



# Tai Chi Newsletter

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## Community Based Tai Chi & Chi-Kung for everyone

*Improvement cannot always be measured, it is something you feel*

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Stephanie Franziska Scholz

### COVID lockdown easing

The government has announced its plans for lockdown easing in England, and details can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-sets-out-roadmap-to-cautiously-ease-lockdown-restrictions>

Key dates for us, based on the guidelines, are outdoor classes can start week beginning 29<sup>th</sup> March, from 12<sup>th</sup> April limited indoor sessions, and 17<sup>th</sup> May indoor classes. Please remember to always check local rules and follow the COVID safety rules.

### Online zoom

We will continue with free zoom classes on Thursday mornings at 10.30am until the end of March. If you can't join us on Thursdays, the sessions are uploaded to our COVID youtube play at: <https://bit.ly/3uZsa1L>

### Zoom evening class?

If you are interested in an evening paid zoom class (£5 max.) that would run through to the end of May, please let me know. Email me at [markpeters@kaiming.co.uk](mailto:markpeters@kaiming.co.uk)



### Standing with Purpose

On a recent zoom class, Steve Taylor did a session on Zhan Zhuang (standing post) that was really well received. There is an ongoing debate on the value and purpose of Zhan Zhuang. Some say it is essential and some say it goes against the flow of what tai chi is about; some say stand for a few minutes, some say 30+ minutes per day!

I remember feeling/being tortured by teachers when asked to stand in the basic (wuji) posture and then told to hold various postured form the form for what seemed like eons. So for what purpose?

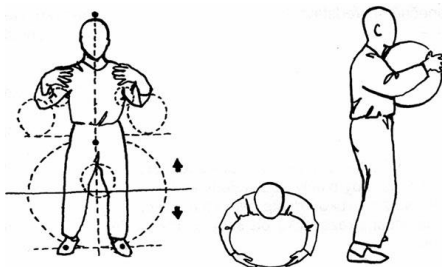
Correct standing is a mindful/meditative process but then so are all aspects of tai chi chuan yet the rest focus on flow it seems. Here let us consider the ancient say "Stillness in Motion, Motion in Stillness"; stillness has unity in it. For me, seeking stillness in motion has a great deal to do with equilibrium, and hence with optimizing alignment and postural stability. If you read Yang Chengfu's instructions for the beginning form, he makes a very clear case for using the beginning posture of "standing in stillness" to take stock of the essential postural requirements before proceeding to the moving form. He suggests that attending to one's core of stillness and stability is the key to managing the movement of an opponent—a point he also made in his tenth essential. Regarding the beginning form, Yang Chengfu said, ***"People all too easily neglect this posture, and really do not know the method of its practice or its application."*** In like manner, after explaining the requirements of the beginning posture, Fu Zhongwen wrote in his book

***"The greater part of the important points for the preparatory posture applies to the movements of the entire form. That being the case, this posture is the foundation for all of the movements that follow."***

That being said, the admonition to seek stillness in motion always suggests me to the converse: seek motion in stillness. I think one cannot honestly take stock of 'standing still' without recognizing the movements that are taking place—however slight they may be. Equilibrium is a process, not a state. I recently read some interesting material in a book on kinesiology regarding "postural stability":

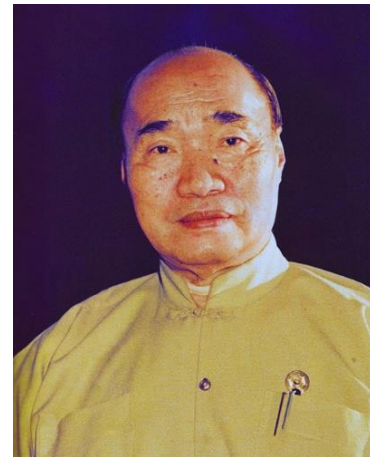
Hellebrandt (1940) was one of the first to demonstrate that even the erect standing posture is not literally static. "Standing," she concluded, "is, in reality, movement upon a stationary base." Her experiments using scales and a reaction board revealed that the centre of gravity did not remain motionless above the base of support, no matter how still the subject attempted to stand, but moved forward, backward, and sideward. This motion indicated that the subjects were constantly swaying. When the swaying was prevented by artificial means, there was a tendency to faint. Thus, the involuntary swaying was seen to serve the purpose of a pump, aiding the venous return and ensuring the brain of adequate circulation for retaining consciousness.

