



Tai Chi Newsletter

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The Cheng Man'Ching 'Legacy Weekend' 2023 - led by Mark Peters



The beginning of September has many different connotations - in the UK it may signify the end of summer, the start of the new academic year, a late holiday for students in the Kai Ming Association for Tai Chi Chuan, the Painting the Rainbow, or Parks Groups it's what many of us have been looking forward to since last year - the annual Cheng Man'Ching Legacy Weekend.

This year the 2nd and 3rd of September were something special. The venue, Weoley Hill Village Hall providing both inside and outside facilities, was as usual, an ideal setting with its large flat area of grass at the front. Even the weather was favourable, enabling us to work outside for the full programme on both days.

The entire event was extremely well attended, with Kai Ming and Painting the Rainbow (PtR) students joined by a number of other Tai Chi enthusiasts from across the UK - some of them familiar faces from previous years. A few came for one of the two days but the majority attended for both.

This review has within it views expressed by many of the participants taking part, gained during the weekend and afterwards.

The whole weekend was lead by Mark Peters who delivered throughout in his own inimitable style - professionalism mixed with humour that enabled everyone to enjoy the whole experience. Mark's attention to detail, presented in a lively and enthusiastic manner encouraged all of us, and allowed those new to the specific aspects of Tai Chi being taught to have the confidence to 'have a go', stretching many to achieve even though they were outside of their comfort zone.

Day One was devoted to the 32 Step Yang family Broadsword (dao) Form.

This comprised six hours of intensive training. Mark's teaching style was to break each movement down into easy to follow

steps, gradually adding the next move until we had covered the whole Form.

This Form was new to the majority of the participants, and proved a very challenging day, both physically and mentally for everyone.

As we moved through the sequence, continually practising, and having the applications explained to us, participants gained in confidence and understanding. What a number of people noted as we progressed through the Form was that the day was just an introduction, a foundation in learning the movements; the hard work would come later perfecting the Form. One person was able to identify that what they personally got out of the day's training was the sense of how disciplined one needs to be in order to achieve a high standard in Broadsword techniques. An excellent day concluded with participants tired but buzzing with a sense of personal achievement.

Day Two dawned, and, as one Kai Ming student commented, with blue sky above, surrounded by late summer foliage and fresh green grass underfoot: it was the perfect setting for a day studying Tai Chi. The number of participants was even greater than the previous day, totalling over 40, all eager to begin.

The morning session involved studying the basics of Push Hands - again an aspect of Tai Chi that was new to a number of those present. Mark introduced the activities with humour and enthusiasm, and with a sensitivity that encouraged those not used to partner work, or being in close proximity with strangers.



We were led through the basics of the Push Hands technique, and then had demonstrations of posture, pressure and what effects these would have on us. Many were surprised by their own levels of sensitivity, about their balance, finding their centre and becoming more aware of their partner's energy, and intent, and the level of 'softness' that is required to achieve the desired results.

With the afternoon working on the Cheng Man'Ching 37 Form, and a concluding session sitting quietly inside with Mark taking us through a series of Relaxation exercises, everyone felt the value of the whole day. In fact the last session proved almost

too much for some who relaxed so much that they entered a state of 'semi-sleep' ! A bonus session rounding off a day, and for many of us two full days, of activity spent outside in the fresh air.

The consensus of opinion was that the whole weekend was a huge success.



It was a privilege for those of us who attended the Broadsword training to have this Form taught us by someone who is a master of his art, passionate about everything that comes within the umbrella of Tai Chi Chuan - and even more passionate about helping others to gain the skills, and a knowledge and understanding of the many aspects that can become a way of life.

Many expressed their appreciation of having the experience of working for one or two days with so many 'like-minded' and friendly people, and many valued the input of some of the Kai Ming Instructors who assisted Mark during the practise sessions, working on a one to one basis with those new to the activity being undertaken.

As a conclusion to this review of the weekend I thank everyone who gave me feedback of their experiences, and end by quoting one of the participants who is external to the Kai Ming Association and was present for both days

"This is the second Legacy weekend [I have] attended and [I] can highly recommend this to anyone who wishes to further their study of Tai Chi Chuan."

By Heather Lomas



How to exercise with shortness of breath

If you experience breathlessness, getting active can seem daunting. But it is possible and can improve your health, explains exercise expert Laura Cartwright.

Shortness of breath is common in people with heart and circulatory conditions. It can be caused by low activity levels after a fall, heart attack or surgery, but it can also be caused by heart problems such as the weakening of a heart that's not pumping as well as it should.

If you struggle to breathe, you may feel frightened or have panic attacks, which can make catching your breath even harder. You can also experience 'good' days when you may feel tempted to do so much that you end up exhausted for days.

