



Tai Chi Newsletter

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Community Based Tai Chi & Chi-Kung for everyone

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The human muscle system

Each human body contains many muscles that hold it together, and allow for coordinated movement. These are attached to bones via connective tissue called tendons. So, whenever you move, the muscles contract and pull against those bones.

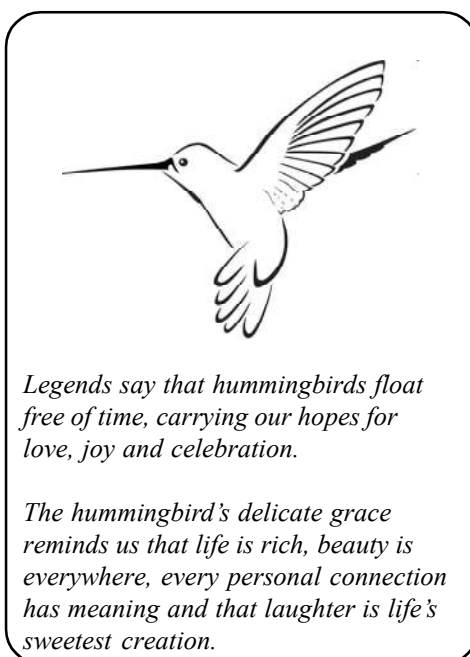
Muscles work in pairs-and in opposite directions-so as one contracts (becomes shorter), pulling against a bone, the opposing muscle stretches to allow movement. If muscles are taunt or contracted, it's impossible for them to relax. A relaxed muscle feels soft, whereas a contracted muscle is much firmer. In between being contracted and being stretched there is the position of ease-when your arm hangs loosely or your hand is not clenched but is soft and open. It is only when all your muscles are in the position of ease that you can be truly relaxed (sung).



Before you commence the form check these points——

- Are you frowning?
- Are your eyes screwed up
- Are your jaws tense and teeth clenched or relaxed.
- Are your neck and shoulders muscles locked and tense or relaxed and flexible
- Is your neck extended forward?
- Are you breathing deeply from your diaphragm via the stomach or in a shallow way from the top of your chest.

- Are your calf muscles and ankles tense or relaxed.
- Are your knees locked or relaxed.
- Then take a deep breath and exhale, feeling all the muscles “let go” of any tension remaining.



Legends say that hummingbirds float free of time, carrying our hopes for love, joy and celebration.

The hummingbird's delicate grace reminds us that life is rich, beauty is everywhere, every personal connection has meaning and that laughter is life's sweetest creation.

Have You Got the Spine for it?

Humans are among a very few animals that move through the world in an upright position. The position puts stresses on the spine not experienced by four legged animals. The natural curves in our spine are thus important in providing shock absorption and structural integrity during upright, seated or standing activities.

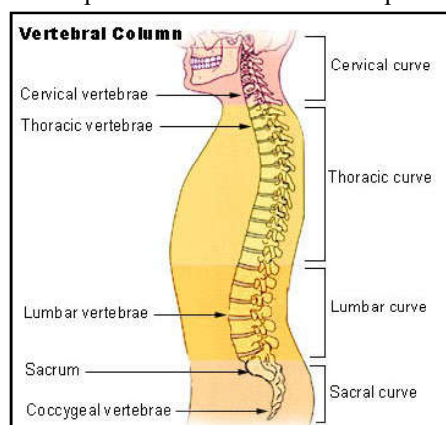
I remember when I first began training in tai chi and being told a few of the standard tai chi postural adjustments, one of which was “tuck your tailbone under and straighten you back” or words to that effect... but how correct is this? How is our spine designed to function?

Many people are unaware that, as humans, we have three natural spinal

curves that are formed in early childhood. We are born with one continuous C-shaped curve. As infants, when we begin to raise our heads, and later, when we push up on our hands to crawl, the concave (or lordotic) curves of the neck (the cervical spine) and low back (the lumbar spine) are formed. The convex curve of the mid-back where the ribs attach (the thoracic spine) is left over from the original C-shaped curve. Please note, some children walk before they crawl and never fully develop the spinal curves. The person with resulting straight spine (referred to as the ‘military spine’) is prone to neck and back problems as well as headaches related to structural stress.

A healthy lower back depends on good structural alignment, unrestricted range of joint motion, maintenance of the lumbar curve, and the support of a sufficiently strong lower-back and abdominal muscles. The practice of good posture while standing and sitting, along with daily exercise to maintain muscle tone and joint movement, will help to reduce the risks of lower back injury.