--Nancy Hamilton, et al., *Kinesiology: Scientific Basis of Human Motion*, 8e, (2008, McGraw-Hill), p. 394



With this in mind, the basic premise for standing, is the development of the sensing/awareness of the connection of the yong-chuan (bubbling well) all the way up to the bai-hui (top of the head). This connection indicates the total unity of one's body, rather than as disjointed components of the body (e.g. Bottom half separated from the top half, hands moving independently etc.). Standing and releasing tensions through the body, as they appear, both strengthens the natural compressive flow of the body and builds whole body awareness. To relax under pressure is one of the key aims of tai chi, be this in combat or in daily

life. I love the saying "learn to eat bitter before you can taste the sweet" which is also reflected in Prof. Cheng's words "invest in loss". There is no short cut, you have to put the time in so start with a few minutes and build up but be consistent; I remember somebody telling me a favourite joke of Master Chu King Hung – as he walked through a park with students one asked "why is that man standing by the tree?" to which he replied "that's his standing post exercise to build his tai chi". When they passed by again an hour or so later, the man was still there and the student looked amazed. Master Chu looked and said "Oh, it must be his day off today...." He loved the irony in that when he didn't have to go to work he would stand still because that wasn't work.....



### Q&A Huang Sheng Shyan

*How should we practice taijiquan (Tai Chi Chuan) in order to reach accuracy?*

The gap between accurate and non-accurate achievement is wide. Remember the words of the ancient Taijiquan master Wang Zongyue, that the body must be naturally and vertically balanced, and that one must bear in mind the principles of being relaxed, rounded, and aware of the various parts of the body. During practice of the form, one must be careful, conscious or alert, observant, and must feel where one is moving. Otherwise there is form without substance and deception of others. To achieve accuracy, the principles of Taijiquan must be followed, in addition to having correct methods of practice. A good master is necessary, coupled with one's own constant research. The art must be learned progressively; one must be on firm ground first, before advancing to the next step. Personal

requirements are also important. One must be determined, confident, persevering, and motivated. One must have a secure means of livelihood and a normal environment; these, coupled with learning and practice, and a clear, thorough understanding of the principles—all this will lead to achievement of accuracy. This is in contrast to those who want to learn fast, who concern themselves with the external forms and who learn and practice sporadically. Those who hope to learn first and be corrected later do not realize that this is worse than having a new person learn from scratch. Others take the principles of Taijiquan lightly or superficially and liken the art to a common exercise, drill, or dance.

All of these cases have form but no substances. One's body must be likened to a perfect machine where a wrong spare part will affect the operation of the machine. The founder of Taijiquan said, "achieving the Dao is important, acquiring skill in the art is secondary; but not learning my Dao, he is not my student". Therefore, also important are honesty, righteousness, and a good moral character.

For me this question and answer explains the importance of mindful practice without the distractions of life's daily worries, impatience or aims of self-aggrandisement. Once these are removed from the equation then the body and mind can focus on developing the inner skills of taijiquan (Tai Chi Chuan) or as Willie Lim calls it '**moulding into the form**'. Steven Covey is often quoted as saying "begin with the end in mind" which can be applied here as 'practice with intention', what is your aim? To feel natural balance, to play the postures and see where they lead, to discover martial possibility, accuracy, to... Well, whatever you choose! As GM Cheng says "form without function is no form at all". This does not mean just fighting; it too means what is your aim! To practice without intention is to play an empty dance; the classics are a guidebook of intentions you can play with as are Huang's 5 loosening exercises. Accuracy is not an outside shape it's an inside feel; when the feel is right the shape and application becomes naturally correct. The advanced monthly classes I run aren't about learning new forms or techniques; they are about developing a deeper practical understanding of tai chi (Taijiquan) as a living art. What is your aim? You can change it by the way, as you no doubt will as you train more and more. An aim gives you the

ability to develop accuracy, well how can you be accurate if you don't know what you're striving to be accurate at!

