



## Kai Ming Association Newsletter

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# 武德

### Martial Virtue (Wu De) – Our tai chi School in changing times

I first became interested in martial arts, as many young men did, growing up watching Monkey, the Water Margin and Zoro etc. When, much later, I looked to train I realised I needed to find not just a martial art but a teacher who's approach embodied the philosophies behind the art. It's harder than you'd think. Beyond the martial techniques, I am interested in Martial Virtue which is based upon cultivating a compassionate attitude that transforms an act of potential violence into an expression of balance and peace. Although the physical techniques that comprise the 'form' aspect of martial styles have originated from the battlefield, and are the product of an efficient brutality remembered and preserved through the generations in the martial movements themselves, the movements are transformed from the original 'brutality' implicit in their inception, into a state of 'profound awareness' that has no correlation with violence or anger. It is a curious paradox that when preserved as a method of 'self-defence', these very same 'transcendent' movements retain their combat effectiveness and enable the individual (or group) to maintain health, develop the mind and body, pursue a spiritual path, and simultaneously train in a method that adds to the sense of 'safety' and 'security' within a family and community. Self-defence then becomes a matter of blending with life rather than resisting it; developing a natural balance.

My aim in writing this is to show the natural evolution of martial training from youthful vigour to mature insight. Please do not confuse this with no longer practicing or teaching tai chi as a martial art now we are older, it is only a change in perspective and application.

I originally started my tai chi journey with Nigel Sutton's Zhong Ding school where I studied tai chi in depth in the UK and Asia. The teachings I received were built on a solid foundation of a traditional school with traditional values of respect and commitment. When we formed Kai Ming in 1994/5 the name was chosen to embody our philosophy of open-mindedness to the arts. As a traditional tai chi school we have always taught all aspects of tai chi chuan from mindfulness to martial application; after all, form without function is no form at all. I have always taught martial applications even when training hospital staff and tai chi in the park. When I first started teaching, my approach to martial application was imbued with youthful vigour and as such attracted like-minded students. I competed and won medals in the UK, America and Asia, and encouraged my students to do the same; it was a great time.

As we've aged so as we approached to training and teaching. This along with an increasing interest in tai chi and chi-kung from the medical profession and an increasing awareness of the health benefits to the general public has led to reservations around presenting the martial aspects. Years ago I remember Nigel asking me why my classes were doing so well and I said, "It's because I believe everyone wants to do tai chi they just don't know yet!" This still applies today; we should not remove martial elements such as push-hands and applications, we just need to show relevance to life. People train in martial arts for self-defence and tai chi is amazing in that it truly is 'buy one get one free' – you learn to relax but also if needed could defend yourself if attacked!! Consider for a minute that the

skills developed in push-hands (sensitivity and flow) are the same as developed in partner dancing; the skill required to put someone out of balance is the same skill required to help them into balance. With the ever increasing diagnosis of social anxiety, the sensitivity skills of push-hands help to gently break down the barriers of contact. Martial applications can be presented as 'aide-memoire' to give shape and meaning, they can be presented as fun play and even as confidence builders to give some sense of security. Understanding peoples' needs and values enables each of us to share the martial aspects of tai chi in a way that is interesting and relevant. Weapons are a natural progression; some people like to practice for their martial value, some for their aesthetic value. Tai chi weapons training builds strength, flexibility, co-ordination and spatial awareness. I have said many many times, at the instructor training sessions, that the greatest role of a teacher is to instil a fascination for learning. This is as true for tai chi as anything else; please be open minded (Kai Ming) and approach your training/teaching with a view to explore as many facets of tai chi as possible, please do not limit yourself in the belief it isn't relevant or possible.

At the beginning of this article I mentioned Martial Virtue; it is about taking your martial spirit into all areas of your life. Spread your interests in tai chi and explore it in more depth.



## My Students Don't Want To Do Push Hands

I've heard this said, yet if push-hands is an integral part of tai chi what is it that has been putting them off the idea, until now? In previous newsletters I've discussed the power of words as 'the word is not the thing' so in this situation, another aspect to consider is relevance and/or context. When push-hands is only considered from one perspective then maybe it doesn't seem relevant or even appropriate so I thought I would discuss some of the many and varied facets of push-hands to enable connection to a wider purpose and thereby find relevance. Often the term 'pushing hands' is taken literally with the intention outward and forward, pushing and shoving, whilst trying to grab onto the ground in some sort of egocentric challenge. Yet a more descriptive term would be 'sensing hands' where the aims are:

- To develop sensory acuity
- To connect with your partner
- To connect to the ground
- To connect to the flow of energy of interaction
- To blend, neutralise and redirect



With this in mind, let's look at some potential applications of push-hands (Tui Shou). The first and most obvious is the martial application of off-balancing and uprooting your opponent. The next is the polar opposite where the aim is to sense imbalance in a person with the aim of rebalancing them to the point that they feel more stable and safe. Jenny said there is a more obvious application of being close enough to have a chat about what was on TV last night whilst attempting some sort of partner dance that sneaks under the teacher's radar.

