

TongRen

A publication of the Canadian Taijiquan Federation
Une publication de la Fédération Canadienne de Taijiquan

November 2008 Novembre



Canadian Taijiquan Federation / Fédération Canadienne de Taijiquan

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2. To stimulate public awareness of and participation in Taijiquan. / A stimuler la connaissance et la participation du grand public en matière de Taijiquan.
3. To inclusively link practitioners of Taijiquan from various styles and traditions without precedence – whether as individuals or gathered in groups, clubs and organizations across Canada – as they join the Federation family. / A relier tous les praticiens de Taijiquan, peu importe les styles et les traditions, qu'ils soient seuls ou affiliés, partout au Canada.
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*The spiritual is the essence,
the martial is the application.*

'Jin bu'
Sam Masich p.16

Tanya Korvkin
demonstrating Taiji Sword
at the CTF AGM in Kitchener, Ontario
Saturday, September 27, 2008

TongRen

November / Novembre 2008 . Volume 15 . Issue / Numéro 4

TongRen provides a forum for the discussion, expression, and experience of Taijiquan and related subjects. Articles, reports on events, biographies, letters, book reviews, poems, illustrations, scholarly research, and philosophical musings are welcomed. Please email submissions for consideration for publication in TongRen to the editor, Michelle McMillan <ki.design@sympatico.ca> / TongRen fournit un forum pour discuter, exprimer et vivre le Taijiquan et ses domaines connexes. Articles, reportages, activités, biographies, lettres, critiques de livres, poèmes, illustrations, textes savants et réflexions philosophiques sont des bienvenus. Veuillez soumettre tout matériel à fin de publication à la rédactrice de TongRen, Michelle McMillan <ki.design@sympatico.ca>.

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Qigong

at the CTF AGM

Kitchener, Ontario
September 27, 2008



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CTF/FCT Board of Directors 2008-2009

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Carol O'Connor**



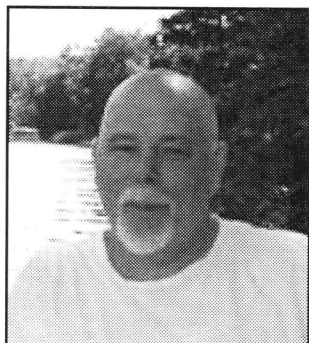
Carol has been a Taiji player for almost ten years. She studied Shotokan Karate for six years in England and Germany, as well as Goju-ryu in Ottawa, and has been studying Taijiquan with Steve Higgins at *Cold Mountain Internal Arts* for several years. Two years ago she became registered as a massage therapist, adding these techniques to the range of energy work therapies she was already practicing: Reiki, High Touch Jin Shin, and Reflexology. This training also informs her of anatomical and structural issues surrounding the body. Carol lives in Waterloo and is the President of the Board of Directors of the CTF.

**1st Vice-President
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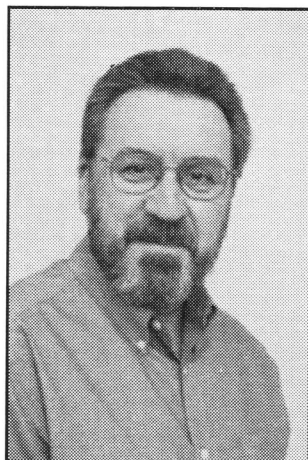
In 1979 Ian Sinclair began his training in Taijiquan, Qigong, and Chinese martial arts. Ian has studied with Grandmaster Shouyu Liang and Sam Masich. His training has focused on Taijiquan and other Neijia wushu styles such as Xingyiquan and Baguazhang, esoteric qigong, and oriental healing methods. Since the late 1980's Ian has taught private and group lessons, led seminars, and worked as a consultant and performer for film, TV and stage. Now living and teaching in Orillia, Ian has dedicated himself to making the world a better place and improving lives by offering quality instruction for body, mind and spirit.

**2nd Vice-President
Duff Doel**



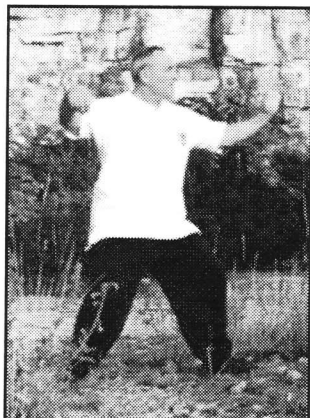
Duff has been a teacher of Taijiquan since 1980. He has practiced such martial arts as Judo, Karate, Hap Ki Do and Taijiquan. After many decades of seeking, practicing, teaching and working with these energies, and as an initiated Master in the Usui System of Reiki Healing, Duff has developed his own syllabus of training in energy awareness, perception and interaction. Duff lives and teaches in the Dundas area

**Steven Holbert
Treasurer**



Steven Holbert has been a T'ai Chi player for about twenty-three years. He started with Gloria Jenner at the London Y, and worked with several teachers for a few years. In 1998 he returned to Gloria's teaching at the *Phoenix T'ai Chi Centre*. About six years ago he began to do some teaching with her guidance, and became a teacher with the Centre in 2004. He is certified as a teacher with the *Phoenix T'ai Chi Centre* and with the CTF. He has been a member of the CTF for five years and treasurer for one. His "day job" for twenty-five years has been as a Registered Nurse, working in various fields e.g. pediatric medicine, child and adolescent mental health, and adult services in a tertiary hospital. He is currently a Clinical Nurse Specialist at *Regional Mental Health Care* in St. Thomas, Ontario.

Ed Cooper
Founding Member
Board Member



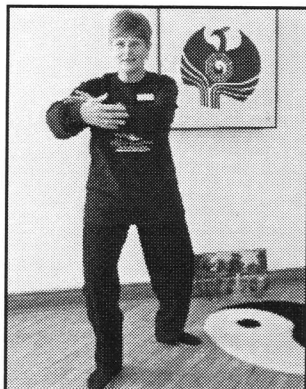
Ed Cooper has studied and taught Taijiquan both locally and abroad for over 30 years. He is one of the founders of the CTF (1987) and he served as its President for 5 years (1993-1998). Over the years he has organized workshops, co-edited *TongRen*, hosted the CTF Teachers' Exchanges and was active on the CTF Teachers Certification Committee. Along with Steve Higgins, he co-hosted the CTF Teachers' Training seminars: 'Nature and Nurture', 'Form and Function', 'The Taiji Garden', 'Professionalism and the Tai Chi Teacher', 'Out of the Box: Teaching Taijiquan in the post-modern environment'. As an accredited judge, he has judged forms, push hands and weapons at Taijiquan competitions in Canada and the USA. Ed established the *Circle of Friends Tai Chi Club* in 1987 in Milton, Ontario to promote the practice of the art and science of Taijiquan and he continues to teach in his new home, Vancouver. Since 1993 he has studied with Sam Masich in North America and Europe.

Michelle McMillan
TongRen Editor



Michelle is a senior level instructor of Taijiquan, certified by the CTF, and has been the editor of *TongRen* since 2003. She founded *Green Dragon Qigong & Taijiquan* in Guelph, Ontario, in 1994, where she continues to learn and teach. She has studied Taijiquan and Qigong with Dr. Zaiwen Shen, Dr. Yang Jwing-Ming, Sam Masich, and Wolfgang Boggs. She is a recognized Therapeutic Touch practitioner (TTNO), practicing since 1994. She has studied Morris, African, and Raks Sharki dance traditions. She is project manager of the *Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice* project at the University of Guelph, Ontario.

