terms of pouring a cup of coffee to denote the late twist in the punch. The detail involved in energising the main index fingers when punching was really interesting. As boxers' hands are usually wrapped or encased within a fixed glove with the thumb on top, clenching the fist is not desirable. There was an interesting proposition of moving the ribcage and hips away from the arm, although these would remain covered and protected. There was also the idea of a hook coming down as if 'hammering a nail' rather than parallel to the floor. This meant that a great deal of power was added to the punch. William Chen then asked me and another participant to hold the pads whilst he hit both of them, and boy did he pack a punch (I think the demo is on the DVD). It was interesting to see golden cock stands on one leg transform into an upper cut. I did, rather embarrassingly, ask Grand Master Chen to sign my Chen Man-Ching book something I've never done in my life, which he kindly did.

I really liked my time spent with both Peter Ralston and William Chen. Both are incredibly thoughtful people, offering an alternative way of viewing boxing. Peter's methods made me think differently about how to approach boxing. Whilst the experience was in some senses alien to the boxing I had been learning at the amateur club, I did practice some of the principles when I returned to the gym and got some funny looks whilst attempting to throw a hand up in the air without power. I think Peter's ideas are sound, however you would have to be highly skilled (which I'm clearly not) in this in order to carry this off. By this time I was an ABA Assistant Coach with the club and rapidly became cognisant of the fact that it would take a great deal of time and faith on the boxers' and other coaches' part, to attempt to instil the principles Peter was advocating. Getting the basic feel for each stage Peter was promoting would take at least 6 months (dependent on skill level). Anyone who has been around an amateur gym will know that time is something that is not always available to the coaches and boxers. Interestingly, I was told that one of Peter's senior instructors had sparred with an ex-golden gloves champion and returned with a headache.

I was drawn to the ideas of William Chen and loved the idea of energy creating the shape of the move, not only in boxing but in other arts. On my return, I was keen to introduce the idea of a hook coming down in order to create more power. However, as an ABA Judge I soon realised that the boxer would not be able to score a point from this, as technically the fist from the hook has to impact square to the face. Unfortunately the angle of the hook would mean that this could not happen. However, I incorporated it into my own training.

I felt very fortunate to train with Peter Ralston and Grand Master William CC Chen. Both had something to add not only to my boxing, but to tai chi practice. There are recognised differences between the two exponents. Peter advocates 'switching off the muscle' in order to be as relaxed as possible, utilising innate strength. William Chen is aware that the body, particularly the hands, need to be relaxed, but energised and not

floppy. Interestingly, for single whip William Chen adopted a more traditional approach whereby the end position of the arm was 90 degrees to the body, reflecting the initial purpose of the move. Peter Ralston appeared more laissez-faire, stating that an inch or so behind did not matter.

Since my involvement with boxing I have trained in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and Krav Maga, but have always seen how these can be mutually informed by tai chi chuan and vice versa. I appreciate Kaiming for providing me with a wonderful foundation, whilst encouraging an inquiring mind with which to gain new experiences. There is still more to this 'chuan' stuff to explore.

Phil Shelton



The Low Down On Warm Up's

Every good Tai Chi class should start with some warm up exercises before form work commences. It's always good to vary them from week to week, and try a few new ones occasionally so that you and your classmates have to focus on what's happening to your body with the movements instead of just following each week by rote.

They not only loosen your limbs, they SHOULD loosen your mind.

So let's take a look at the why's and wherefore's of them.

By using a light intensity warm up regime prior to moderate or heavy exercise it allows the cardiovascular system to gradually redistribute the blood flow more gently than if moderate or heavy exercise were initiated from rest, which could have bad effects on the heart.

When exercise is initiated, the oxygen consumption of the heart muscle increases because it also is working harder to pump more blood.

It needs to get your blood flowing around the body especially to the muscles to warm them up and in doing that increase their elasticity which in turn will make them less susceptible to injury.

All major organs benefit from increased oxygen carried in the blood especially the brain, which after the warm ups will be called upon to focus for an hour or so on how the body moves and other intricacies of their Tai Chi class.

Make use of the time spent warming up to let your mind wander around the body feeling the loosening of the leg muscles, the lowering of the shoulders, the warmth travelling down the arms into your hands.



As the end of October and Halloween fast approaches, there is something great to look forward to. No, not yet another commercialised Americanism but the wonderful flood of pumpkins from which to make Pumpkin pie and some amazing pumpkin soups... Here is a soup recipe for you to try

Ingredients

- 4 tbsp olive oil
- 2 onion, finely chopped
- 1kg pumpkin or squash (try kabocha), peeled, deseeded and chopped into chunks
- 700ml vegetable stock or chicken stock
- 142ml pot double cream
- 4 slices wholemeal seeded bread
- handful pumpkin seed from a packet

Method

1. Heat 2 tbsp olive oil in a large saucepan, then gently cook 2 finely chopped onions for 5 mins, until soft but not coloured. Add 1kg peeled, deseeded and chopped pumpkin or squash to the pan, then carry on cooking for 8-10 mins, stirring occasionally until it starts to soften and turn golden.
2. Pour 700ml vegetable stock into the pan, then season with salt and pepper. Bring to the boil, then simmer for 10 mins until the squash is very soft. Pour the 142ml pot of double cream into the pan, bring back to the boil, then purée with a hand blender. For an extra-velvety consistency you can now push the soup through a fine sieve into another pan. The soup can now be frozen for up to 2 months.
3. While the soup is cooking, slice the crusts from 4 slices of wholemeal seed bread, then cut the bread into small croutons. Heat the remaining 2 tbsp olive oil in a frying pan, then fry the bread until it starts to become crisp. Add a handful of pumpkin seeds to the pan, then cook for a few mins more until they are toasted. These can be made a day ahead and stored in an airtight container. Reheat the soup if needed, taste for seasoning, then serve scattered with croutons and seeds and drizzled with more olive oil, if you want.

Tai Chi for Arthritis

An ancient Chinese exercise offers arthritis relief through slow, gentle movement.

For the uninitiated, tai chi may be a little daunting. The ancient Chinese art is hardly as mainstream as aerobics or the treadmill, but with its gentle, fluid movements and proven health benefits, it's a natural arthritis workout.

Matthew Bosman, 38, started taking tai chi classes after back surgery, as well as psoriatic arthritis and osteoarthritis (OA), left him unable to continue his vigorous gym workout routine.

"I was looking for something that was low-impact and not going to hurt," says Bosman of Palm Springs, Calif., who now takes two 45-minute tai chi classes each week. "Tai chi is very calming and peaceful. I'm really sceptical about talking about chi and all that, but it gives you a better energy."

Tai chi also offers plenty of other benefits. Recent studies have found that the slow, graceful exercise, which originated centuries ago as a martial art, can improve balance, reduce stress and offer arthritis pain relief.

A study released by researchers at Tufts Medical Centre in Boston, Mass., found that tai chi can specifically reduce the pain and physical impairment of people with severe knee osteoarthritis.

Betty Broderick, 67, of Cathedral City, Calif., acknowledges that she and her classmates might have looked silly when they were first learning their tai chi poses. "When we're in a room with mirrors, you can actually see how dorky you look," she says, admitting she prefers when the instructor takes the students outdoors for class.

But awkwardness aside, Broderick credits regular tai chi classes for lessening pain from knee OA and a long bout with polymyalgia rheumatica. "I can do things I didn't think were possible before," she says, happy that she can now take long walks and be on her feet without having to stop because of aching joints. "I can't say enough about tai chi; it changed my life."