Tucking the tailbone is contrary to good back health as it can flatten the spines lumbar curve, just as over-arching the lower back can put strain on vertebrae and cause tension in the back muscles. In the practice of tai chi form and push-



hands the lower back with naturally tilt and release when changing weight and bending your knees. This action acts to mobilise the spine and feed the intervertebral discs, which work similar to a sponge.

Releasing the lower-back may be a better description than 'tuck the tailbone' as it aids natural positioning and promotes good spinal health.

The correct spine curves both act as a shock absorber and spring-like compressive power for tai chi application in all areas of life.



My Personal Journey (Larry's Student)

My journey began aged 14 when I was introduced to Shotokan Karate I progressed through dedication hard work & constant practice, & competition I finally achieved my black belt aged 21 I don't usually tell my story as I never feel I have earned the right to wear one as I was constantly humbled by those that came before me.

Then came the break

Back to nursing & having children. Over the years I was plagued with chronic pain after surgeries that went badly wrong & to this day I'm still under the hospital for yearly checkups. So I decided I needed to focus. A background of martial arts led me to research Tai Chi. I googled Tai Chi in Lancaster in 2014, The first name that came up was Larry Jones; I turned up for a one to one in Stilletto Heels (he never lets me forget this).

From that first meeting I was hooked A background of Karate then into Tai Chi!! What was the difference, it was Martial Arts??

I needed that discipline that structure. I couldn't do Gym work or running on the streets when martial arts had always been the focus which I'd neglected but found it again; my old Karate training came flooding back.

I launched myself into this little known art thinking it was just a bunch of elderly folk in a park doing exercise. Boy!! Was I wrong... Tai Chi has been the hardest art to learn for someone like myself who had a karate background

I've had to relearn everything. Larry once told me one day "Shell, don't try punching the middle out of that Tree"!!

Larry fed my appetite & gave me the opportunity to widen my understanding, knowledge & philosophy of Tai Chi through reading & discussion we even did a Radio Show together.

It is now a big part of my life; My pain is better (I have good & bad days). I have had to adapt my Tai Chi as I had a knee operation also last year. I enjoy Qigong. Shibashi, 8 Brocades, Fragrant Buddha these are my Go To every day practice. I practice Yang Cheng Fu 108 (not every day but seeing as I have learned the form I can have time off). I also train with John Bolwell & Dee Swift, and was honoured with a basic instruction qualification last year. Tai Chi has given me a sense of balance of understanding & also a sense of inner strength something which I wake up to everyday.

So that's basically my story

Larry & I continue to practice together when we can. The weather has been kind during this COVID19 Pandemic so we have some wonderful outdoor space. It's times like this when Tai Chi isn't just about getting up & practicing One has to dig deep & find that inner self to motivate. I've found that really hard to do but as the title says it's a Personal Journey which is ongoing.

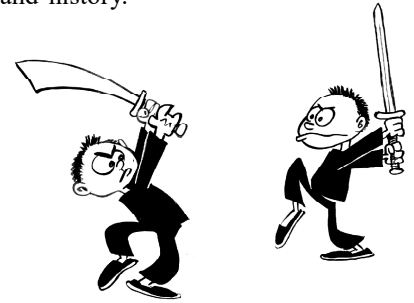
By Michelle Brown



A journey in Sword Study

While reading **Dr. Yang Jwang Ming's book Tai Ji Sword Classical Yang Style** I thought some of the information given would be of use and interest to those embarking on, currently studying or even those well versed in the study and history of Tai Chi sword.

First some sword shapes, their purpose and history.



There are many types of sword, the main being the Jian (straight-sword) and the Dao broadsword or sabre). Particular styles of Jian include:

The Wen Jian, Scholar's sword or female sword. It's long and light with a rounded tip, not commonly used in battle, more for decoration or in dances.

The Wu Jian. Martial sword or male sword, mainly used in battle.

The Wu Go Jian, a hooked sword designed to block other weapons and cut the enemies limbs or his horse's legs.

The Ju Chi Jian. The saw toothed sword, originated in the Wu Dynasty, 22-280AD the ragged edge was thought to do more damage to the flesh. There are two holes in the tip, resembling a snakes head and when swung makes a whooshing sound.

The She She Jian. Snake Tongue Sword with a wavy blade and a double tip, said to be for catching the opponent's weapon and increased damage to the flesh.

