

Kai Ming Association Newsletter

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EXAMINES WELLBEING ARISING FROM 5 MINUTES OF STATIC CHI KUNG



* feeling of well-being commences

** inverse feeling of well-being commences

MARTIALARTSANDSTILLNESS?

In Chinese Martial Arts , stillness lies between each activity. Even in the midst of furious fighting, we seek stillness.

It is like mortar to bricks and binds together the actions of the practitioners. We need silence between notes to blend into a melody.

For centuries Chinese martial arts has concerned itself with stillness.

But why?

Ancient warfare and battles demanded exhausting stamina.

Fear, adrenaline, anger, panic (fight or flight) hours of clashing swords, skimming spears, and hand to hand fighting, injuring and killing.

Then comes a lull in the barbarity; a few moments of quiet in the middle of the melee.

Or maybe it the peace will last an hour, a year, or perhaps just an instant.

Just as the army knows how to re-group, so does the trained warrior. He must turn inward to recuperate and regain vigor.

He must find where his hidden stores of energy lie.

Without this stillness he may not be able to go on.

There is an old saying that goes "Movement on the outside; quiet within, but it is only when we take time from the fray that we find this quiet, this stillness and access it to find our hidden strengths and energy.

In other words, without stillness, the warrior might not be able to go on.

Some martial art skills are based on movement.

Punching and kicking. Yet other skills grow out of stillness.

Like rooting and waiting. Keeping your control until the opponent makes his move. Master Koh Ah Tee of Kuala Lumpa, Malaysia often referred to tai chi as "patience boxing".

The muscles and ligaments used for running are not the same, are not utilized in the same manner as those employed for rooting and power generation.

Only when the great outer muscles fatigue and allow adjustment muscles to take over, only when the weight sinks and ligaments and tendons are called upon to support the frame, do we enter the realm of strength that grows inside and increases with every minute of standing. This is when strength can internalize, Therefore strength and calm can be gained from stillness, and something very important for the martial artist (and maybe for all people) - self-knowledge.

Quiet Standing is probably the most intensely self-analytical exercise you can do.

The muscles ache, the body craves movement, the mind may be beset by a thousand thoughts, you notice that annoying itch, you remember something that maybe you should have dealt with yesterday and you become anxious or angry.

Slowly, all this dissolves, into a world of attention to your body and mind.

You realise after a while that it is the stillness itself you are fighting. Each time you say relax to your mind and body, you do. Then you notice the ache in your hip or stiffness in your shoulders. Everything is trying to seduce you away from calmness.

Slowly the whole thing passes, and maybe later you feel that something that bothered you before no longer gets the same reaction. You are a little calmer, more open.

You can never be sure what made this so but maybe it was the standing, and this will make it worth repeating the next day, and the next; standing still and searching for stillness.

There are many questions martial artists are divided on, "are there meridian?, Is there Chi? But most accept there is stillness in that mysterious thing we call consciousness and we can all find it, standing quietly being one path to it.

If you watch beginners sparring (it's easier to see with them) nervous energy builds, they square off, adjust distance, anxious with expectation of who will kick or punch first, who will advance first. Eventually one will rush forward and even if no point is scored they feel relieved. It's a lot easier to charge in than face stillness...

A sign of a great martial artist is their ability to attack or retreat at great speed without hesitation, never appearing rushed they do just enough, even still during the explosive moments.

It is strange that we study combat in order to gain calmness. We very rarely have to fight, but we need to feel secure about our world and our safety yet we perfect only what we practice. Therefore, if we wish to learn calmness, we should practice calmness.

It will enable the student to ease the mind and re-energise the body.

Every day you can put it on like a comfortable old favourite jumper.

Just standing, noticing, sinking, feeling, exploring, moving things around your body, letting go, calming the mind, and just BREATHE.

THE REALM OF STRENGTH GROWS FROM DEEP INSIDE AND COMPOUNDS

WITH EVERY MINUTE OF STANDING.