Roseann McKay
Membership



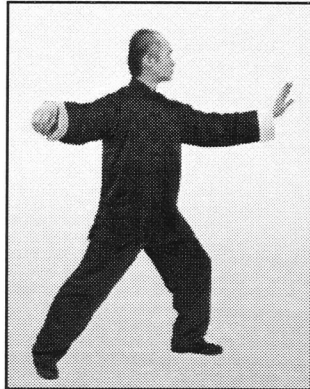
Roseann McKay is an avid student of Tai Chi and Qigong. She is currently serving a second term as director on the CTF Board and has volunteered to chair a new committee for membership recruitment. As an instructor for the *Phoenix Tai Chi Centre*, Roseann teaches classes for the mobility challenged, arthritis sufferers, and seniors in London Community Centres and the Central YMCA, Ontario.

Doug Colins
Board Member



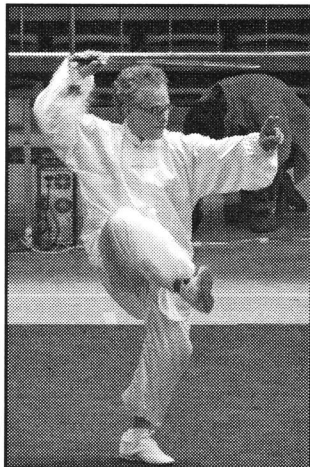
Doug Collins is a senior disciple of Grandmaster Wu Kwong Yu and a senior instructor at *Wu's Tai Chi Chuan Academy* in Toronto, where he teaches the Qigong class, as well as the Saturday morning class with Deputy Chief Instructor Dave Robert. Doug holds a 7th Level Master Degree from the *National Wushu Federation* and is a *COTTQA* Certified Judge. He has studied Tai Chi Chuan for more than 20 years and has been a disciple since 1992. He formerly taught a recreation therapy program at the *Donwoods Institute* teaching Tai Chi Chuan to recovering addicts. He continues to teach and train.

Steve Yee
Founding Member
Board Member



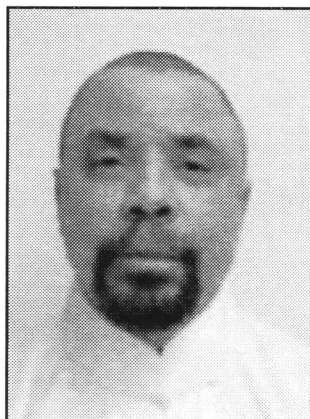
Steve Yee, one of the founders of the CTF (1987), has been studying Tai Chi Chuan for about 25 years. His teachers have been: Sifu Chan Man Kong (Yang), Sifu Andy James (Wu) and Sifu Li Lai Wen (Chan). He started with Yang style but loves to learn other styles, so his main form is Yang with a combination of three other styles. He has taken workshops with Joseph Chen, Sam Masich. Steve has competed in: USA all Taijiquan Championship (Taste of China) Push hands (Third place in weight category), Canadian Tai Chi Push Hand Competitions medals in Yangs form and Push Hands. He received recognition from the Ontario Government at the *Volunteer Service Awards* in 2000. He has been teaching Tai Chi to adults for the *Toronto District School Board* continuing education since 1983, as well as three times a week with the Toronto Catholic District School Board. Steve designed the original logo for the CTF. Sifu Martin Kennedy

Jonathan Krehm
Founding Member
Past-President



Jonathan Krehm is No.3 disciple of Grand Master Eddie Wu, the current Gatekeeper of Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan. He has been active in the Canadian Tai Chi Chuan community for over 30 years. A founding member of the CTF, he was its President from 2006-2008. He is a board member of the COTTQA. He is President of *Wu's Tai Chi Chuan Academy* in Toronto. He is an internationally successful competitor and teacher. He was Grand Champion in both the 2006 *Swedish Tai Chi Chuan Championships* and in *The Singapore International Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan Tournament* in May 2007. In Nov. 2007 he took 5 medals including 2 golds at the *Canadian Open Taiji Championships*. He has given workshops in Athens, New Jersey, New Brunswick, and Ontario and assisted his Sifu in teaching in Hong Kong, Singapore, Penang, and Ann Arbor. He published the English translation of the Late Master Wu Kung Cho's Classic Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan. In November he will compete as a member of the Canadian Team at the *3rd World Traditional Wushu Championships* in Shiyan City, Hubei China.

Martin Kennedy
Board Member



Martin is a disciple of Wu Kwong Yu. he began his training in 1981 under Sifu Wu Kwong Yu in Toronto. He was looking for focus and clarity and found Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan. Martin began teaching in Toronto in 1984 under the supervision of Sifu Wu Kwong Yu and moved to Fredericton in 1994. He taught throughout the Fredericton area in various locations such as YMCA, Bodylines, UNB, Fredericton Physiotherapy, Fredericton Recreation Dept.. In the spring of 1998, *Wu's Tai Chi Chuan Academy Fredericton* was established, where he is chief instructor. Martin offers all levels of instruction in Tai Chi Chuan as well as Chi Kung, Meditation and Push Hands. As well as the hand forms, he is also a qualified instructor of the sabre, sword, and spear forms, which are offered periodically. Martin continues to train with Sifu Wu in Toronto and conducts seminars in Canada and the USA.

New T'ai Chi Research for Victims of Torture

Carol O'Connor



There is now a growing body of clinical research evaluating the use of t'ai chi as a therapeutic tool for various health conditions. T'ai chi research tends to focus on issues related to balance and posture, strength and flexibility, cardio-aerobic exercise, immune function and stress management. Effects on the elderly are most often studied, though recent surveys indicate that about 5 million Americans have practised t'ai chi and the number is increasing. This allows for a good body of research on a range of subject groups.

A recent study in Boston has looked at the use of t'ai chi and qigong to treat survivors of torture and refugee trauma. Torture is described by the authors of this study as a "global public health problem" that affects the survivors and their families as well as communities, often North American communities into which these people settle as asylum seekers. In 2006 it was estimated by the U.N. That 10 million asylum seekers, refugees, displaced and stateless people were at high risk of human rights abuses. In the same period, Amnesty International reported that torture occurs in 150 countries, affecting anywhere from 5-30% of the world's refugees, even higher among certain ethnic groups. Even where these individuals make it to a place of safety, Canada, for instance, their ability to resettle and integrate into their new surroundings can be greatly hampered. Economic burdens, complicated procedures of asylum and immigration applications and resettling in new

cultures increase distress and weigh heavily on the healing process.

The impact on survivors often takes two forms; major depressive disorders and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The majority of those so diagnosed suffer symptoms of depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, including nightmares, and persistent pain. PTSD is further defined as either "simple" or "complex" With complex PTSD, people also have trouble regulating their impulses, have disturbances to their attention and consciousness, and the perception of the self and the perpetrator. It affects relationships with others and the perception of meaning, especially when one is learning to interpret signals from a newly adopted society. The ability to regulate one's responses to the world is a key factor in building and sustaining every day relationships.

Psychotherapies and drugs have been the mainstay in treating individuals with these symptoms, attempting to empower them to regain control of their emotional responses, recognize triggers from traumatic experiences and recontextualize them to current circumstances. Body work includes manual therapies and movement which are used to improve body awareness, as there is often dissociation of self from the body as a result of torture. These therapies help to address disturbances including muscle tension, shallow breathing and reduced body awareness. Dance and massage are commonly used to reconnect physical and psychological responses.

Complementary approaches favour an attitude of holism, or wholism, viewing the mind-body as an interconnected unit, where changes to one affect the other. A troubled mind can express itself in the body, just as dis-ease in the body will affect mental attitudes. The body is said to "keep score", within itself, of what has happened, so that healing trauma, which is often grounded in the body, cannot take place by only treating psychological symptoms.