In general, regular exercise can help many people with breathlessness find daily tasks easier, including shopping and gardening, or even getting up from the sofa.

"When people come for rehab, we focus on educating, setting realistic goals and pacing," says Laura Cartwright, an exercise physiologist and rehab specialist at Wrexham Maelor Hospital.

Understanding what's normal

How can you tell the difference between normal breathlessness with activity and breathlessness that might indicate a problem? Doing any activity increases the amount of oxygen that the body needs, so breathing automatically becomes faster. But fast and erratic breathing can be a sign of a heart condition. Other signs may include needing to breathe through the mouth rather than the nose and struggling to calm the breath at rest.

If you can comfortably talk while moving, you're not overdoing it.



You may also feel very tired very easily. "Watch how your breathing changes," Ms Cartwright says. "As long as you can move and comfortably talk, you're not overdoing it."

And how to tell when it's too much? Stop if you get any chest pain or discomfort, or any palpitations. Take any breathlessness medication that your specialist has recommended. If you have angina and get no relief from your medication within 10 minutes, call 999.

The benefits of exercise and setting goals

"At the start of rehab, we ask people to set a realistic goal," says Ms Cartwright. These could include regaining independence, walking the dog without needing to sit on a bench or playing with children or grandchildren, to name a few.

We often caution people that their specific goal may be possible, but the timelines involved may be longer than they're prepared for," says Ms. Cartwright. "Regular exercise at a suitable level is a goal in itself," she says. "The recommended 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity a week may be difficult to achieve for many people. But some exercise is always better than no exercise."

Exercise to help with shortness of breath

Exercises that build strength, such as balancing on one leg when brushing your teeth, are a good place to start. It can give you some of the benefits of exercise, but your lungs and heart don't have to work as hard as they do with cardio workouts.

"Strength exercises also build confidence, helping people progress to the next level," says Ms Cartwright. This could be a slow walking programme, where you go at your own pace and rest when you need to, increasing the distance over time.

Chair-based exercises to improve your posture can also help you breathe better. Sitting in a hunched-up position can make muscles tight, which makes breathing harder.

“With good posture, the muscles support the body and free up the lungs,” says Ms Cartwright. Having better posture and relaxed shoulders can help you breathe using the diaphragm (a big muscle under the lungs that helps you breathe).

“Letting your tummy expand when you breathe in gets the diaphragm to help bring more oxygen to your body. It can also help control the panic that breathlessness can cause.”

3 exercises that are best for heart health

The three types are (1) aerobic to increase heart rate and give a slight breathlessness – e.g. walking, cycling, and qigong; (2) resistance for strength – e.g. resistance bands or weights; (3) Balance – e.g. tai chi and yoga.

Whatever your heart or circulatory condition, you’ll have something to gain from exercise. Getting active could help to ease your symptoms, help you do more in your daily life, and stop your disease from getting worse.

Article from Heart Matters, BHF magazine Aug.2023



The Importance of Weapons Training in Tai Chi Chuan

After being reminded by Heathers article how enjoyable broadsword training is I thought it worth sharing with you a section from a chapter in our book “**A View from the Back of the Class – Vol.1**”.

Copies of the book are available on our website shop or via your instructor.

Many students come to Taiji and believe all there is to the art is a slow form they’ve seen in the parks or on the TV. There is much much more; it’s a complete system including strengthening exercises, sensitivity exercises, philosophy and weapons. Different schools have various numbers of weapons but generally they all teach the straight sword (Jian). The reasons for this article is to explain their importance and the function of each weapon in their formation of the ‘Taiji whole picture’. I have known schools that teach weapons as a kind of dance; an extra bolt on to make their system more interesting and lucrative. Let’s consider the dictionary definition for weapon -

an instrument of offence or defence [the Wordsworth concise English dictionary]; I suppose an extremely bad dance could be construed as ‘offensive’ but I don’t think they’re quite the same thing.

Different weapons develop different skills or areas of Tai Chi Chuan; although our school practices straight sword, broad sword, walking stick, staff, spear and fan, I will focus on the most popular three to give a common ground. These are broad sword, spears and straight sword. These are sometimes referred to as the 100-day, 1000-day and 10,000-day weapons respectively due to their level of complexity to master. I will explore each in turn.

Broad-sword (Dao)

We practice the 32 step Yang style form as described in Weapons of Primordial Pugilism by Dr. Tseng Ju-Pai. The blade is curved and single edge thereby making it a hacking and slashing weapon. There are two types readily available: a light flimsy one used by Wu Shu stylists and a more robust one favoured by Tai Chi Chuan (plus other northern Chinese martial art styles) and made in China by Dragon Well; the blade is usually approx. 28" long. As well as the solo form, individual training exercises are used along with partner work for application practice.