The first part of push-hands should actually be called connecting-hands as the aim is to meet and connect with your partner/opponent. The next stage is to connect the energy pathway to the

ground or to become aware/attuned to the energy pathway to the ground. The final stage is application. Regardless of your use of push-hands, only the final stage changes as this is the stage of application or usage of the energies developed/refined within push-hands and in-turn tai chi practice in general. Mindful practice of application is essential.

The main failing in push-hands is the initial connection intention (or purpose of connection intention). By connecting with the intention "I reach out and connect with you to develop kinaesthetic awareness, of who and where we are in space. To develop proprioception" we connect to our own balance and awareness. This sensory acuity (calibration) is key to our development whatever the end goal.

Application comes from mindful connection with purpose; it doesn't matter whether you intend to off-balance or re-balance the connection stage is the same.

Reach out and connect to your partner; take that connection and connect it to the ground. Next neutralise, redirect and apply. Neutralise means 'take to neutral' it does not mean run away from or resist. For the pusher it may initially feel as if they could still push yet they are not able to direct the force without losing balance. At the next level the pusher will feel as if they are falling into emptiness which is the stage at which they lose their connection to the ground. The next stage is where you either choose to accelerate them into a waiting wall or rebalance them into safe stability.

So back to the question of why bother with push-hands. The simple rule is "to off-balance, don't let your opponent connect to the ground" or "to re-balance, reconnect your partner to the ground". This disconnection or connection creates either panic or peace of mind so next time you consider how to present push-hands ask yourself "what is the purpose?" because it is an amazing practice tool that can both harm or heal; I should know, I've used it for both.

### We can all contribute

Each year Kai Ming makes a contribution to charity. This year we chose to donate to Bears of Asia, Brooke donkey Rescue (UK & care in 3<sup>rd</sup> world countries), Sight savers (for children in Africa for operations to save their sight), and Guide dogs for the blind puppy training.

## PUTTING THE "CHUAN" BACK IN TAI CHI CHUAN (or Who Stole the Kidney?)

Whilst watching a class of Cheng style Tai Chi students practicing applications from the form I was amazed at how my former observations were re-enforced. Those who joined the club solely for relaxation and the arts health benefits were the ones who were enjoying the martial applications the most. Why is this, have they suddenly developed an aggressive streak; or is it, as I think, that whilst training with others in class, they have come to realise the principles of Tai Chi really work! What I mean by this, is that the self-defence aspects are accessible to most people regardless of age, sex or brawn. Unlike many external martial arts, Tai Chi, if taught correctly by a reputable teacher, will not cause joint damage or broken bones and can even alleviate existing injuries. Due to its non competitive nature, the ever present ego can also stay intact. The practice of push hands is based around the golden rule of *invest in loss* and therefore even if you do decide to enter a competition, and don't win the gold medal, but take back the learned experience, are you not still a winner?

There should be no pressure put on you to perform forms (katas) etc. in front of the class, and no rainbow of belts to work your way through. If you decide to become a teacher yourself, with the permission of your own instructor, then that's a different matter and entirely of your own choice. This concept makes Tai Chi a very social thing where students help one another and pass on their own personal pearls of wisdom. There is no rush, learn at your own pace and enjoy the experience.

Having said that, make no mistake, Tai Chi is not being taught properly, if it is not being taught as a complete art, both martial and meditative. There are self proclaimed Sifu's who devalue the martial aspect and promote it purely as a healthy exercise. Could this be because stress relief and health promotion can be very profitable? Don't get me wrong, I am not opposed to this area of Tai Chi but if it is to be passed on in such a clipped fashion will this not eventually cause it in its entirety to be lost? To truly teach and practice this art it must embody Yin and Yang, soft and hard; to teach one without the other is like having steak and kidney pie without the kidneys. Why call it Tai Chi Chuan (supreme ultimate fist) why not call it Qigong (breath exercise). A

martial understanding is necessary to understand correct posture; you are being robbed, if you paid for a whole pie and only got half, wouldn't you demand a refund? Bare in mind you need the relaxation/meditation to develop internal power which in turn strengthens your health and fighting skills (you need to master the fighting skills to stop people laughing at you when you're moving so slowly!!).