One way that trauma surfaces in the body is that the constant repetition of the trauma in the survivor's memory and any physical injuries sustained lead to muscular holding patterns. This not only disturbs smooth control of body movements, but also affects the individual's ability to control erratic thought

patterns. Both may produce pain and tension in the body and unbalanced reactions in the mind. The slow, mindful practise of t'ai chi and qigong was shown in this study to release these holding patterns as sensitivity and body awareness developed. Practice focused on movement control, flexibility and manipulation of internal qi. The t'ai chi and qigong used in this study was described only as simplified and basic. Exercises included monitoring the breath, grounding, weight shifting, circular movements and centering. Subjects followed their t'ai chi classes with psychotherapy sessions and it was observed that they showed a decrease in hypervigilance, an increase in introspection and had decreased psychosomatic complaints.

Based on the research of others, the authors (no Chinese surnames among them) explore the possible mechanisms of healing. They note outcomes of statistically significant improvement in psychological well-being, and reduced anxiety, stress, anger, confusion, depression and fatigue. Though exercise has long been shown to reduce stress and improve well-being, they felt that it was the cognitive aspect and low impact on the body compared to other forms of exercise that attributed to these benefits. Studies with the elderly find reduced somatization, – where psychological stress shows up as pain and discomfort in the body – improved relations with others and increased self-esteem.

The mindfulness of t'ai chi and qigong that allow the practitioner to tune into their immediate surroundings is what also directs the person to identify with the inner self rather than the physical body. This in turn is thought to allow a survivor of torture to release their experience as a guiding factor in their response to the world. With this type of trauma the sense of self as an autonomous being is lost, plunging some survivors into a feeling of helplessness. The sense of autonomy must be regained through self-awareness, a feeling of self-mastery and freedom of choice in what happens to oneself. It is control, the authors say, that is the antidote to helplessness, and while control over the initial trauma may not have been possible, some control over subsequent experiences can be developed. It is the growing feeling of self-mastery in t'ai chi that is thought to assist in feelings of control.

Pain, including chronic low back pain, has been shown to decrease significantly with the practice of qigong and relaxation response training. T'ai chi is shown to reduce sleep disturbances, reduce nightmares, and improve subjective reports of sleep

quality. Both t'ai chi and qigong reduce cortisol levels and sympathetic nervous system activity (fight or flight responses) and change brain wave activity. These changes result in decreased stress and anxiety as well as improvement in moods.

Although the sample size was small in this study the authors have concluded that the therapeutic use of t'ai chi and qigong present a way of involving the mind and the body in the process of healing trauma. Along with victims of torture, they feel this may be used to provide psychological and physical relief in the general population. This would indicate that there is great scope for research into healing trauma caused by childhood or sexual abuse or other kinds of trauma commonly sustained in our reasonably secure society.

Grodin, M., Piwowarczyk, L., Fulker, D., et al. Treating Survivors of Torture and Refugee Trauma: A Preliminary Case Series Using Qigong and T'ai Chi. J Altern Complement Med 2008; 14: 801-806.

Wayne, P., Kaptchuk, T. Challenges Inherent to T'ai Chi Research: Part I - T'ai Chi as a Complex Multicomponent Intervention. J Altern Complement Med 2008; 14: 95-102.

Carol has been a Taiji player for almost ten years. Sifu Steve Higgins has been putting up with her all that time. Two years ago she became registered as a massage therapist and adds these techniques to a range of energy work therapies. This training also informs her of anatomical and structural issues surrounding the body. Carol lives in Waterloo and is the President of the Board of Directors of the CTF.



Jin bu: Advancing step

(an excerpt from an unpublished treatise on the thirteen powers)

by Sam Masich



Jin bu

Alone, *jin* means: 'to advance', 'move forward' or 'to enter'. *Jinbu* is a common expression in Chinese meaning to 'progress' or 'improve' a situation. These definitions well describe *jin bu* in the Taijiquan sense as well, referring to that quality in the legwork which advances and enters in order to destabilize or claim more territory from an opponent, improving our situation and progressing toward control of their centre.

Advance stepping in Taijiquan is noticeably different than in long range martial arts which tend to lunge forward to a certain extent as they strive to maximize striking distance. By contrast, *jin bu* progresses in such a way as to facilitate the *si zheng* and its *zhan-nian jin*. While it can be very deliberate and stealthy, the advancing step may also be fiercely invasive and startlingly disruptive as it encroaches on the opponent's base, displacing the root.

As a moving step, *jin bu* rolls from heel-to-toe, allowing for continuous forward transfer of force and intention. As a fixed stance (i.e. 'bow stance'), *jin bu* settles deeply into the *kua* or 'hip-crease'. When advancing squarely toward an adversary, *jin bu* tends to engender: square shaped *peng*; downward and forward directed *an*; and *ji*. *Jin bu* can also express itself somewhat laterally as the 'half horse stance' and when so doing, creates potential for lateral shaped *peng* and *ji*, downward shaped *an*, as well as, *cai*, *lie*, *zhou* and *kao*. In short, it is possible to employ the advance phase of the stance in both *si zheng* and *si yu* conditions.

Skillful advancing is one of the most difficult achievements in Taijiquan. Learning to advance confidently requires a careful study of physical posture in order to tame unruly centers of balance, equilibrium and momentum. Mastery in this domain grants the practitioner freedom to stick and adhere without becoming entangled or mired in the sphere of an opponent.

An excerpt from the ninth of the 'Yang Family Forty Chapters':

*The circle of retreat is easy,
but the circle of advance is difficult.*

*Never forget the crown of the head,
the front or the back.*

What is difficult is holding the central earth.

Because *jin bu* is restrained by the requirement to maintain conditions suitable for sticking-adhering, approaches such as lunging, launching and leaping are generally advised against, as they tend to cause detachment in upper limb connection. Fitful efforts to move forward can quickly lead to *bu zheng* conditions and are easily exploitable by seasoned martial artists, since these gestures disrupt the flow of *qi* and agitate the mind.

Although a tempered approach is prescribed, it should not be thought that *jin bu* need lack speed or vigor. Firm, ground-driven stepping and shifting, centered in relaxed hip joints, can be extremely quick, agile and powerful. In fact, creating the conditions for *jin bu* must always be the aim if victory is to be hoped for.

The Yang family manuscripts describe the inexorable intent in the 'Song of Advance':

*When it is time to advance,
advance without hesitation.*

*If you meet no obstacle,
continue to advance.*

*Failing to advance when the time is right
is a lost opportunity.*

From a technical standpoint, methods for *jin bu* vary greatly depending on circumstances. Barehand solo forms, solo weapons forms, fixed-step push hands, moving-step push hands and free sparring each have different requirements regarding such factors as: length and width of step, degree of hip rotation, tempo of advance etc., and variations abound. It is all too easy to forego a nuanced approach here however, as there is a particularly strong tendency toward impulsiveness when advancing. Slow, thoughtful practice is vital if fine distinctions in the forward aspect of the stance are to be made and mastered.

The martial essence of *jin bu* in Taijiquan is to be found in the concept of 'displacement'. While the advancing step may function as a typical 'enter-to-strike' tactic, its genius lays in its unique capacity for eclipsing and supplanting the stance of an opponent. When *jin bu* is operating in fine form, it usurps personal space, leaving no fighting room for the other side, and therefore little opportunity for the mustering of an adequate response.

