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Thus the importance of this move should not be underestimated. It is the single move which connects and permeates every posture, the string upon which all are strung. Only through practice of this constant principle can the myriad transformations occur. Cheng himself said of it, "The Constant

Bear combines the Five Animal Frolics and tai chi into a single move.” Seek it and you will receive it; neglect it and you will lose it.

### The “Constant Bear”

...Chang San-feng’s creation of tai chi has remained an incomparable exercise. His theories are immediate and essential, his ideas deep and profound-even the Five Animals fall far below it. Tai chi gives us the ability to move our ch’i, which then manifests in movement, the true definition of *yun-tung*, exercise, and it embraces the best qualities of Taoist meditation. Only immortal Chang’s breadth of accomplishment and creativity could propel tai chi to such heights.

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. It can cure disease, lengthen life, and rejuvenate the weak. 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 ch’i, you will notice a marked improvement in health and strength and no longer need to worry about any illness. It is truly a “sacred raft”(1) to strengthen our bodies and bears no semblance to other well-known yet inferior exercises.

There are three main points to concentrate on when practising the Constant Bear. They are:

- **First**, the Constant Bear features the constant swinging of the waist to and fro, right and left. It should be done about thirty minutes after your morning and evening meals. Those with weak bodies should start with two to three hundred swings; every five to seven days, add on about five to ten swings. Always increase, never decrease, the numbers - strive for gradual progress. Increase the movements until the total time spent is between ten and fifteen minutes and remain in a pleasant mood.
- **Second**, when you practice the Constant Bear, don’t let your head hang down as a real bear does, but combine the swing with the form called the Looking Owl, where you look straight ahead. Your head should not move independently but moves aligned with the navel. In tai chi this is called “The light sensitive energy rising to the top of your head” and “Keeping the wei-lu centred and straight so that the spirit rises to the top of your head.”
- **Third**, as in tai chi, distinguish clearly between full and empty, as expressed in the statement “Heavy as a mountain, light as a feather.” When you turn left, your weight should be fully on your left leg, making it as heavy as a mountain. Do the same when you swing onto your right leg.

The Constant Bear combines both the Five Animals and tai chi into a single move. If you do these things, your Golden Cock stands on one leg will be stable; your Repulse Monkey will not

be snatched away by the movement of a Sensitive Ape; your Embrace Tiger and Return to Mountain will be as decisive as a tiger’s roar; your Diagonal Flying Posture will be faster than the Deer. The Constant Bear combines both the Five Animals and tai chi into a single move. When you practice be sure to keep your mind and Chi in the Tan Tien, about 1.3 inches below the navel. Also, take care that the soles of your feet are fully on the ground.



### A Bear on the loose .....

**This article is by Heather Lomas, Chief Instructor - Lichfield. I was in a previous newsletter but well worth including in this special feature newsletter**

I have always included ‘Bear’ in my Tai Chi classes - interspersed with Huang’s 5 Loosening exercises (Sung Shen Wu Fa), basic forms of Silk Reeling (Chan Si Gong), and a selection from the many sequences that are ‘warm up’ exercises in preparation for the Qigong and Form work that follow. All of the movements selected are geared to relaxing and releasing, to loosen muscles and joints, to develop body awareness, balance and co-ordination, and to gradually introduce in students a sense of ‘connection’ as they practise changing weight, direction, etc.

By far the most effective of these is focussing on ‘**Constant Bear**’ - so when in a previous Newsletter we had an Article about ‘Cheng Man-Ch’ing’ (CMC) and ‘Constant Bear’, I decided to really focus on the movement. My hope was that by experiencing first hand a more ‘in depth’ practise of ‘Constant Bear’ that the students in my classes would be able to relate to the article as they read it. In addition, I hoped that instead of just following my lead in Class when we practise ‘Bear’, they would be able to ‘internalise’ Constant Bear and use it practically within the different situations we find ourselves in our everyday life.

We are all unique and our shared experiences affect us differently. Similarly, each Kai Ming and ‘Painting the Rainbow’ group has a different group dynamic. Students function at different levels of skill and experience from complete beginners to advanced, and with different levels of fitness from the highly trained athlete to those managing the challenges of a chronic medical condition, and other challenges posed by restricted mobility, or the emotional constraints of acute anxiety.

In Tai Chi each student is on their own journey, some more confident than others, some more experienced. So to really focus on body awareness, on body alignment while releasing the various parts of the body, weight sinking down into the feet (or ‘seat’ if sitting) can be a new experience for a number of students.

To be equal weighted may be familiar, but to concentrate on the Dan-tien, to then sink down into the feet, head up as if suspended from above, feeling as if a pole is down the centre of the body into the ground, as if ‘rooted’, giving stability - but relaxed, not feeling ‘rigid’ or ‘stiff’, triggered an awareness in many that had not happened before.