I myself looked at Karate, Akido and Wing Chun, and yes all of them had something to offer. Unfortunately when push came to shove (no pun intended), if my opponent was bigger and stronger than me, in a true attack I felt I'd lose. Tai Chi Chuan was the one that gave me the confidence to believe, if I used the principles correctly and developed my natural sensitivity, I would at least stand a chance. I felt I could avoid serious injury and equal if not overpower my seemingly stronger attacker. This is what any martial art's self-defence aspect is all about, having faith that it will work for you.

At a seminar, held by Master Nigel Sutton, on Tai Chi Chuan for self-defence, the first portion wasn't spent learning techniques as you might expect, but working on the mind. We discussed and practiced relaxation, meditation and the mental attitude necessary to develop the required state of mind.

The mental aspect of self-defense is initially the most important. Research over the last few years, in the criminal assault area, has shown time and time again that the person attacked usually has a "victims" demeanor and body language. I think we all have this within us - luckily, the majority of us keep it there, and outwardly remain confident when out and about in this increasingly violent world. This does not mean we swagger around the streets or a night-club for that matter, with the words "fancy your chance mate" emblazoned on our chest, infact, the majority of people never think about the danger they may be in but they are sub-consciously alert and keep good eye contact with anyone within their range; this is their first line of protection, and as a general rule, they do not attract the unwanted attention of a would-be attacker.

The victims body language in contrast, exudes nervousness, with low eye contact, unease and poor posture, all highlighting his or her vulnerability to the trained criminal element "the easy mark".

Your first and most important self-defence, is your mental attitude - the ability to stay relaxed mentally and physically is the basis of most martial art and definitely Tai Chi. The problem for Westerners is that Tai Chi Chuan is not an *instant Self Defence System*, it takes years for most students to attain the level of relaxation needed to adequately defend themselves. So, in this day and age of action movies and flash external martial arts Tai Chi has largely lost its *Chuan* and become widely practiced as the slow Chinese calisthenic exercise that gets constant media attention.



If that's all people want, fair enough, but why not try Yoga; do they really not want the whole art or are they just unaware of it's existence. If you only learnt half the alphabet at school, what happens when you need to use all the letters? It's really quiet similar to just practicing Tai Chi for health and relaxation. I think this is what most serious students find out during the first few months of their course and then come to realise they want more. Some have tried other external arts and because of injury or permanent damage to joints cannot practice them any longer. They come to my husbands classes and are encouraged to find they can continue with a martial art as soft and yielding as Tai Chi. The mechanics of the art alone are usually enough to ease the injury.

Every student of Tai Chi Chuan should be offered the chance to learn the whole. Their teacher gives them an instrument whether the student plays heavy rock or a lullaby is their choice, but at least they should know there is a choice.

It never ceases to amaze me when people phone, inquiring about lessons, the high percentage that know absolutely nothing about the art. It's perfectly understandable that little is known about the martial aspect for unless you read the martial art periodicals, the only exposure it attracts on TV and your local press, is its supposed health improving

properties. It is constantly left to the minority to wave the banner.

In my opinion, the first point we should all start at, before even searching out a reputable teacher, is *read a good book*; we are all influenced by our first impression. I myself began the quest for *enlightenment* after constantly seeing the words Tai Chi crop up in night school brochures (I hasten to add, this is not the best place to begin your classes, most students you meet there will have taken cookery the preceding term and probably flower arranging the next, not really the stuff serious quests are made of!!) I booked out *Tai Chi by Danny Conner* from the local library, sat on my patio on a lovely summers evening and read the whole book, unable to put it down. I turned to my husband (who at that time, after trying Kung Fu, Akido etc., was still martially unfulfilled) and told him to read it also. An hour later he turned to me and said, "This is the one for me". Thank goodness we chose the right book the first time or our Tai Chi trail could have been vastly different. Even then it took about six months of searching to find a teacher who fulfilled the criteria he was looking for. We were lucky, we knew at the beginning there was a whole pie to be found.

The most informative easy read, for a complete novice, I have come across is *An Introduction to Tai Chi by Alan Peck*. It gives a brief overview of different styles of the art as well as a list of recommended instructors (of which I am glad to say my husband is one). From there it is a steady climb up the ever increasing pile of hundreds of available titles; my personal favorites are *There Are No Secrets by Wolfe Lowenthal* and *Tai Chi Supreme Ultimate by Lawrence Galante*. Steer clear of any books stating that theirs is the only true style or that drift off into the obscure (I'd be more specific but for fear of reprisals). My husband can get most titles and if not, he can recommend other sources.

