



Tai Chi Newsletter

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WE NEED YOU!



Each month we produce a 4-page newsletter with a mix of articles and updates. We hope you enjoy them and would really appreciate your feedback, and even contributions.

Please send to kaimingtaichi@outlook.com or call Mark & Jenny on 0121 251 6172



In Search of Being Present

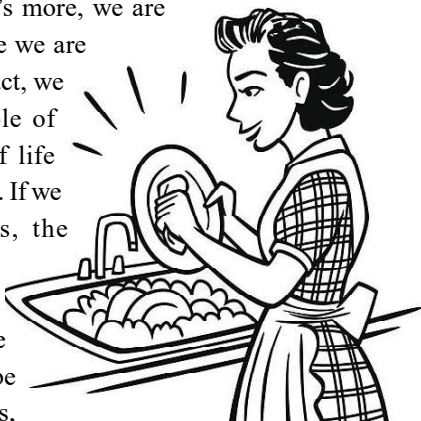
In my search for philosophical and inspirational ideas, I came across this Facebook page which I would highly recommend as it has some great pieces supported by beautiful images to reiterate the topic in question. The extract below captures a simple daily act of washing up and uses it to convey how such a simple act as this can be used an opportunity to be mindful if we choose it to be.

Philo Thoughts

<https://www.facebook.com/philo.thoughtspage>

‘If while washing dishes, we think only of the cup of tea that awaits us, thus hurrying to get the dishes out of the way as if they were a nuisance, then we are not “washing the dishes to wash the dishes.” What’s more, we are

not alive during the time we are washing the dishes. In fact, we are completely incapable of realizing the miracle of life while standing at the sink. If we can’t wash the dishes, the chances are we won’t be able to drink our tea either. While drinking the cup of tea, we will only be thinking of other things,



barely aware of the cup in our hands. Thus, we are sucked away into the future—and we are incapable of actually living one minute of life. ‘

- Thich Nhat Hanh

Whilst performing Tai Chi, one can achieve the same level of mindfulness – we think of the present move and no more than the next. It makes us aware of the body in that moment and that we are alive and feeling our own presence as we breathe and move through our own space. Tai Chi allows us to not be sucked away into the future – we are totally capable of living in that minute. How fortunate are we and our students to have had the opportunity to experience this peace of body and mind in every minute of the form?

By Caroline Gibson



Tai Chi Chuan, Principles Over Techniques

There is no real excellence in this world which can be separated from right living.

David Starr Jordan

I have been meaning to write this for a long time, but never seemed to get started. I think it was a combination of Jenny nagging me and recently reading a book by Stephen Covey called “The seven habits of Highly Effective People”. I expect you have realised from the title that this isn’t a book about martial arts at all, but one of a myriad of ‘power management’ books that seem to endlessly flood the market. I borrowed this book from my managing director initially in an attempt to find out what made him tick (he’s got shelves full of this stuff) but after dipping into a few pages, I soon realised it put in words what Tai Chi Chuan aims to put into action.

Whether people come to Tai Chi for health and relaxation or to learn self-defence they invariably want a series of quick fix techniques for a fast result. Although techniques are easily learnt, they are just as easily forgotten. To be effective in the long term they have to become natural and instinctive, but by their sheer nature techniques are static, it is the underlying principles that give them life. Virtually everybody knows to bend your knees not your back when lifting a heavy package, and we all say it makes common sense. This is not just a

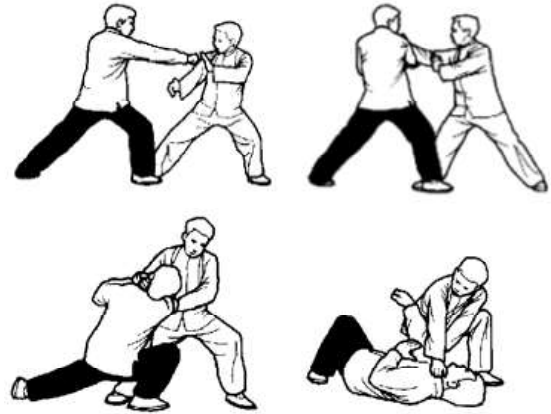
technique but a principle of proper body mechanics. Where Tai Chi differs from external muscular-based martial arts is not just due to its focus on the mystical energy called CHI but due to its awareness of the principles of proper body mechanics. A large proportion of those first attending Tai Chi are suffering from stress, poor circulation, joint damage, cardiovascular problems etc. The art has become renowned for its health-giving qualities more so than its martial prowess; why is this?..... It is because of its core focus on correct body function. The principles that underlie Tai Chi Chuan are the principles by which our mental and physical systems are designed to operate efficiently. That which is natural happens without effort, that which is forced has its limitations.

