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Tai Chi Newsletter

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FREE ZOOM Tai Chi & Qigong CLASSES

The classes have been going well and well attended. I'm teaching qigong to start the class, then moving on to form practice and development.

Sessions will initially be on a Thursday morning at 10.30am and numbers strictly limited. Please email for the zoom login to:

markpeters@kaiming.co.uk

Cheng Man Ching on the 'Constant Bear'



At the end of January, I demonstrated 'constant bear' to connect the body during form practice. I was first introduced to the 'constant bear' exercise in 1991 in Kuala Lumpur,

Malaysia by Master Koh Ah Tee. He is a dedicated practitioner of Cheng Man Ching's tai chi and an initiated disciple of Masters Lau Kim Hong, Tan Ching Ngee and Wu Guo Zhong. We would practice the exercise at every training session, to connect the body in readiness for form practice

Also, in Prf. Cheng's words:

"I bequeath the Constant Bear movement to the elderly, the sick, and the frail. It is a wonderful, traditional exercise which is both simple and easy. You can also use it for self-defence until you are years old. All this is easily obtained. Although my explanation is short and simple, if you understand its principles and practice with perseverance, after as few as one hundred days of moving your chi, you will notice a marked improvement in health and strength and no longer need to worry about illness. It is truly a 'sacred raft' to strengthen our bodies and bears no semblance to other well known yet inferior exercises"

Cheng Man Ching, Master of Five Excellences, p. 113-117; translation by Mark Hennessy. Frog Books, 1995.

A good friend, James W. Chan, from Philadelphia, recently translated an interview with Prf. Cheng and gave me permission to share this with you.

When Professor Cheng Man-Ching was in Taiwan, someone asked him for instructions on 'Constant Bear' (xiang jing). The following is a translation of the discourse.

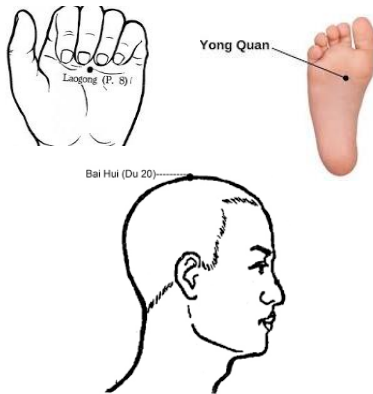
Question: "Constant Bear" is the simplest, easiest, and ingenious exercise from ancient China. It wards off illness, prolongs life, and strengthens the body. Please tell us how it can be used in self-defense?

Cheng Man-Ching: Constant Bear not only strengthens the body and wards off ailments, but it is also a 'yin' move of Taijiquan. In contrast, 'Brush Knee' is a 'yang' move. Years ago, when I was Director of the Martial Arts Academy of Hunan Province, I went to see a good friend. Before I could get to his door, a dog attacked me abruptly from behind me. Momentarily, I had no idea what was going on. Before I could ramp up a full "Brush Knee" move, I simply brushed off the dog with my hand. Instantly, the dog went away in silence. The next day, when I went to my friend's house, he said: "The dog cannot open its mouth to eat." This is how to use Constant Bear for self-defense.

Question: You say that if we practice Constant Bear long enough, we'll be able to drive our qi (yun qi) and turn a sick body healthy again. We need not worry about getting awful diseases. What do you mean by 'driving our qi'?"

Cheng Man-Ching: The goal of driving our qi with Constant Bear is to "connect the five centres" (wu xin xiang tong). It means driving the qi to flow through the body and connect all 5 acupoints in our body. These 5 acupoints include the 2 "bubbling well" acupoints of your feet (yong quan); the 2 acupoints in the centres of your palms (lao gong); and the acupoint in the apex of your head called bai hui. Constant Bear connects the qi in the body by unblocking all the pathways and lanes through which it travels. When you can connect qi flow

with all these 5 acupoints, qi suffuses your whole self and assures good health. [Interpreter: I have added the illustrations below to show the location of the five acupoints.]



Additional point #1. As you turn your waist left to right, relax the instep of your foot. The bottom of the foot adheres to the ground. It draws the qi or strength of the earth and directs it to the centre of your right palm. As it moves, you will feel a clear, smooth and coherent sensation of heat, expansion, numbness, pain or even itch.

Additional point #2. When you make left-right turns, you need to have a mental picture of what you want the turn to look like. You are not turning mindlessly in a willy-nilly manner. Rather, you turn as if you were rotating around the axis of an imaginary “root” that comes in from the top of your head and which traverses through the centre of your body. This imaginary “root” may feel like it suddenly appears and then, just as suddenly, disappears. You must direct the qi that travels down this imaginary “root” to connect to the centres of your palms as well as your bubbling wells. Pay attention to achieving the ideal state of vertical qi flow. As you turn your hips, your head must turn with your navel in perfect alignment. This will direct the “insubstantial” spirit (qi) to reach the apex of your head (xu ling ding jing). At the same time, keep your sacrum and coccyx upright in alignment. As your qi rises to the top of your head, you attain perfect connectedness and spiritual transcendency (wei lu zhong zheng shen guan ding).