The Blood Groove - Xue Gou

Battle swords were usually cast with a groove down each side of the blade. The reason for this was thought to be that the penetrating sword could be held in the body by suction or by the surrounding flesh. The blood groove allowed air into the wound counter-

acting the suction effect. This would mean the swordsman lost no time in retrieving his weapon and was able to continue his battle.

The Sheath – Jian Qiao

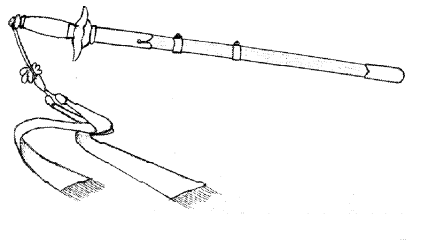
There are two types of sheath or scabbard, the scholar's sheath and the martial sheath.

The scholar's sheath is made of wood with an alligator or snake skin covering to make it waterproof.

The martial sheath is of metal making it stronger and can even be used for blocking and striking if needed.

Sword Tassel – Jian Sui

Tassels were usually only found on the Scholar's sword or dancing sword as they have no direct martial purpose. The Martial sword however, never had tassels as they changed the balance of the sword or could be grabbed by the enemy who would then have an element of control over the sword.



Taiji Sword Classical Yang Style.

Choosing a sword.

From the descriptions above, you will have an idea of what you wish to achieve with your sword practice; it must also be remembered the sword you pick should be around the length of the distance from your feet to the base of the Sternum (breastbone).

Sword Structure and Technique in Relation to Geography

Chinese history tells us the northern Chinese tended to be taller than the southern Chinese resulting in differences in use of the sword and the sword used.

Northern characteristics were: Swords were usually longer and thinner, on average the sword would be six inches longer than arm length and suited long to middle range combat.

Sword guards faced forwards so the opponent's weapon could be locked.

Northern sword styles were more offensive and attack oriented.

Southern Characteristics were:

Swords were around arm length but wider and heavier and more suited to closer combat.

The guards slanted backwards towards the hilt to slide the opponent's sword away.

The Sword Way

In ancient China the sword was widely respected. Not because its skills were difficult to learn but that the highest moral and spiritual qualities were required in order to attain the highest levels of proficiency.

In our study at The Kai Ming we first study the form and Chi-Kung (qigong), moving onto Push Hands (Tui-shou), which helps us achieve the knowledge needed to overcome an opponent (we lead them into their own downfall). In China originally, the use of other weapons was included in preparation for study of the sword so lots of preparation is required before embarking on sword work giving us resilience, experience, willpower, perseverance and endurance. This is all good training for the journey ahead, an old Chinese saying is,

"The sword is the lord of a hundred arms and the king of short weapons."

Because the sword is used for mainly defence, calmness must be learned along with patience and bravery. To achieve calmness meditation was used.

To instil the moral and 'spiritual' qualities mentioned earlier the sword master would tell inspiring stories encouraging loyalty and honour. Anyone who has ever entered the study of a martial art will very quickly learn respect is expected from the outset, respect to their teacher, their school, their practice partners, respect for themselves and the arts they are learning. The result is humility and when one is

humble one can respect the styles of other martial artists.

Another quality needed is righteousness, or martial virtue, (Wu De) and students were expected to act only in the interests of righteousness and justice; these traits, having been learned would be passed to future generations of students and the sword masters who taught them would be remembered as men and women of honour by the populace.

More next issue.

'Mountain in the distance.'

By Perry Bennett.

Useful links

Here are a few links to information regards COVID-19 and classes. I've shorted the links for ease

Guidelines for outdoor classes (we are aiming to start back in August)

<https://bit.ly/3iVGuSQ>

Guidelines for indoor classes (we are aiming to start back in September)

<https://bit.ly/3ffJCH4>

<https://bit.ly/2Zm5POI>

There will be a lot of new procedures regarding risk assessments, student numbers, masks, social distances, cleaning etc. and we will not reopen classes until guidelines and common sense allows.

I am currently running a FREE tai chi and qigong class live on facebook every Thursday morning at 10.30am.

You can join in at

<https://www.facebook.com/KaiMingTaiChi>

Also ask your instructor as they may be running small outdoor sessions.

Weekend training

Hopefully the Sunday sessions can reopen starting 13th September and the weekend camp will go ahead on 17th & 18th October.

For details, please contact Mark & Jenny on 07831 743737