I recently saw the movie 'American Sniper' and the greater skill, it seemed, wasn't being able to shoot but stillness. He lay on the roof waiting and thoughts running through his mind; fidgeting physically and mentally. Eventually he got up and wanted to be involved in 'the action'. When he came back to the US he was suffering with PTSD which he eventually overcame through the practice of stillness within himself and those he started to help. The greatest battle is always the one within.

TO TEACH OR NOT TO TEACH-That is the question?

I don't know many students of Tai Chi who began training with the intention of eventually becoming an instructor. It's something that seems to happen one of two ways. Either the teacher of your class notices a "certain something" about you during sessions and sees a "prospective assistant" to cajole into training up and helping out (which is a great way of extending your learning yourself). Or after a few years of patient and dedicated practice and exploring the art, you come to the realisation that maybe the next step is to be at the front of the class.

In both cases many people feel a little "unworthy" or have never been the type of person with the confidence to contemplate this move.

Well Tai Chi has a way of changing all that, especially if you have a good teacher yourself who will put that little extra into his classes to inspire you to want more.



I think I can safely say that most of the Senior instructors within our association had no thoughts of attaining this position. In fact we have several who are still in a state of shock at how much it has changed and added to their lives and now teach most days for our mainstream club, Kai Ming, and also for Painting the Rainbow our Rehabilitation section.

Don't get me wrong the journey to be at the front of the class should not be taken lightly. It is a commitment, it demands patience, dedication and continued learning.

I have left in my mind perhaps the most important attribute of all - **The right Personality**. You need to be able to motivate your students. Make your class a relaxing time with a scattering of humour. Turn up to class when it's pouring down with rain and still smile

when there are only 3 students waiting at the door, and don't take it personally. Have infinite patience and be able to empathise with beginners (we all had to start somewhere!) Be able to be approachable but professional and last but not least, love the art and culture of Tai Chi Chuan.

Teaching can be a good way to fund your continued learning with your own Sifu and in fact they may help you set up a class of your own; however if they do not feel you are ready to take the step into this area you must be patient until they do.

Here are some points you should consider before you take that step:

Evaluate your knowledge of the form and art you will be teaching.

Make sure you have general historical knowledge of Tai Chi and know your own lineage. Have a good understanding of the Tai Chi Classics.

Find a good location for the class, that's not too close to another teacher, with good parking and lighting for the winter months, one that has good access suitable for all age groups and abilities. One that's well heated in winter and aerated in the summer and last but not least, an affordable cost especially in the first few months whilst trying to establish your class and gain students.

Determine what the cost will be and how students will pay this i.e. weekly, monthly, 3 monthly and how: cash, card, standing order.

Remember if you choose weekly payments it could take time out of their training collecting this. Paying in bigger blocks shows commitment on their part to turn up each week, and you can pay your venue in advance to show your commitment.

Think about what you will teach and how you will teach it. Structure and continuity are important for your students.

Teaching will bring many challenges but also many rewards. It will enhance your own learning and practice and as one sifu once said –

“Learn from your students; they make the same mistakes you do, only louder!”

Nigel Sutton always used to say ***“The teacher is the taught”***. It really is a two-way street.



PRACTICE THROUGH IMAGINATION

The power of the mind is stronger than we realise. By using our imagination we can actually influence our actions and abilities. In a sort of modern scientific equivalent of Laozi's Tao Te Ching ***“Without going outside, you may know the whole world”***, Harvard neuroscientist Steven Kosslyn has shown that when people imagine something, parts of their brains becomes active, the very same parts that would become active if the action was actually taken; our brains cannot easily distinguish between imagining doing something and actually doing something.

Piano experiment

Neuroscientist Alvaro Pascual-Leone ran an experiment at Harvard Medical School where one group practiced playing a simple piano exercise and the other group imagined (visualised) playing, plus they were instructed to keep their hands still. The participants sat beneath a coil of wire that sent a brief magnetic pulse into the motor cortex of their brain, located in a strip running from the crown of the head toward each ear. The so-called transcranial-magnetic-stimulation (TMS) test allows scientists to infer the function of neurons just beneath the coil. In the piano players, the TMS mapped how much of the motor cortex controlled the finger movements needed for the piano exercise. What the scientists found was that after a week of practice, the stretch of motor cortex devoted to these finger movements took over surrounding areas like weeds spreading on a lawn. What was doubly fascinating was that the impact on the motor cortex was strikingly similar in the visualisation group.