The 'Taijiquan Treatise' describes an adversary's experience when being advanced upon in this way:

*Retreating, the distance seems
exasperatingly short.*

The half step technique, 'stealing a march', becomes virtuosic when combined with tenaciously applied *zhan-nian* energy. In his 'Song of Thirteen Powers', Li Yiyu leaves little doubt about this:

*Advance and seize the central palace with
an attack no opponent can withstand.*

*When closing, take a half step, making sure not to give
the opponent an opportunity.*

While it is true that the study of *jin bu* is born of the Taiji boxing strategy, it would be insufficient to leave the subject here. In classical Taijiquan writings it is indicated clearly that martial study is a means to *shen ming* or 'spiritual illumination'. There are implications for this in the study of the *wu bu*—in particular for the advancing step. Clarity in *jin bu* is an indispensable factor in allowing deep sticking-adhering to develop. Without a solid understanding of the advancing step it is not possible to develop sufficient trust in the *zhan-nian* connection to the point where *ting jin* and *dong jin* ('listening' and 'comprehending energies') can take root in the body and psyche of the practitioner.

Jin bu is difficult to master because it is so prone to impulsive expression. It could be argued that the sub-par level of *jin bu* is one of the principal culprits in much that is awry in contemporary Taijiquan. Practitioners lacking clarity and confidence in this phase of the stance are almost guaranteed to develop habitual use of the *si yu* energies. Like the four corner energies, the advancing step is given to thoughtless behaviour and must be subordinated into the service of the four squares. Without a well disciplined *jin bu*, the *si zheng* – and especially *zhan-nian jin* – have no encouragement to put in an appearance. As a result the practitioner's sticking ability remains shallow.

Overcoming the urge to spring into action or fall into an advancing step, requires a certain degree of self-restraint which in turn demands the kind of self-knowledge only obtained through good practice. This is the basis of self-cultivation in Taijiquan. Learning the secrets of *jin bu* through *taiji tuishou*, can be an opportunity to overcome deeply rooted forms of impulsiveness while simultaneously cultivating and embodying *zheng* virtues and values. It is possible to do a great deal of practical work in this regard, even without a desire to master the art martially. One might speak of 'sensing-hands' as compared to 'pushing-hands', but even here one must still learn to operate the *jin bu* properly if the practice is to bear fruit. Given the right approach, technical questions such as: 'where does the power start?', 'when does my hip stop rotating?', 'how does the *jin bu* support connection to my practice partner?', can yield spiritual lessons.

In Taijiquan there is really no separation between physical/martial cultivation and spiritual/self cultivation. Some practitioners, finding the aggressive nature of martial study distasteful, shy away from vigorous interaction, and are particularly reluctant to exercise the *jin bu* in its fullness. While there may be virtue in such caution – i.e. in the desire not to provoke conflict or bully – without vibrant, spirited interaction, the art lacks animation and depth. Eschewing the martial for the spiritual may in fact have the opposite effect, as it is through a commitment to deep sticking that one transcends the infantile clutching responses which plague much adult human experience. It might be even considered that reluctance to 'step into' the process may stem from latent fears around growing up and the responsibility entailed by forms of connection which go beyond avoidance and coercion.

The Yang family material echoes this view:

*The spiritual is the essence,
the martial is the application.*

The spiritual without martial training is essence without application; the martial without spiritual accompaniment is application without essence.

A final note on advancing energy: The 'blunt square', that is square energy supported by crude advancing, is also to be mitigated if progress is to be made beyond a certain point. Advancing of this sort can especially be seen in forward directed *an*, where it is possible for some players to achieve success in delivering effective shoves characterized by fast, lunging entries and a partial or complete break in connection with the partner/opponent. While there is no arguing the 'point value' of such blitzes, they are of questionable worth in long term development if progress in the art is to be made broadly and deeply. Certainly, as just-another-tool in one's arsenal of techniques, blunt pushes, supported by rapid rough-hewn advances, are justifiable. Push-hands play of this sort however, generally forfeits *zhan-nian jin*, and as a consequence, veers away from the *si zheng*. When unsuccessful offensives of this sort are met by escalated riposte, as is usually the case, the overcommitted pusher is left, either lurching forward, desperately trying to whack with the shoulder or elbow, or clamoring backward into position. In such scenarios grabbing-on becomes *de rigueur* for both parties, and the down-spiraling trend of: *dun fang* (blunt square) to *si yu* to *bu zheng*, becomes difficult to avoid.

The 'blunt square' and the 'round square' diverge from one another largely due to the quality of support offered up by the *wu bu*, and especially by *jin bu*.

A passionate and gifted teacher, Taijiquan and Qigong expert Sam Masich, inspires students along their path. Having studied the internal martial arts most of his life, Sam is one of the most accomplished "new generation" practitioners of Taijiquan. A Canadian, he has learned from many of the great Masters, including Liang Shouyu, Dr. Yang Jwing-Ming, Jou Tsung Hwa, Yang Zhen duo, and Chen Xiao Wang. He has distinguished himself in competition as a gold medalist in the USA and as a member of the Canada's National Wushu Team has competed in China garnering gold medals and praise for his performances. Sam is the technical consultant for the TV series "Black Sash" and is the subject of two documentaries. He is an author, a musician, and has produced many top-rated instructional films available through his website: www.sammasich.com



Sam Masich demonstrates Peng

Tai Chi Practice – One Person’s Journey

Roseann McKay

What are some of the undercurrents of Tai Chi practice? Can we ever exhaust its full potential? Can practice affect the way we react and interact? When I first started learning Tai Chi, I saw practice as a mere de-stressor, a healthy but gentle exercise, a means of consolidating the form. yet, one phrase seemed to resonate more than others:

*Tai Chi strengthens the body,
quiets the mind, and frees the spirit.*

Even as a beginner, I intuitively knew it to be possible. I already felt calmer in Tai Chi class. I began to move more easily. But my spirit ... free? Like most, I found progress slow, the sequence frustrating. My movements still felt awkward and uncoordinated. Yet that phrase echoed deep within my soul and inspired me to keep digging, encouraging me to explore and experience movement and to see where it would take me. Even back then, I sensed the hidden potential of Tai Chi to open oneself up – mind, body, and soul – a golden opportunity to grow within.

To this day, its seductive and enigmatic quality draws me deeper into the labyrinth of its web. With time, practice has evolved into ‘play’; the mind delighting in the unexpected. Every repetition uncovers new layers of sensation and meaning. I am constantly in awe at what our bodies manage to do for us and ever-grateful for what the senses can teach us. Any physical handicaps have proven to be a bonus rather than a liability, allowing for interesting revelations and creative fine-tuning.

When did I become aware to what degree Tai Chi practice changed the way I view my world and my place in it? The credit goes to a Tai Chi retreat a few years ago sponsored by the *Phoenix Tai Chi Centre*. That seed of awareness dawned the first night after a group brainstorming exercise and ice breaker. We were asked to compare answers to a series of questions probing the character of our own Tai Chi experience. In the wee hours of the next morning, I suddenly awoke, able to appreciate the full impact of practice in my attitudes to everyday life. Words flew on the page. What follows is a personal journey. It documents the significant role practice played in my perceptions, my values, and my growth – or lack of it. These same questions may lead to you to come up with discoveries of your own.

Question 1

With respect to your practice, what WINDOWS and DOORS are IMPORTANT for you in ACCESSING YOUR POTENTIAL, both within and external to yourself?

Note: In group discussion, there was little time to distinguish between windows, doors and access points, so we just came out with whatever came to mind. But the question remained: How was I to unlock my personal potential and capitalize on what lay outside of me? What would make it happen? What would stop it from happening?

IN GENERAL TERMS, these were the keys to unleashing that potential:

- *Opportunities* to learn about Tai Chi, polish my form, continue to deepen my knowledge of the internal arts.
- *A willingness* to continue to *open myself* – mind, body and spirit.
- *An ongoing commitment* to devote time and focus (attention/intention) to my practice.