To move weight and have the same ‘pole’ feeling down just the one leg - and then to completely transfer to the other and to replicate the feeling, rather than moving across only part of the

way, has enabled some to feel truly 'balanced' for the first time.

To achieve the gentle, flowing movement of 'Constant Bear' there are many 'hidden' skills that need to be taken on board...

Students in every group showed real commitment as they practised.

Once awareness of balance was understood, practising the slow swing across, and turn using the whole torso, while keeping both feet on the floor, required further focus.

So much to think about - making sure that the hip is not 'pushed out' sideways in the move across to the other leg, causing the spine to be out of line ..... Once there, imagining turning as a door hanging on a central shaft and rotating outward round a vertical axis, but without the stiffness and rigidity - keeping the head in line with the centre of the body, the navel, as it turns, not turning it independently - have all contributed to create a feeling of 'connection' throughout the movement.

The complete 'game changer', however, was when I introduced the additional concept of the 'Looking Owl' sitting on the head. Keeping the head up as if suspended from above, not slouched forward - neck relaxed, not held stiffly above shoulders, made a real difference.

Many students noted that the clavicle area below the neck seemed more 'open', and that they felt 'lighter', and more 'composed'.

Having done all the groundwork, we then put it to the test - when carrying out a Qigong applying the newly acquired 'awareness' of relaxation, sinking, body alignment while changing weight and/or direction, and 'flow'.... when practising The Form, to perform it in 'Bear' - up to the first 'Roll Back', to 'Single Whip', to Cross Hands, and for the Advanced students through the whole CMC 37 step Form.

The fascinating outcome of studying 'Constant Bear' is that each group has demonstrated similar reactions ..... some 'observable' in their 'Form' and Qigong', others reporting their 'feelings' as they repeat the regular, gentle movements whilst paying attention, being 'mindful', focussing.

Students have 'relaxed' and felt greater 'flow' and balance when practising a Qigong sequence - others have vastly improved in the execution of their Form. The 'Single Whip' and 'Brush Knee' moves have more meaning, the 'turns' have increased balance, and intent. Students have said that they 'understand' better what is required not just physically, but internally.

Practising the regular flowing movement from one side to the other in 'Constant Bear' has had a major impact.

Gentle movement at a constant speed - not too fast to 'rush' the movement and by so doing cutting out, eliminating, the feeling of calmness, of moving through air in a loose, but controlled way, and building inner strength - not too slowly to 'stop' the continuous flow - has held real meaning.

Staying 'aware' of yourself carrying out the movements - the change in direction - not letting the mind 'wander' as the sequence is repeated ..... keeping the eyes relaxed but staying focussed, not looking around at objects, or activities going on nearby, and by so doing allowing the mind to 'wander' and lose concentration - have all added to the overall experience.

This experience has spurred one student to resort to verse! In her words - "The feeling of relaxation, harmony and lightness of moves was such a benefit."

### Tai Chi group...'Be aware of the 'BEAR'

Our coach introduced us to 'Bear'  
To practice the 'Form' flow with flair,  
Move a mountain like a feather,  
A big thanks to Heather...  
We enjoyed every moment to share.

To relax and to feel floaty light,  
Shifting our weight left to right,  
Improving our balance,  
And our mindset enhance,  
'Diagonal' and 'Cranes' take to flight.

And so, we are all made aware...  
Of the benefits of doing 'The Bear',  
'This one single move .....  
Puts Tai Chi' in the groove  
As Cheng Man-Ch'ing once did declare.

Listening to what practising 'Constant Bear' has meant to students outside of their Tai Chi classes, makes one realise just how much influence a correct interpretation of a move, or sequence of moves, in Tai Chi can have on our quality of life generally.

Using the techniques used in 'Constant Bear' has assisted when moving a heavy object like a chair, or a large bag of garden compost. The relaxed but balanced 'posture', head up with an 'open' feeling has given some a feeling of 'empowerment'; for others this has given them an increased feeling of 'confidence' when needing to face-up to an unpleasant situation like censure at work, or receiving test results from a Consultant, enabling them to maintain their equilibrium. Some students have reported practising the move in their head at bedtime has enabled them to fall asleep easier, and some battling short or long term anxiety have described the benefit that the calming, repetitive movement has had, even just sitting and visualising themselves doing the actions.

Do we now have a better understanding of what Cheng Man-Ch'ing meant when he said of 'Constant Bear'...." This one single move is tai chi - there is nothing more than this" ?  
Very definitely !

Was it worth all our efforts - absolutely !