Through correct body alignment strain is taken from the joints and the load is placed in the muscles and tendons, providing the function they were designed for. The knee is one of the most frequently damaged joints, whether by martial training or bad luck, but this one joint is supported by a series of muscles and tendons that are designed to articulate it and absorb any shock. Use this joint correctly and it will give you a lifetime of trouble free use; abuse it by not adhering to the principles of proper function and see what happens. The Tai Chi classics are like a rule book for proper body function, follow their principles closely and you will not only stave off injury but improve the body's efficiency.

One principle Professor Cheng Man Ching put great store in was "Make your spine upright". Apart from the effect it has on your skeletal structure and organ alignment, it also aids the effect of 'rotating like a wheel', with your spine aiding the creation of an axis. This is explored in great depth in Cheng Tzu's 13 Treatises on Tai Chi Chuan. My intention here is only to reinforce the need for proper body alignment and function, as we have covered this issue before, so keep this in the back of your mind when we consider the importance of principle over technique.

Jan Diepersloot said, "external martial arts are based on the energy of movement, whereas internal martial arts are based on the movement of energy". We can consider this in terms of the effort taken (both mental and physical) to apply techniques compared to free flow when applying correct principles. I am constantly asked by students for applications for Tai Chi Chuan forms; these are usually ex-students of external arts who are used to drilling applications. Here comes the difficulty; learning applications to the form helps you have an intent when practising, helps you remember the postures, allows you to check body alignment etc., what they are not is wholly practical. The core concept is 'from Wuji to Taiji' or more clearly, from non-action to action. This means that an input is required to create a reaction thereby making Tai Chi a defensive (or better still reactive) art rather than an offensive one (unless of course you swear at your attacker as well!!!). Reacting doesn't allow for time delay while deciding which technique to choose nor does it allow time to switch to a backup if the first fails. Unfortunately techniques are quicker to learn and seemingly

easier to grasp than principles; how do you convince a student that it is better to blend with an attack than to block it, to allow the body to 'stand like a balance and rotate like a wheel' thereby receiving and redirecting the energy instead of just smashing it out of the way. This is what Professor Cheng called 'Investing in loss'.



Self-defence is not just about physical attack, it is about mental attack as well; the stresses and strains of everyday life: traffic queues, over-baring bosses, missing Coronation Street, being late for my class. In terms of personal interaction, referring back to Covey, he named these two areas personality and character ethic. He stated that Character ethics included integrity, humility, patience, simplicity and modesty which were the basic principles for effective living, whereas personality ethics included public image, skills and techniques designed to lubricate the process of human interaction i.e. being manipulative and even deceptive. He believed that our Character ethics are in our nature and only need to be nurtured where as personality ethics are only superficial tricks to gain a 'quick fix' and would soon fail or be found out. We have all at sometime or other seen both ethics in action but it has only been more recently that I have considered them in terms of martial development. Principles for proper living and principles for effective fighting are invariably the same; they are non-confrontational and follow the Tao.

Techniques covering locking, throwing and striking are taught to understand their function but they are limited by what ifs. To properly apply any methods, the underlying principles are what makes them real. People don't attack in the same way with a nice clean straight punch or a grab to your right wrist. Sitting loosely into your hips so that the body feels buoyant and allowing the waist to move freely, strictly adheres to the principles of this wondrous art.