This weapon uses coiling and extensively trains the waist as the power is needed to draw the blade through flesh or body (please try not to kill any partners in class). This was ostensibly a battlefield weapon but this does not mean it was designed to be wielded and applied as if you are in an Errol Flynn swash-buckling movie; It is important to use the skill of Tai Chi i.e. sticking, neutralising, redirecting and applying. When blocking a strike this should be done in a sweeping action and with the side of the blade to prevent damage to the cutting edge (the steel wasn’t very good quality) in addition to the use of force against force. The circular force developed by this weapon is excellent for use in fixed step push-hands, grappling or throwing.

In terms of modern application the methodology could be applied to almost anything from the new police batons to an umbrella, walking stick or rolled-up newspaper. The techniques can be applied empty hand against empty hand, or empty hand against a weapon to allow resistance training. In addition to this, heavy weapons improve strength and stamina; Yang Cheng Fu is quoted as saying “The heavier the weapons the more energies are gained”.

This is probably the most apt weapon for modern day as it is a close-quarters weapon and includes seizing your opponent. It is extremely useful in developing Peng Jing (ward-off energy), the first and most important underlying energy used in Tai Chi Chuan. It is imperative that awareness of the weapon is developed, as both an extension of the body and an improvement of focus. Be aware of the cutting edge as it slices through the air, of the hilt and pommel as striking implements in their own right; hitting with the butt of the weapon (pommel) is a very

painful point strike as well as a method of creating space for the blade to cut through. Wrist locks can also be practised with this section of the weapon and applied to everyday items, even a Coke bottle (most likely not a 3-litre plastic one). We only have to look at Aikido to witness the effectiveness of weapons awareness applied effectively in empty hand techniques.

Mark Peters



"WHY DON'T YOU GO OUTSIDE AND PRACTICE THAT?"

M.A.D.

I am writing on behalf of the wives and girlfriends of men afflicted by Martial-Arts Addictive Disorder, commonly known as 'M.A.D.'; the symptoms of which can be varied and extremely upsetting to the sufferer's carer. They include such things as:

Voluntary movements of the hands and arms, which as the disease progresses can appear at any time and are known by the term 'Blocks'.

Similar forceful jerking of the legs has also been observed.

Some of the afflicted have a tendency to utter a loud cry as these movements take place, described by some as a 'WHOOOP'.

There are clubs 'M.A.D.' Sufferers can attend, up to seven days a week depending on the degree of addiction, where they can discuss their disease and try in pairs or groups to coordinate their involuntary movements and use them to their advantage, usually as some simple form of self-defence! They have their own magazines, by which they can keep in touch with their own kind and spend hour after hour gleaning every small scrap of information from these, that may help them to understand and develop their disorder, which is regarded by the most severely afflicted as an 'Art Form'.

The words CHEN, YANG, KUNG FU and CHI appear to evoke great excitement when introduced into their conversation.

KARATE, JUDO, AIKIDO, WING CHUN, there are many variations of 'M.A.D.', but TAI CHI CH'UAN with the well-known terribly afflicted sufferer Mark Peters seems the most addictive, with its slow almost hypnotic movements.

At the present time, no treatment is available, and I feel the partners of the addicts need some form of support group, therefore perhaps if the response is great enough, I would be

willing to arrange a 24hr. helpline to cater for certain times of crises for these people, such as workshops, weekend camps, and video nasties (Enter the Dragon, Hard to Kill etc.).

My in-depth knowledge of this disorder stems from a close association with a sufferer whom I will refer to as Kato (remember the Pink Panther?) Whose greatest joy is to stand poised on the patio, in the moonlight, freezing cold, with a broom handle held majestically aloft (I think this represents a broad sword). The feeling he gets as he stands shuddering with hypothermia is the nearest he will ever get to mingling Chi with the likes of Cynthia Rothrock.

Therefore, I hope you will take the time to read this and enable me to help other carers realise they are not 'forgotten people'. Women practitioners are just committed of course.

Jenny Peters



One moment of patience may ward off great disaster.
One moment of impatience may ruin a whole life.

Patience is quiet hope and trust that things will turn out right. You wait without complaining. You are tolerant and accepting of difficulties and mistakes.

You picture the end in the beginning and persevere to meet your goals.

Patience is a commitment to the future.

Advanced monthly training sessions.

Sessions are held each month for 3 hours at Weoley Hill Village Hall, Bournville, to enable instructors time for their own training and for more advanced students to gain the time to develop a deeper understanding of the application of tai chi chuan.

Sessions are Sunday's 9.30-12.30 at £30 per person.

Below are training dates for 2023

October 8th

Nov 5th

Training in 2024 starts with

February 18th

March 17th