Article by *Jenny Peters* (Tai Chi convert)



## Steph's summer 'Tai Chi time'

Last March I left my office role of 3 years to explore my options. I was not content with fitting in with the corporate environment with its high stress, overworked and unforgiving attitudes. Luckily it was the start of spring and there were some Tai Chi sessions in the Parks which gave me something to do whilst figuring out where my life's direction should go. I had already been going to Tai Chi classes with Kai Ming since I finished University in 2012 so it was nice to have an excuse to practise outside with other people. After going for a few weeks in Cotteridge I asked Mark whether I could get involved in doing some of the Park sessions; he was very supportive and asked if I'd be interested in a place on his 'Tai Chi for Rehabilitation' training course, which I accepted.

In between course dates Mark had arranged a Painting the Rainbow class for me, plus providing covering for other instructors to gain experience. At first it felt very overwhelming, moving from a very stationary regulatory role (my old job) to teaching people Tai Chi! I had learnt a Qigong sets on Mark's course and really got to test what I had learnt. In my first class I got a bit excited and ended up exhausting my poor group with a straight hour of standing Qigong. I did struggle with some classes, at first as I did not fully understand what the participants were able to do, plus organisers of a park class kept wanting to change times and location. On the plus side, the summer was very liberating, driving around in a convertible to the various parks to take part in tai chi classes in the sun, what could be better? Oh yes, working towards getting my own class and being paid for something I truly love!!

I found that my Tai Chi has improved as well as my appreciation of how it can help people of varying abilities. I do still get anxious about any class I am asked to teach; however getting the class moving works wonders on my nerves. Even if I get my words muddled occasionally, the class seem to enjoy my approach as much as I enjoy delivering it. I would recommend at least trying it, even if you find that it is not for you, you will have gained some valuable experiences.

## Tai Chi Christmas Party

The Party was great fun, as usual, and there was something for everyone at Flavourz which makes it much easier; I was personally so stuffed I think I went up a trouser size. A special thank you to the Lichfield group which had the largest group in attendance and probably travelled the furthest. Not as many attended this year due to a few illnesses but we still had 50 people and the feedback was great.

The annual party is a lovely time to catch up with old friends and new; some only see each other at this event as they attend classes in different parts of the city.

This year I had the pleasure of handing Chris and Sara their Junior Instructor patches which they can now wear with pride. Tony Rose was also awarded Full Instructor grade following his hard work, and excellent teaching session at the Sunday training in December.

Maybe it's time we look to plan something mid-year...



This is a storey passed onto me by a couple from my Stonnall class, I thought it might be a suitable filler for newsletter. Regards Neil Rankine.

### SOMEWHERE OVER THE painting THE RAINBOW...? MAYBE!!

One Thursday morning on our way home from visiting my daughter in Skegness, I suggested to my husband Brian that if we made good time we could go to our Tai Chi class. Well we had a good journey and just had time to have some lunch, but not to unpack, so left our luggage in the hall and went to Neil's class. On our return, Brian said "let's have a cup of tea before we do the unpacking". We were just about to sit down when the door bell rang, it was my Avon lady so invited her in. Brian said to her "you are lucky you caught us, as we have just come back from Tai Chi" she looked at our cases in the hall and said with a puzzled look on her face "where on earth is that?".

Margo and Brian Holmes  
Stonnall students



### SARDINE PATE

*a quick tasty healthy snack for brunch or supper.*

120g (4 1/2 oz) can sardines in sunflower oil.

2-3 tbsp virtually fat-free natural fromage frais

2 tsp hot horseradish sauce

1 tsp finely grated lemon zest

2tsp finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley (optional)

Freshly ground black pepper, to taste.

1. Drain sardines, discarding oil, place sardines in a bowl; mash well (bones & all).

2. Add 2 tablespoons of the fromage frais, the horseradish sauce, lemon zest, parsley (if using) and black pepper; mix well. Add an extra tablespoon of fromage, if desired.

Serve on top of crusty French bread, hot toast, or crackers, or use as a dip for fresh vegetable crudités and breadsticks. Makes a nice starter for a meal as well.

You can use canned mackerel or pilchards and vary the seasonings according to taste.

### Advanced training dates 2017

Hopwood Village Hall  
9.30-12.30pm £25

February 12<sup>th</sup> - San Shou

March 5<sup>th</sup> - San Shou

April 9<sup>th</sup>

May 14<sup>th</sup>

June 4<sup>th</sup>

August 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> - Tai Chi Camp

September 17<sup>th</sup>

October 15<sup>th</sup>

November 12<sup>th</sup>

December 10<sup>th</sup>