An input of energy will cause a natural reaction in the Tai-Chi'ist, subduing or throwing out the attacker. No techniques are considered only the principles of adhering, redirecting and releasing. As soon as a forced technique is applied, the attacker has something to resist against thereby giving them an opportunity to counter. Principles are simple and therefore know no bounds, techniques are just that and limited by their nature. When students ask what would you do if I hit you, I have to reply "I have no idea but it is likely to hurt". Apart from the

obvious intended discouragement (well I don't really want them to hit me!!), this statement is true because without the energy input of an attack I can not move from Wuji to taiji. Consider the principle of borrowing your opponent's strength; If we look at the body as a seesaw in balance (Zhong Ding) and the fulcrum as our centre (Dan Tien) then an input to one side (a strike) will cause an equal and opposite output (counter-attack) on the other side. A technique would be a strike and counter whereas the function of the seesaw allows this principle to be used against any input and more importantly, the greater the input the greater the output; this is the only martial art where attackers beat themselves up!! Another example which may be clearer to other martial artists is the intercepting fist. This is applied by punching across the attackers striking arm, directly at their centre; it intercepts their strike rather than blocking it and allows you strike to land. The technique is called intercepting fist but the underlying principle allows you to strike, brake the limb, throw etc. [see photo's]. If too much force is used the attacker will have a chance to counter; using Professor Cheng's theory of 'never put more than four ounces on them and never let them put more than four ounces on you', (as an extension of deflect 1000 pounds with four ounces) allows you to move your body to a better position if the attackers strike is too powerful. The shortest distance between two points is not always the straightest; technique alone does not allow for this.

Tai Chi Chuan is famous for ROOTING but how does it work. There are many pictures of great masters absorbing a push from a whole bunch of people at once [see photo]; this is not done by just wedging themselves between the pushers and the floor because if the pushers moved, the master would fall over. The principle of seek the straight within the curve allows the force to be directed to the ground through a seemingly straight line, while the curve generated by soft (buoyant) joints allows the master to absorb and release at will.



Rooting is a feeling of connection to the ground, though the whole body, and can be just as easily felt when sitting wei tso (with upright spine), standing on tip toe or moving around. The principle of go backwards to go forwards, go down to go up etc. allow you to sever your opponents root or rather their feeling of stable connection to the ground; the effortless throws of Aikido work in the same way. Rooting allows you to use the strength of the ground to defend and attack in the same instant; simply put if you punch an opponent with a feeling of connection from the ground to your hand, the ground can not move therefore the opponent will. I always tell people the key to self-defence

is to take your opponents balance while maintaining your own; balance is both mental and physical therefore by feeling rooted, balanced and calm you will eventually be able to deal with all the stresses of life and see them coming a mile away. In terms of physical attack, you can move as necessary, counter (effect their physical balance) and disorientate them putting them at the disadvantage (effect their mental balance).

I hope I haven't waffled on too much in my attempt to get the point across. The best way forward is patience and a good teacher (or just pay me!!).

We will be more successful in all our endeavours if we can let go of the habit of running all the time, and take little pauses to relax and re-centre ourselves. And we'll also have a lot more joy in living.

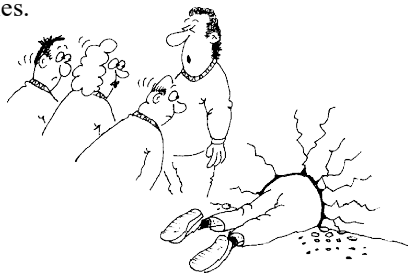
Thich Nhat Hanh

What Am I Doing?

"Stand there and push the other person over, but you can't use any force" and "Don't compete - its best if you lose" or "Non-action and Invest in loss". Hmmm - easy, not! One of the main questions asked by students is "What am I doing?" What are they doing if you haven't already guessed? Push hands. Even students of some years practice can ask this seemingly easy question. One of my answers is "The form is getting to know yourself and push hands is to know somebody else", but this statement only scratches the surface. In external martial arts students usually have sparring sessions as I did back in my Wado Ryu and Lau Gar days. The question here is never asked it's obvious, it's fighting. If it were asked, I would like to think it would be answered more or less the same way. We learn the form, exercises, skills, and other tools taken from the toolbox known as our style, what for? We all do martial arts and especially Tai Chi Chuan for individual reasons, but I believe the end result is the same in everyone. That is your confidence, general health and well-being can be greatly enhanced. This is because the principles, etiquette, etc, learnt while doing your style soon flows over into other areas in your life. This should be true of push hands and even sparring.