Question: How about breathing? How should we breathe?

Cheng Man-ch’ing: Breathing helps you drive the flow of qi in your body. Remember: you are “moving” your qi. You are not “creating” or “refining” qi. For beginners in Constant Bear, breathe normally and naturally just as you do in practicing Tai Chi. Breathe in a quiet, slow, fine, and long manner (jing man xi chang). Once you’ve practiced Constant Bear to an expert level, breathe in as you shift your weight (your centre of gravity) and breathe out as you turn your hips.

Question: You say that Constant Bear is thus named because that is how a bear constantly walks. You’ve not talked about what we do with our arms and hand? Please elaborate on this.

Cheng Man-Ching: How you move your hands and arms is a testament to your deft use of them. In Taijiquan, one does not move one’s arms as if they were “moving” on their own accord (tai ji quan bu dong shou). This applies to Taijiquan as it does to Constant Bear. Your two arms don’t move in Constant Bear. Rather, it’s better that you follow the ancient Taoist guiding principle of merging your energy and spirit (bao yuan) to permeate your physical being (shou yi). This way, you attain a feeling of calm and oneness. You feel you’ve “returned” to being your primal, undifferentiated self (bao yuan shou yi). This feeling of bliss you can achieve if you concentrate your mind and energy (qi or chi) in the dan tian.



For what Purpose?

The aim of Kai Ming Association for Tai Chi Chuan is to encourage and develop a love for the exploration and practice of Tai Chi Chuan as expounded by Prf. Cheng Man Ching. He strove for the essence of the art, not to mimic others; he practiced out of love, not ego. He encouraged the development of those around him without holding back.

With this in mind, I came across the quote below which I hope touch you as they did me.

by Jenny Peters

“Even though our path is completely different from the warrior arts of the past, it is not necessary to abandon totally the old ways. Absorb venerable traditions into this new Art by clothing them with fresh garments, and build on the classic styles to create better forms”. (how good is that!)

Taken from THE ART OF PEACE

by Morihei Ueshiba



Rose Coloured Glasses, Or How To Unwrap A Brick !!!!

Those of you who have read my articles associated with Tai Chi may have noticed the lack of them over the last year (some may feel this to be a bonus!) however good things don’t last forever and I’m back.....

I can only explain my absence by saying the time has been spent reflecting on my Tai Chi journey, and where I am ‘at’. Writing about the art has never been a problem for me in the past, but because of certain instances and attitudes I have discovered in the world of Tai Chi Chuan, I felt the need to step back and reassess my own feelings and try to understand these people I have encountered. I have had to acknowledge that even Tai Chi cannot escape the internal problems of

all Martial Arts i.e. the wrong people in the wrong art at the wrong time for the wrong reasons. The following article may reflect some of my disappointments, but also my hopes for the road ahead, and the need for us all to sometimes be still, and reflect before moving on again

Before someone trod on my rose coloured glasses, I had a long honeymoon with Tai Chi.

Like most beginners my husband and I looked with awe and admiration at our teacher and his masters. We were inspired by their dedication and skill, and felt that they opened many closed doors of ignorance to a better understanding of what the art held in store for us, if we worked hard and had the desire to want more than the average night school class could provide.

I thank them for implanting that vision, but I now realise, some years on, although their exterior packaging was excellent, **HOWEVER YOU WRAP A BRICK, IT IS STILL A BRICK!!** (one of my favourite sayings at the moment)

It's understandable that when we first commence training, in anything, we are susceptible to this outward appearance of worth, otherwise we would not start at all. We value our instructor's expertise and hopefully they have a reputation as a good and reliable person.

If I say when we formed our club **KAI-MING** (open-minded), the other choice of title was **BEWARE THE BRICK!!** need I say more. If we could have translated it into Chinese, there would have been no contest for the title

Tai Chi seems to have within the art, many pedestals, with "Masters" teetering on them, elevated there, by various avenues. Possibly the main

misleading factor is the mystical propaganda surrounding it. We have come to believe that anyone involved for a long period of time, will have a definite understanding of the essence, plus the "GOOD HEART" of the Taoist and will guide us with skill and humility, in the hope that one day we can attain their level, and in time pass it on to the next generation.

Forget it! Unfortunately, this does not apply to some. The general rule appears to be, if they started out on the Tai Chi journey, as an arrogant self-worshipping waster, you can bet your life they still are. The art can do many things for you, but a personality transplant is not one of them!!

To the average student who may only stay for a while, this person may do no lasting damage, but if, as we did, you want a lifelong relationship with the art, it would be devastating to one day "unwrap the brick".

Fortunately, I now realise that these people are eventually of no consequence. You hopefully find them out, and move on. Thankfully there are Masters I have met, who by their sheer goodness, inside and out, have made me feel humble in their presence.