.....
SPECIFICALLY: (What follows poured out of me... these were the factors that brought about most significant change)

- *Discovering, seeing, realizing the existence of natural connections* all around me.
- *Listening to what my body* tells me and *respecting its wisdom*.
- *Listening to my inner voice and trusting my instincts*.
- *Being willing to confront* my flaws, long held perceptions.
- *Allowing myself to see old patterns in a new light* and making a point of reassessing their impact.
- *Allowing myself to trust* the wisdom of the Universe in providing what I need.
- *Availing myself of mentors* a) to develop better teaching tools, b) to channel me in a new direction, or c) to offer a fresh perspective when my own was compromised.

Note: It became ever so clear that I was focusing more and more on the principles of Tai Chi even in my practice – the form simply being a vehicle for their expression. And I was carrying those principles

beyond the time-frame and setting of my practice of the form into everyday encounters with life in general. The practice opened and freed mind, body, spirit to entertain the prospect and benefits of change.

Question 2

What has the practice brought into your life?

OF A PERSONAL NATURE:

- Increased energy and openness.
 - Self-understanding and growth.
 - A recognition of my strengths and how they might best be used.
 - Self-acceptance and the courage to allow myself to 'appear' vulnerable to others.
 - An awareness and recognition of the 'necessity' of balance and the lack of it in my own life. People with many passions have a tough time down-sizing. Discovering our priorities can make it easier.
 - The realization that 'being in the present' or finding 'balance' is not as easy for me in my every day life as it is in my Tai Chi practice.
 - The joy of knowing that we all have the 'capacity' to evolve into integrated and compassionate beings. That alone makes it easier to forgive myself and accept others.
 - An appreciation of the transformative power of Chi. Knowing that Tai Chi and Qigong are, and have been for me, viable resources to bring about change.
-

AS A TEACHER and STUDENT of THE ART:

These are some realizations that brought about positive change in my own form ...

- A real appreciation of how the body works; the structural intricacy of its individual parts, their actual function and how interconnected and mutually dependent they are. (I was surprised by how much of the body gets involved by the simplest of movement i.e. the closing of a hand... finger by finger - seeing what tendon muscles come into play - how easily they are exercised (a form of play while watching TV).
- Fluid motion being a matter of structural integrity and a product of the natural relaxation of the body as a whole. By focusing on a weakness, exploring it, it gets easier to make useful adjustments.
- I was lucky that the *slightest* extension outside of my range caused me pain or made me lose my balance. I experimented and played with centimeters of difference. I had no choice but to quickly find my

comfort range and stay within it. In time, that range increased.

- The subtlety of ' optimum ' space and the importance of allowing 'enough time' for the body to perform to its full potential i.e. allowing just enough room and enough time for the joints to loosen, the connective tissue to stretch and the body to unfold naturally.

- Time to set a proper base, time to shift the weight little by little so that each body part can be drawn into the movement to finally execute an action as a whole. I like to think of body parts as members of a family. We all know what happens when one does all the work or others are ignored or left out! Burn-out for some, laziness and rebellion in others. Parts of the body can overwork, others lose their elasticity or atrophy.

- The significant role of the breath to calm the mind, deliver oxygen to the brain, lungs and muscles; Warm-ups are an ideal time to practice breathing. So is standing still. I've gone from a mouth breather to normal breathing. Beginners can benefit from that kind of focus, taking that first step towards relaxation.

- The importance of intention to move Qi and give it fullness and strength. Experienced practitioners can get beyond just feeling chi and learn to build it, move it, channel it by focusing on the bubbling Spring and the lao gong points as destination points. Just because one has done Tai Chi for a long time doesn't mean there is no need to review, re-assess, or change what one does or how one does it.

- An increased awareness of how often we tend to override the body's natural wish to move. An appreciation of the fact that old habits die hard and the ego can, over time, radically interfere with the body's ' natural' process. I see it every day in beginners especially. It is a long process to 'allow' rather than 'force'.

- An appreciation of what happens when the body is 'allowed' to move as it was intended to move. And a recognition of what happens when it can't. That's when a timely adjustment can make all the difference. That's when the smile appears on faces! Helping them experience that difference is pure joy!

- The importance of highlighting Tai Chi principles and their relevance to every day life. The form is important in that it puts principles into practice but most students can't wait until they know the form to feel the substantial benefits of Tai Chi. Enabling them to discover for themselves the connections that influence how their own body performs; helping them to be aware of how postural habits can affect how they

feel will help them improve their well-being outside of class.

- A commitment to show how Tai Chi principles can greatly improve our perspectives and our ability to make choices that will enrich our lives. (Slow down, be mindful, stay centered, align yourself and set a proper foundation with that first step, take the time to allow yourself to relax, don't rush, go with the flow...)
- The realization that the concepts of rooting, contraction and release have become guiding principles in my teaching and the key to balance, and relaxation in Tai Chi and in life – proper rooting facilitates and demystifies the learning of Tai Chi moves. Transitions are important - for stability, execution and power of the actual moves.

- A re-channeling of time and energy to people and activities that nurture and restore me.
- An appreciation of how interdependent we all are, the willingness to ask for/offer help
- An appreciation of how interdependent we all are, the willingness to ask for/offer help.
- An awareness that our differences are actually opportunities to grow, a chance to explore different perspectives, a means to re-connect on a truly basic yet intimate level.

One small step at a time brings awareness. One mindful movement after another.... blossoms into a form. One practice repeated ... begins to fulfill the promise of a more enriched and conscious life.

Question 3

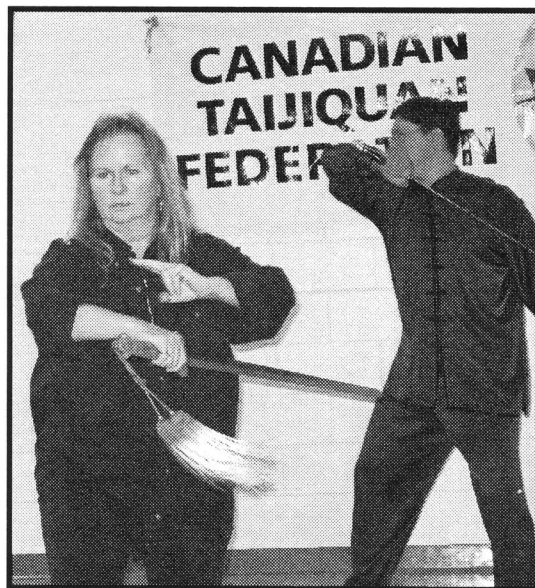
And the benefits of your Tai Chi practice?

PERSONAL BENEFITS:

- Immediate pain relief. I've had fibromyalgia for the last 22 years.
- An ability to sleep a 'restful' and uninterrupted sleep.
- Changes in the way I move my body – the movements now much more flexible, more natural.

Roseann McKay is a Board member of the CTF, an avid student of Tai Chi and Qigong, and a practitioner of Yang style hand and sword forms. A teacher with *Phoenix Tai Centre*, she teaches adult classes at the Y and in seniors and community centres in the London, Ontario, area. Classes for the mobility- challenged and arthritis sufferers have made Roseann keenly aware of the importance of awareness training to improve one's well-being.

Carol O'Connor
CTF President 2008-09



Alpha Montemayor
CTF Secretary 2007-08

HELP!

These fine folks need support!

Would you join the CTF Board as Secretary for the 2008-09 term?

Please contact President Carol OConnor <carol.oconnor@sympatico.ca> if you are interested.

Le Cote Martial

by Pierre Huot

LE COTE MARTIAL – 4

Je suis étendu de tout mon long sur le plancher de bois de notre studio de danse quelques centimètres plus haut, il est là, son corps recroquevillé, et il va me tomber dessus, une question de secondes...

Notre petit groupe de danse tient sa pratique régulière en vue d'un spectacle qui s'en vient. Notre coach est en tournée en Russie avec la compagnie de danse grecque qu'il coach aussi. Nos deux consoeurs sont assises à l'écart dans un coin du studio et discutent, ne nous portant attention en rien.