Pascual-Leone wrote ***“Mental practice resulted in a similar reorganization of the brain”***. If his results hold for other forms of movement then mentally practicing your tai chi could lead to

improvement with less physical practice. Even more profound, the research showed that mental training has the power to change the physical structure of the brain.

Applying imagery in your tai chi practice

Relaxation is the first step in practising the application of active imagery in your tai chi practice. To start, start by creating a deep state of relaxation through mindful breathing. As you breath in, be aware of the sensation of you breath entering your nose and flowing naturally down into you lungs; notice your abdomen expand as you breath down into your dantien. Notice that as you allow your breath to naturally dissolve, your abdomen relaxes your body relaxes; from there you can allow your minds eye to scan you body looking for and releasing any tension as you go.

Once you have enabled your mind to quiet, you can focus on your tai chi form practice; start by imagining yourself standing in preparation to commence your form practice. If you become distracted by extraneous thoughts, begin again with you body scanning until all thought have passed.

Once ready, imagine moving through your form, being clear about each detail: where is your weight? The sensations of transferring from one leg to the other and so on... Continue this active imagery through each move of the form until you have completed. This can be taken one stage further by having a particular intention in your practice eg martial application, weight transference, compression etc.

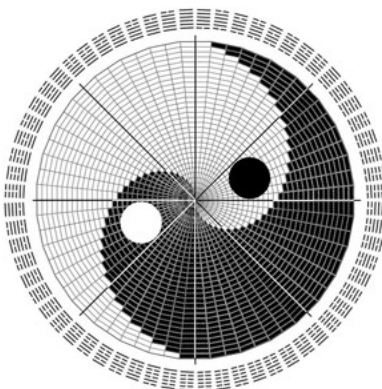
After completing this mental form practice, practice your form physically. How did this experience change your experience of your form practice? Maybe even alternate between practicing physically first then mentally first to experience the differences, if any. As you continue to practice you can choose to focus one once particular sense then another eg kinaesthetic, auditory and so on.

The old saying of *“where the mind goes, the chi goes”* can now find new depths of meaning.

Practicing with active imagination will help you remember your form more easily plus strengthen your body-being awareness, thereby strengthening your growing connections.

The Axle, the Wheel and other stuff

Another instalment from one of the Kai Ming instructors on their interpretation of the tai chi classics. This was written by Steve Taylor, an instructor from Bromsgrove and Hopwood classes.



The phrase:

“Stand like a perfectly balanced scale and move like a turning wheel”

I thought about the wheel first.

For a wheel to turn smoothly the axle needs to be straight.

A bent axle is not much use and nor is one which is catching on something.

If it's straight, upright and free from obstructions, it can do its job properly and the wheel will turn.

What if the waist is the wheel? – After all it has the ability to turn.

Then surely the spine would be its axle - if it's upright, loose and unrestricted, it can turn freely and the waist can turn; if it's bent, twisted or obstructed, it becomes stiff and inefficient.

But how could the spine be obstructed? Even simply raising or lowering our chin instead of suspending the head as if it was held by a thread from above alters the alignment of our spine.

Locking our legs out straight can cause the spine to curve putting pressure between the vertebrae and restrict movement. Likewise, if our knees are bent, there will be some tension and the spine tilts forward, again restricting movement.

Then my thought turned to the perfectly balanced scale.

For a scale to work correctly, it needs to be set down on a level surface.

Obviously our legs play their part, making a stable connection to the ground.

We can create a perfectly balanced scale if we stand with our feet shoulder width apart, legs neither straight nor knees deliberately bent and with our shoulders and arms relaxed. Imagine a thread suspended from above, the head sitting on top of our shoulders, not tilted.