The wonderful thing is once you have planned your journey's end (the aim) you are free to enjoy the journey and discoveries made along the way.



### **The Importance Of The Five Loosening Exercises from Master Huang Sheng Shyan.**

By Master Willie Lim

As exponents of the 37, from the Lineage of GM Cheng Man-Ching, the form needs to be looked at with an acute eye. Many an exponent thinks that learning the form means they are on the way there??! On the way there but how far ahead. Little do people realise that within the 37 moves are hidden the 108. Where I am often asked? I change and mould as I move along the form that must be refined and refined. How do I go about this? Master Huang has left us the five loosening exercises that with proper execution of them, and knowing where they fit into the form, we can refine the form and move ahead in the 37. What do the loosening exercises involve? The Chinese translation is "Hue-Shou" meaning throwing hands, hence you get lead astray if you interpret as such. "Throwing hand" is just a simple phrase to describe the refinement that must go into the exercises when you perform them. The best way to understand how these exercises are performed is to look at two different analogies. Take rhythmic gymnastics where the girl plays with the ribbon; that is Tai chi at its best. The line you have to remember here is the girl never moves the ribbon. The next analogy is the weightlifter cleaning the weight. What is common here? Both are identical muscle activities. How do you relate one to the other and where are they the same? The same sequential motion of the muscles are in play. This is what you have to look for when training the 5 loosening exercises, so they in turn fit into the 37 and refine the form. I believe today that without

understanding these exercise one cannot develop “ting jing” or listening energy. Differentiate the straight from the curve, full and empty, connect and disconnect, torque and compression. These are some of the principals that are involved.

Take the rotation exercise or No.1 - What is involved? How do you differentiate the straight from the curve here? When is one arm full and the other empty. Does the body and the arm move at the same time? What are the joints that have to be lined up when one sits into one side? How is the arm 'brought' up and how it is let 'down'. Do I really move the arm? When does the caving of the body come in? Do I really cave in or do a “counter rotation cave in” (sink the chest, pluck the back). Where does the compression and the torque come in? There is more and more I could go on.....

This is how you have to look at the loosening exercise and in turn fit them in to your form to really move on. Tai chi is based on simple principles that have to be honed into the body. It is never easy because it needs time and guidance from someone who is ahead of you to guide you along that path. Just look at master Huang on YouTube. Look at other tai chi Masters. Do they even ever come close to him? For your information master Huang is the one who taught the founder of Goju karate. Tai chi is a journey which is full of twist and turn. It is not as many think, collecting forms, while that has its place as well. Be critical of every small change and enjoy the journey, because it is a lifetime's work moulded into the 37.

# 氣功

## How to Start Your Qigong Journey

by Sue Dunham

If you're here, then qigong (pronounced chee gung) has probably already come onto your radar. You may want to start trying it NOW. Read on before leaping into action!

For avoidance of doubt, the simplest translation of qigong is energy work. A more helpful 'translation' might be

Chinese exercise for health. It's less known than the more popular Tai Chi Chuan (a martial art) but qigong is something that you could consider if your primary interest is in health, mental or physical.

Many come to qigong via Tai Chi Chuan, liking the repetitive exercises and meditations that are typical of qigong they have found embedded in their Tai Chi class. Others pick up on the scant media coverage: qigong recently featured – briefly – on Countryfile

Or perhaps it has been recommended by your acupuncturist or an enlightened health professional often to help you manage the stress of a chronic condition.

However, you come to qigong, please be assured that you will be welcomed and that a good instructor will be able to teach you within your health limitations. Much qigong can be done seated, completely without compromise. I have seen students with Dementia and Downs syndrome embraced in classes.

So how do you start your qigong journey?

First, be clear on what you want.