Lui et moi sommes seuls au monde, à danser et à improviser. Nos rapports ont changé. Sans en avoir glissé un mot à personne, j'ai changé nos rapports dans mon esprit. Je ne porte plus notre groupe. C'est fini, bel et bien, du moins en théorie.

Mon collègue s'en est rendu compte. Il n'aime pas. Il se sent abandonné du moins dans son inconscient. Dans quelques secondes, je vais en payer le prix. Je serai écrasé sous son poids, le poids d'un corps qui tombe à toute vitesse sur un corps immobile, ouvert à tout ce qui vient, vulnérable.

Que faire? Me défendre en le repoussant? Et le blesser. Etre l'attaquant? Sans raison qui tienne aux yeux des autres, notre spectacle annule. Me laisser faire sans plus? Et être sérieusement blessé et même pire, au moins des côtes cassées, le foie transpercé, les intestins déchirés. Non, pas question.

Je l'ai laissé venir et, juste au moment où ses pieds allaient frôler ma cage thoracique, je me suis tout naturellement tourné vers la gauche. Ses pieds frappent le sol. Son corps rebondit. Je me tourne vers la droite. Son corps frappe le sol. Nous sommes saufs.

Ma confiance est ébranlée. Je serai sur mes gardes. Sa colère est passée. Elle ne reviendra plus. Des semaines plus tard lors d'une rencontre de groupe, je soulève la chose qui est niée par tous, même l'absent. Encore plus tard, alors que je tiens des rencontres privées avec chacun de mes collègues pour revoir ma participation au collectif, mon partenaire et moi en discutons à mon initiative. Il reconnaît que, oui, inconsciemment, tout ça s'est probablement déroulé comme je l'ai décrit. Nous faisons la paix.

Ce sera la fin pour nous, même si depuis nous nous sourions et nous embrassons toujours lorsque les hasards de la vie nous font nous rencontrer.

Les qualités martiales dans tout ça? La présence d'esprit, le sens du temps qui est allongé à l'infini, la capacité de penser stratégiquement, de voir les choses de l'intérieur et de l'extérieur tant physiquement que mentalement, ne faire que l'essentiel, rien de plus, ne pas blesser autrui si ce n'est pas nécessaire, garder son calme, retenir la leçon, voir les déplacements dans l'espace et se mouvoir en conséquence, le calcul juste des temps de déplacements relatifs des partenaires, une évaluation appropriée des conséquences de ses gestes et de ses actions pour soi et pour les autres, de même relativement à autrui, penser ballons en rotation, prévoir la paix à rétablir, accepter l'inconscient de chacun et ne pas en vouloir à autrui de ce qu'il lui fait faire et fait faire à soi-même, saisir le lien cause effet de nos agirs respectifs.

Ces leçons s'apprennent sans donner de coup, avec patience et longueur de temps, sans même savoir qu'on les apprend, jusqu'au jour où on les voit se manifester dans l'instant présent.

Si j'ai raconté ce fait, ce n'est pas pour critiquer un être que j'aime et que je respecte. Je ne l'aurais pas fait dans ce cas. Mais simplement pour partager une leçon de tai chi. Les rôles auraient bien pu être inverses.

LE COTE MARTIAL – 5

«Tu es l'homme que j'attendais, je suis l'homme que tu attendais.» C'est ainsi que s'est ouverte la première conversation téléphonique entre lui qui allait devenir mon premier (et le seul) chambreur l'été dernier. J'avais des problèmes d'argent et je devais me trouver des sous sur le champ si je voulais manger et aller travailler. Je voulais louer une chambre, non me lancer dans ce qui pourrait être une étrange aventure émotionnelle, amoureuse, émotionnelle et amoureuse à sa façon le fût-elle!

20 décembre 2008, 18h. Je me débats pour savoir si je vais rentrer à la maison ou aller au café internet. J'opte pour le café. Je rentre à la maison vers les 21 h.

La nuit est tombée et je ne remarque rien dehors dans le parking. Curieusement pour la 1ère fois depuis des semaines où nous nous évitons, il est aimable avec moi et nous mangeons ensemble. Mais il est étrange. Je ne sais pourquoi il vérifie des choses sur mon emploi de temps pour le reste de la soirée, pour le lendemain matin; il me donne le sien pour plus tard ce soir-là.

Je me couche comme souvent dans le salon sur le sofa. Il monte à l'étage à sa chambre. Je m'endors. En pleine nuit, endormi, j'entends qu'il descend. Je continue à dormir comme si de rien n'était. Le jour se lève, je me réveille, les choses semblent différentes dans la maison. Il est parti, mais c'est plus que ça. Je me lève un peu, vois la serrure de la porte d'entrée, alerte! Mon cerveau vérifie les choses : danger! Les clés – mes clés – n'y sont plus! Je me lève en panique. Je suis embarré dans ma maison et je ne peux plus en sortir. Je cours à la cuisine voir si les autres jeux y sont. Non! Il les a prises. Il est passé 9 h. Les gens sont partis au travail, plus personne dans la rue. Le téléphone. Vite. Plus de cordon entre le combine et l'appareil quand je téléphone. Prisonnier encore plus.

Mais j'avais oublié : mon appareil est aussi un sans main. Après avoir raccroché, il sonne et c'est bien le 911 qui me rappelle : un policier s'en vient. Avec l'aide de la préposée je retrouve un peu mes esprits, trouve une clé de l'arrière de la maison oubliée par mon chambreur et arrive à sortir par la porte arrière qui s'ouvre sur un plein mur de neige et à travers lequel je fonce en pyjama. La police arrive. Me calme un peu. Les clés sont dans la serrure de la porte avant et dans la boîte aux lettres, le tout invisible de la rue. Je suis sain et sauf. Aucun « mal » ne m'a été fait.

Mais pour les prochains mois, je suis un animal en frayeur. Qigong, tai chi, chiropratique, acupuncture, abandon corporel et conversations m'aideront à me rétablir. Et même maintenant, 3 mois plus tard, les bruits étranges de la nuit me surprennent avec des pensées noires. Pourquoi est-ce que je vous raconte tout cela? Quels liens avec le tai chi? En quoi est-ce que j'ai fait preuve d'aucune habileté taichiesque?

Eh bien, beaucoup.

Ce jeune homme m'a rendu un fier service. La peur qu'il a réveillé en moi en a réveillé une autre qui dormait et me terrorisait depuis toujours à mon insu. J'ai pu la confronter directement, son emprise sur moi en est diminuée d'autant. Je crois même que c'est dans ce but que j'ai accepté de le prendre comme chambreur chez moi. Je crois qu'il disait juste lors de cette envolée lors de la 1ère conversation

téléphonique. Nous avions à nous rencontrer et pas juste pour moi (mais ça, c'est une autre histoire).

Les 20 et 21 décembre, mon être profond a senti des choses sans que je puisse les nommer et a dirigé mon comportement pour que j'évite une confrontation brutale et dangereuse tout en me permettant de connaître la libération dont j'avais besoin. Pour la 1ère fois, j'ai pu être conscient de ce qui se passait autour de moi alors que je dormais et j'ai senti la prudence en toute conscience. C'est aussi pourquoi je ne suis pas rentré tôt le 20 au soir : pour ne pas voir ses valises dans sa voiture et partir une esclandre.

Ces deux habiletés sont très utiles, même vitales, devant tout danger. Je crois qu'elles n'apparaissent qu'après un long entraînement et un approfondissement de sa réalité à soi. Elles sont d'un autre ordre que celui des coups de poings et de pieds. J'ai pu vérifier ces aspects avec une maître du mouvement des profondeurs.