By keeping our waist relaxed and loosened, our feet not only have power but our legs make our connection to the ground even more stable.

Sat atop this perfectly balanced scale, our waist (the wheel) can turn freely around the spine (its axle).

To further the analogy, imagine our arm is a spoke of the wheel. The Peng, or ward-off energy, is our springy rubber tyre quality.

Now imagine the wheel; if the axle can spin freely the wheel will turn if someone pushes on it. But the tyre doesn't stiffen. It remains springy. The wheel doesn't collapse; it turns and can bounce objects away.

To conclude, it is said that the waist is the well spring of your vital energy, and the commander of your body.

All our movements originate here. Changes in full and empty derive from the movement of the waist.

This line from the classics forms the basis of Push Hands and many of the applications of Tai Chi Chuan.



Without relaxation, the energy rising up from the ground cannot be felt.

He believes that the earth's energy is Yin and the sun's energy is Yang.

They want to come together because yin and yang naturally compliment and change each other to create a balanced greater Qi or Da Qi

CHESTNUT, CHICKPEA, AND CHORIZO SOUP

Serves 4



3tbsp olive oil
1 large onion, finely chopped
2 celery sticks, finely chopped
1 large carrot, finely chopped
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1tsp cumin seeds
150g (5 ½) cooking chorizo, sliced
1ltr (1 ¾ pt) light chicken or vegetable stock
½ a 400g tin of plum tomatoes
150g (5 ½ oz) chestnuts, vacuum packed
1 x 400g tin chickpeas, drained and rinsed
Sea salt
Freshly ground black pepper

A handful of parsley and a pinch of chopped chilli (optional), to servr

Heat the oil in a large, lidded pan and gently saute the chopped onion, celery and carrot until softened.

Add the chopped garlic, cumin seeds and sliced chorizo and cook for a few more minutes. Pour in the chicken or vegetable stock and the tomatoes, then stir in the chestnuts and chickpeas.

Cover and cook gently for a further 20 minutes, by which time everything will be cooked and meltingly soft.

Transfer the soup to a food processor and pulse briefly (or use a hand blender) to a chunky consistency-you don't want it too smooth.

Season to taste with a little salt and freshly ground black pepper and serve with a scattering of parsley.

If you like it extra hot, try adding another pinch of chilli... You could ask Ben for one of his ghost chillies...

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Tai Chi Summer Camp 1st & 2nd August 2015

The day will run

10am to 12.30pm with a 10 minute break about 11.30am.

Lunch 12.30 to 1.30pm – light lunch provided

1.30pm to 4pm with a 10 minute break about 2.45pm

** Optional extra session on push-hands from 4pm to 5pm'ish on Saturday

Cost

The cost will be £40 per day (Kai-Ming members) £60 (non-members)

** Optional push-hands session £10 per person.

Content of the Summer camp

Saturday will focus on Tai Chi walking stick; you will learn the walking stick form and applications. The walking stick is an excellent and practical weapon for our modern times, it is both graceful and practical.

Sunday will be form to function where you will have the opportunity to review the 'wheres and whys' the Cheng Man Ching form is structured the way it is, professor Cheng's focus on being upright and Sung (relaxed). I will apply the concept of 'teaching by inches' to highlight whole-body connection, plus the ripple and role effect of 'one part moves all must move' from the classics. Form to Function will give you the opportunity to explore the applications of both stillness and movement in practical self-defence, be that in daily life or against an opponent.

Who can attend

The content is suitable for all levels of tai chi student from complete beginner (just started) to Instructor as you will learn how to apply the content to your developing appreciation of tai chi as a whole art.

Any questions?

If you have any questions regarding suitability, content, location etc etc please call Mark and Jenny on 0121 251 6172 or email markpeters@kaiming.co.uk

IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT LUNCH

We will be providing FREE refreshments and a light lunch. There will be vegetarian and non-vegetarian options. If you do have any specific dietary requirements then please bring that with you. There is a microwave on-site if needed.

Location

Hopwood Community Centre, Redditch Road
Hopwood. B48