- Classes for your own benefit
- Classes that lead to a qualification, possibly to teaching
- Second, where do you wish to learn
- Online
- Locally
- Or might you be prepared to be 'geographically and financially inconvenienced' as Leonard Cohen said!
- Third, what type of person are you?
- I'll be happy with just a basic understanding, following along in a class will be fine
- I'll probably want to know a bit more
- I'm willing to train independently
- I'm interested in exploring the meditation and deeper energetic work
- I really want to study with the best teacher in this country/in the world

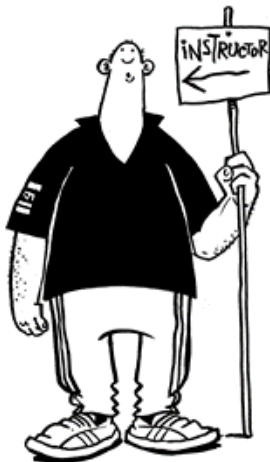
I know students of all these types and each has their own character and life situation that drives their journey. Most students fall into the first and second categories.

It is only worth considering how to find a suitable teacher, in my opinion, if you have clarity on the above 3 questions.

There is a quote from the Dao De Jing 'A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step'. Here are a few pointers to help you with that first step:

- Qigong teaching is not regulated so you need to use your own judgement or follow a recommendation
- You will not be 'taught' by free online videos.
- Find out whether there is a local school or teacher
- You will probably need to try a class, online or in person, to see if it is right for you
- We all had to start once so there is no need to feel uncomfortable or inadequate.
- Instead, focus on absorbing the atmosphere and protocol observed in the class. There may, for example, be no opportunity to ask questions – and yet somehow they will be answered.

Qigong is a challenging subject which will provide you with a lifelong interest so good luck with finding a school and teacher that is right for you!



## Getting it Right

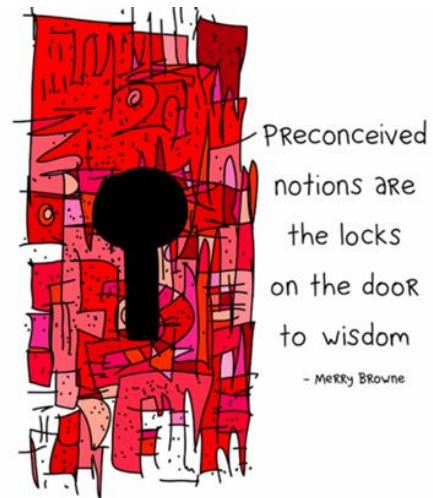
Recently at a class somebody made a comment about getting the level of instruction correct for the people in the group and it made me consider what is it that draws people to learning tai chi and what is it that makes a good teacher?

You may think on the face of it that a good tai chi has to have an in-depth knowledge of the art, an ability to answer virtually all questions without hesitation, to be able to spot the errors and quickly make corrections, to be beyond reproach in the quality of their own tai chi and so on...

From my perspective, I have not found this to be true; for me a good teacher: inspires you to want to learn, they don't

teach answer but lead a student to discover their own answers, they identify expectations in both the student and themselves and understands that it can be those expectations that hold us back. If you are a teacher for a moment, ask yourself what are you teaching by your actions? Compliance, art-by-rote, that learning is difficult or are you teaching constant curiosity, learning can be fun, for what purpose? As a student what is your inner teacher (you) teaching you as the same rules apply.

I love the term 'pacing expectations' as for me it means 'getting in step with' the expectations of myself and whoever I am working with. I always ask myself "For what purpose?" this ensures the training has an intention even if the intention is HAVE FUN.



## Open Mind (Kai Ming)

The mind is like a parachute - it works best when it is open.

How quickly we make assumptions, jump to conclusions and close our mind. How easily we form and hold fast to our opinions and then close our mind. How fast do we make a judgement, slap on a label and then close our mind.

A closed mind never knows the delight of playing with possibilities, being enlightened by others point of view or enjoying the diversity of human life

An open and understanding mind never assumes, doesn't jump to conclusions and won't hold fast to any opinion.

Perhaps it is no wonder a closed mind is not a very relaxed mind.