J'ai beaucoup d'affection pour ce jeune homme. Il est plein de talents et plein de problèmes aussi, dont un cerveau amoindri par l'usage de la cocaïne et une conscience peu élevée. Quel dommage! Je sais que, d'une certaine façon, je lui ai rendu service. J'espère – et je lui souhaite de tout cœur – qu'il saura trouver sa place dans le monde, car il a beaucoup à donner.

Pierre Huot teaches Taiji and Qigong in Ottawa-Gatineau. His classes focus on the principles and training methods taught by the late Gilles Vaillant, Sam Masich, and Joseph Chen. Master Chen certified Pierre in Hunyuan Qigong. Pierre teaches kids, teens, adults, seniors, and people with special challenges or needs; like stage training for a stand-up comic. He was authorized by John and Kim Bright-Fey to use their New Forest Way. He has created a structured, well-rounded water Taiji program that he teaches on a weekly basis. He has completed his certification in Helen Wu 's Therapeutic Qigong with Jill Heath and has begun studying the Practical Method that Master Chen teaches. He has recently opened his own school, which is affiliated with Master Chen's world Hunyuan Chen Academy, and begun publishing a regular e-bulletin, both under the name of Chung-Ming Zak. His teaching draws also from ai chi, feldenkrais, mentastics, sensorial gymnastics, voice and singing, and his background as an actor, dancer, and authentic movement practitioner and leader. He was a founding member and Vice-President, Teachers` Training and Special Workshops, of the Gilles Vaillant Tai Chi Center. Pierre is a Director of the CTF and a member of the National Canadian Kung Fu Fellowship.

Midback

The classics mention 'plucking the back' but there is seldom much explanation (don't ya love the classics). Often students will end up creating too much tension by their efforts to adhere to this principle. My experience is that, with time, the back will pluck without much effort. This plucking happens, in part, by lifting up through the spine and neck. Softening of the chest also facilitates a rounding of the back to create a slight plucking sensation. Bringing qi or awareness to the back will add to the experience, as will the principle of 'in front there is back.'

The front tends to dominate our awareness because of sight as well as hand positions, resulting in less attentiveness to the back. We need to keep balanced by bring attention to the area. 'Listening with the back,' helps to keep energy in the back, which gives it a sense of being plucked. This listening also helps keep the qi down. If there is too much focus on the front, qi rises. Another method to assist with the plucking is by having the sternum very gently seeking the spine. Remember, all of this should be accomplished through release and relaxation.

Being too active in plucking the back may cause excess tension and ultimately hamper progress. Conversely, many students do not give this concept much consideration at all. As always we need to find the balance and this can be a daily dance. As with all the principles we must be dedicated and diligent without being rigid or too eager. It takes a long time and a great deal of patience for these principles to settle into the body. If we tend to hunger for these experiences they will elude us, if we do not put effort into the principles they will remain theoretical understandings. Interesting but lacking in ultimate depth.

Chest

The chest area can hold a great deal of protection, physically and emotionally. Culturally we have all been exposed to protecting ourselves by projecting, shielding or hardening our chest. This has led to a great deal of emotional and physical struggle. We hide behind a presentation, sometimes of projected strength, sometimes collapsed victimization. This protection becomes layered by life's struggles and our true self is buried deep within.

Taiji encourages practitioners to soften, relax, and release tension in the chest as much as possible. This has both a physical and emotional benefit. It will take a while to let go of all the layers but bit by bit they can be surrendered. In Standing, we can slowly and consciously shed the old layers of tension that lock us in, and others out.

To soften the front of the body, swallow slowly and follow it down through the throat, chest and stomach, releasing along the way. Another consideration in keeping this area of the body relaxed is to make sure that you are breathing into the abdomen and not the chest. A big inhalation into the chest brings the qi up and adds tension. Breathe down into the belly and with each exhalation soften the chest and stomach as much as possible. It also helps to let the body sigh with the exhale.

At first, softening the chest may have a feeling of being exposed. This can feel very vulnerable initially, but eventually it becomes a feeling of powerful acceptance. Taiji philosophy is based on the power of softness, as opposed to bracing and protecting. Learning to trust softness is one of the greatest challenges of studying Taiji, especially in Pushhands, but it is the integral to the Art. It is also a important step in personal growth and acceptance. The other option of protecting, hiding and denying of fears, can be the biggest hindrance to overcoming them.

It is important to admit our vulnerabilities, not as a victim, but honestly acknowledging their existence. Denial does not transcend, transcendence comes through acceptance and awareness.

In the pursuit of wholeness, by definition, all parts of ourselves must be embraced. So allow yourself to experience that softening of your front. Let down your guard, let go of the presentation, and sense your deeper being. Allow your vulnerability to exposed itself. Do this slowly and in situations where you feel safe.

Eventually you will find that this softening is empowering. As you relax, energy that was used to hold and protect the chest, then lowers into the Dan tian. This energy also begins to fill the legs and feet, the support of your being.

I find that the softening of the front assists with the plucking and the rounding of the shoulders. They then help transform the feeling of vulnerability into a sense of strength. Play with the relationship.

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Shoulders

The shoulders are an on-going nightmare for most people. It is where many of us hold our tension; it is where we 'shoulder' our battle with the world. Our teacher's instruction to relax our shoulders is a seemingly endless part of our practise.

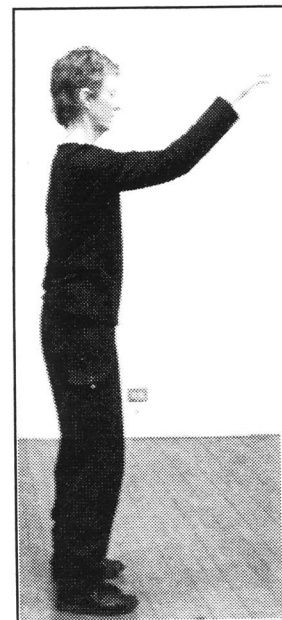
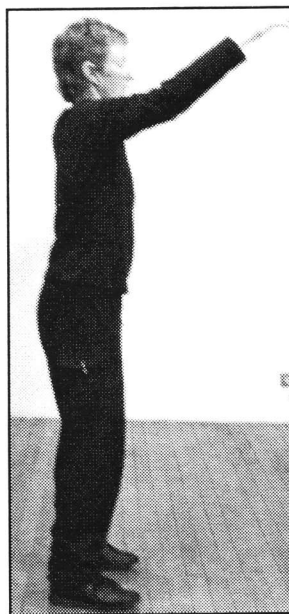
One of my favourite stories about this is about one Master who after years of reminding his students to relax their shoulders, phoned them all up excited with a new discovery. He gathered them all together and shared his new insight – 'REALLY relax your shoulders!' There is always another layer of tension to let go of.

The main challenge of keeping the shoulders relaxed is to figure out how to raise our arms without lifting and tensing the upper body. Ideally we want to keep the collarbone down and allow the shoulders to remain in the housing. Unfortunately people seem compelled to raise their arms by lifting through the shoulders. This invariably causes excess tension, disconnects the arms from the strength of the core and raises qi. This is far from Taiji objectives and from mastering laziness.

Another part of the problem is that besides our overzealous minds in our heads, we have mini-minds in our shoulders and our hands. As soon as we get an idea, the mind, the shoulders and the hands become very active and attached to accomplishing the goal and insist on leading the way. This leading is often disconnected from the rest of the body. Of course these parts are necessary components of the goal. The problem is that they often demonstrate an attachment to getting the job done, this causes excess tension. It also lacks the whole body connection that is so beautifully expressed in good Taiji.