The one who springs to mind at times of disillusionment, and there have been many, was a Master who I met, on the occasion of his first trip away from Malaysia where he was born.

He trained every day for hours in the early morning when it was cool, and again in the evening after work, before retiring around 9pm, to rise at 5am to begin again.

Above his bed was an iron bar to reach up and grasp, as a conditioning aid for extra training. In the daytime he had a heavy metal bowling ball on a stand, that he picked up and put down

constantly when not busy, even his feet where not idle, as he had a device to exercise them whilst sitting!!

He did not hold open classes, and had only one private student, he had no desire to become revered by others, he trained for himself, and the benefits he believed he could obtain from his art. Then the news came that his elderly teacher had died, and as former disciples met each other again after the funeral, he was deeply worried when he heard them discussing how much of their master's teachings they had forgotten. It was at this moment that he realised, he could remember it all. He also knew then that if he did not pass it on, it could be lost forever. He came thousands of miles to England leaving his village for the first time, because of his love and belief in his art.

The other side of the coin is the Master who although has many skills and has trained with many teachers, sells his art at greatly inflated prices, keeping the best for him, and using the money to avert the need for a "real job".

Neither my husband or any of the instructors in our club teach for a living, because to do this and support a mortgage it is inevitable that you have to "Prostitute" yourself to a certain degree, by the need to obtain sufficient funds. Suffice to say the only one of our instructors who told me at the onset of his training that he could see a good living to be made, once he had obtained his grade, has been voted out of our association because of his bad attitude and other deeds. He is now teaching for a club where some of the members are like minded. What was it I said about Wasters?

I suppose it's being too idealistic to have expected Tai Chi to escape the politics that other martial arts attract, the secret is not to get caught up in them, and allow it to detract from the

pleasures you are obtaining in training, something that I have not always found easy.

Teachers who have no confidence in their skills or worse, those who have too much, would eventually be found out one hopes. I once heard it said that Great Masters Go Unnoticed which can be translated to mean that they have no need to be flash, no need to prove anything to themselves or anyone else. It saddens me how people are so easily misled, and this does not only apply to newcomers to the art. One of our students who had trained with us for some years, but due to work commitments had to leave, eventually found another class nearer his home, which had not long ago been set up. When my husband saw him a few months later and asked how he was getting on, he was told he hadn't been able to "sit in" until he had made a commitment by paying £100 term fee, and added that some of the exercises he had been shown made his knees hurt. These exercises were in contradiction to those a teacher had taught him in our club, a club recognised by the governing bodies for Tai Chi Chuan. When we suggested that he should know good from bad by know, he amused us by saying his Sifu must know what he is doing "because he is CHINESE". How long must this cultural blindness go on? If my son went to China would he be regarded as a Cricket Master, just because he played a little in his youth There are well known cases in England, one where a guy who worked in a Chinese restaurant spotted an opening in the Tai-Chi market, and developed his own system, which should be known as Infinite Rubbish!!! although he did initially claim it was a "Family System". Maybe I should be an authority on Fagots and Peas as I live

quite near to the "Black Country" where they are a choice dish.

Whenever we begin new classes, we have found it to be good policy to invite prospective students to a free demonstration class. They can see what they will be getting or at least the potential of what they can hope to achieve. Questions can be asked, credentials checked, misconceptions cleared and medical problems discussed. Those who were unsure will now be able to make an informed decision, and others will have saved themselves money by attending.

By Jenny Peters



Benefits of Breathing Exercises

Deep breathing can help restore diaphragm function and increase lung capacity. The goal is to build up the ability to breathe deeply during any activity, not just while at rest.

Deep breathing exercises can also lessen feelings of anxiety and stress, which are common for someone who experienced severe symptoms or was admitted to a hospital. Sleep quality may also improve with these breathing exercises.

Diaphragmatic Breathing (Belly Breathing)

Deep breathing restores lung function by using the diaphragm. Breathing

through the nose strengthens the diaphragm and encourages the nervous system to relax and restore itself.

When recovering from a respiratory illness like COVID-19, it's important not to rush recovery

Anyone can benefit from deep breathing techniques, but they play an especially important role in the COVID-19 recovery process. The exercises can be started at home during self-isolation and easily incorporated into your daily routine.

Humming

Humming while exhaling helps increase nitric oxide production in the body. Nitric oxide helps with neural plasticity (building and repair of the nervous system) and it dilates blood vessels, enabling more oxygen to be delivered throughout the body. Humming is also calming and soothing, it reduces stress and it can help the patient remain in restoration mode.

1. Sit upright on the edge of your bed or in a sturdy chair.
2. Place your hands around the sides of your stomach.
3. With your lips closed and your tongue on the roof of your mouth, breathe in through your nose and pull air down into your stomach where your hands are. Try to spread your fingers apart with your breath.
4. Once your lungs are full, keep your lips closed and exhale while humming, making the "hmmmmmm" sound. Notice how your hands lower back down.
5. Again, inhale through your nose, then exhale through your nose while humming.
6. Repeat for one minute.