It is interesting to watch someone push for the first time you can almost feel the conflict within the person. This manifests itself in various ways. Two of those ways, which seem most frequent, are either they will not attempt to do anything at all and want to stop or they will try and obliterate the other person; both having the desired result of not having to deal with pushing. I suppose it's part of our fight or flight mechanism kicking off. If the person persists with this intangible pursuit you can see a -rise. They still may have no idea what they are doing, but they are doing it and once this initial barrier is overcome then they

can start to understand push hands. It should not be competition, winning or losing, but learning. If a student is only thinking about winning or losing then their minds are closed to all the other possibilities.



"IF I CAN HAVE SOMEONE ELSE I'LL SHOW YOU THAT AGAIN!"

The same focus used in the practice of the form should also be used in pushing. The principles should be adhered to without exception. What is the point in learning the forms and foundations of your art so that when you go to use it you throw it out the window? You don't learn to drive your car and then push it everywhere. Sometimes when pushing with new students you do feel as if each time you step up to push you could just push straight through them uprooting them with ease, but this would prove nothing. Yes, there may be a time and place when this would be acceptable, but not with beginners. If you are free pushing with a partner and you are able to uproot them it should have been done with the smallest amount of force and thought. You and your partner should have had no idea of what was coming. The idea is that you are only really interested in following the flow of the energy and keeping to the principles. What usually happens is that when the other person is uprooted they have actually put themselves off balance by following the force into an area that they are not happy with. At a higher level you should be aware of openings which you could take advantage of. The trick is to wait for the openings and only take advantage if there is little or no opposing force. All the movements should be spontaneous this conceals any intent. If you try to create openings your intentions will be known by your partner and used against you.

When you have learnt the form well enough it should be done as if you don't know what the next move is until you have done it and on to the next one. Your focus should be on the principles and not on thinking what comes next. The form and push hands are not that different and should be done with the same focus and intent. Exercises like Da-lu are used to infuse the two ideas. In push hands there may be instances when you pull-put movements from the form and while doing the form there maybe Times where you go blank not knowing what to do next. When we go that happens? Nothing, this is because it is instilled that we do the form 100% accurately, Doing the form accurately is important, but not to the point it makes the form stagnant. Try to do the form alone not really focusing on the moves to a point where you go blank, it may be hard at first, and turn it into push hands or go into a different form - the form then can more flowing and flexible.

A better name for push hands is sensing hands; when you take part your focus should be on all the energies being used or not used as the case may be. One of these feelings that should be

harnessed is when your partner becomes double-weighted in their legs. The body, if properly relaxed, should be able to pick up on the differences as to when somebody is either double or single-weighted. To feel the difference, get a partner to stand both double and single weighted and then push them around. When you are happy with this get your partner to push hands and change to double weightiness every now and then to see if you can sense the difference. No action is required - a simple verbal exchange will do to keep each side informed. Once this has been taken to a comfortable level, other areas can be worked on and explored.

Sometimes when I push with students they will push me into areas that they themselves get caught out on and they try to see what I do or ask 'what if?' questions. I suppose the general idea is that the instructors walk about with every scenario in his/her head. In fact, this would be impossible as there would be too many variations and it would put an end to the movements being spontaneous. So usually the best way to explain is to make them aware of how they feel to the other person: uprooted, double weighted, etc, and usually comes down to what bit they need to relax. If you go through it blow by blow and think "wait, they did that so I should do this" I would be flat on my back. This is somewhat of a general account of push hands, but I hope it will help you up that first of many difficult steps and with a bit of practice and faith in the principles of Tai Chi Chuan the body will take care of itself.

By Ben Clarke



Tai Chi Weekend September 2024

Each year we have a focus for the weekend camp and this year's is the 30th Anniversary of Kai Ming Association for Tai Chi Chuan.

Saturday 7th – The day will cover the 18 lower hand tai chi form taught in Malaysia as an extension to the Cheng Man Ching 37 form.

Sunday 8th - You will be learning qigong (chi-kung). We will focus on the three refinements of mind, body, and breath.

Cost

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

More details at <https://shorturl.at/gtz06>

Venue:

Weoley Hill Village Hall, Bournville. B29 4AR.