Thanks to Sana's generous spirit, this is TongRen's sixth excerpt in a series taken from Sana's highly informative manual Taiji Wisdom. To purchase an updated copy of the complete manual, please contact Sana at:

sanashanti@gmail.com



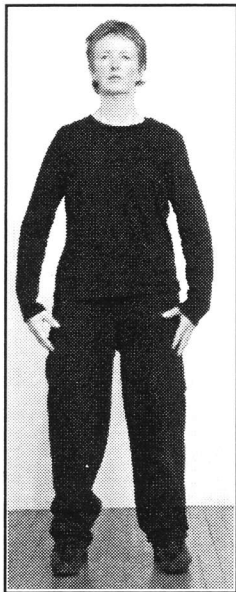
EXERCISE 13 **Shoulders Down**

A good exercise to explore the shoulders is to once again use exaggeration. Lift your shoulders up higher than you normally carry them. Go as far as you need to in order to clearly identify the muscles required to accomplish this lift. Notice what muscles are engaged, how they feel, and where the tension is. Lower your shoulders and feel the release. Then try another slighter lift and feel how immediately the neck and back are activated and tensed.

When releasing go slowly and make sure you are not pulling your shoulders down. You want to let go of the tension required to hold them. It should be that ever so sweet ride of letting go.

Now that you have a sense of the excess tension used try to minimize the muscle energy required. Remember this is the ART OF EFFECTIVE LAZINESS.

Try to keep the collarbone down as much as possible, not so much with force but by allowing it to surrender to gravity. If the collarbone is down the shoulders remain in the housing and retain their relationship with the hips. This adheres to the requirements of the Six Harmonies - the shoulders must maintain a relationship with the hips, the elbows with the knees and the hands with the feet. (More on this in Book 2).



Arms / Hands

In the beginning of Standing, I think it is best to start with the hands at the side. Most people carry a great deal of tension in the neck and shoulders so Standing with their arms raised often just adds to the tension. If you begin Zhan Zhuang without a clear understanding of relaxation, you will more than likely just add to the tension you are already so adept at holding. Allow the arms to hang in the beginning. As you get a good sense of letting go and relaxing you can gradually extend through the joints and into the fingers to bring more energy and qi flow.

Keep in mind that the most important thing in the beginning is releasing tension and relaxing. If you activate the arms too soon you will greatly hamper your overall progress. You can try busting through tension but this requires holding postures for a long time until the muscles finally give up. It is not the way I suggest but for some it is a valid practise. I find small steps of letting go serve students better.

After getting a sense of the arms relaxed and open you can begin to lift them slightly but with an ongoing resolution to keep tension to a minimum. You can hold the hands on the dan tian, one on top of the other, with the lao gong points lined up with the dan tian. The lao gong points can be found by touching the middle finger to the palm. Teachers differ in what hand should be placed on the belly first, and some reverse it depending on whether it is a male or female student. I practise both ways, usually following whatever teacher's practise I am using. Another

position is to form a downward circle with the arms; the hands cradling the dan tian.

When you are ready to start raising the arms it is essential to explore the principles of 'in up there is down.' The other principle to consider is 'in order to go up one must first go down.' Whenever we want to lift the arms or hands we need to be aware of keeping the shoulders and collar bone down. You can use the lowering of the shoulder blades as a type of lever that then raises the arms and hands – in up there is down. This keeps the collarbone down and the shoulders in the housing. This downward movement of the shoulder blades may need to be actively done in the beginning. Eventually it is more about the shoulder blades surrendering to gravity. Be lazy.

There is a tendency to focus on the lifting of the hands which then becomes a very active doing. If we bring intention to the idea of lowering the shoulders, particularly the shoulder blades it creates an essence of non-doing, or at least less-doing, as the hands rise. This also balances front and back awareness so that we do not become heavy in the front.

EXERCISE 14

Lowering the Shoulder Blades

Raise the arms, while purposely lifting the shoulders and collarbone. Feel the tension, feel how the qi tends to rise and the arms seem to separate from the rest of the body. Lower the arms paying attention to the release.

Lift the arms again, this time focusing on the shoulder blades lowering. It will take some practise to get the blades to lower as you lift your arms. It is worth the effort as it will make a huge difference in your ability to relax and release tension in the shoulders.

With the lowering of the shoulder blades, the arms and shoulders sink into the body with more connection, less tension. There will be a muscular feeling because you are engaging muscles to actively lower your shoulder blades but not as much tension as when you lifted them up. As you learn to let the shoulder blades surrender to gravity there will be even less muscular tension. You are working with gravity instead of against it. Eventually it will act as a smooth lever and the downward movement of the blade will lift the arms up. True laziness.

Once you have a sense of keeping the shoulders in the housing try this exercise. Raise your arms and shoulders. Then have someone gently pull on them. They will easily pull you off center. When the shoulders are raised, the arms are separated from the body and you will have to depend more on arm strength.

Then try with the arms raised but the shoulders lowered and in the housing. Now they are connected to the whole body so it is harder to be pulled off center. This is full body connection.

Another important consideration to keep the shoulders relaxed is keeping the elbows lowered. Often the tension in the arms and shoulders has more to do with the elbows than the shoulders. When the arms have raised slightly from lowering the shoulder blades, relax the elbows to bring the hands up even higher. Keep a sense of a weight pulling down the elbows at all times. This will keep the elbow lower than the shoulder which allows the shoulder to stay in the housing.

Learn to allow the hands to float up without excess muscle effort. To minimize tension only raise the hands until just the forearms are parallel to the ground. Over time with increased relaxation, you can work your way up to chest height. Round the hands at the wrist. Fingers and palms should be open and energized to bring the qi to the whole arm. The fingers should be even or slightly dropped. I find that if you lower the tips slightly the dan tian settles a little more. If you keep your fingers even, make sure you counterbalance the dantian.

Always keep the shoulders in the housing and keep awareness of 'backward energy' in the shoulders so that they do not float forward.



EXERCISE 15

Keep the Shoulders Free of Tension

While in standing posture with the arms and hands forming a small circle with arms parallel to the ground, explore the muscle engagements that happen depending on how far the hands are from center. Notice that if you extend forward (even slightly) that the muscles in the back of the neck and shoulders become tense trying to hold this posture. Bring the hands back in until you can feel the tension subside. Notice what happens when you pull the hands back too close to the body; again there will be an increase in tension. Remember it is the Art of Effective Laziness. Experiment until you can find that place where there is a minimal amount of energy and muscle being used to obtain your posture. The depth of your experience is only limited by your willingness to really listen and experience your body and how it works. This is an amazing study of physics in your own body. Not some external objectification of it. How exciting is that?

Sana Shanti has been studying Taiji for over 20 years with teachers from Canada, USA, and China, giving her a deep and diversified understanding of these arts. She teaches exploration and self-cultivation of the body, mind, and spirit. Emphasis is placed on awareness, posture, and relaxation. Her classes include partner work to deepen the understanding of principles and to improve interpersonal dynamics. Discussions on integrating the philosophy and principles into other aspects of life are a central and inspiring element. Sana has been sharing her insights into these arts for over 15 years. Her work can be integrated into any art or activity. She has taught beginners and advanced, young and old, internal and external martial artists. Sana has been acknowledged by many to be a talented practitioner and gifted teacher.

EVENTS / Événements

Classical Taiji Push-hands: Si-zheng and Ba-pan with Sam Masich

Friday 14 – Sunday 16 November 2008
Middle Street Primary, Brighton, England
Contact: see www.SamMasich.com

Qigong, 16 movement Taiji, form corrections with Nancy Lucero

Friday 14 – Sunday 16 November 2008
Contact: Helene Dobrowolsky (867)668-3814
Tai Chi Yukon, Whitehorse, Yukon Territory
info@taichi-yukon.ca
www.taichi-yukon.ca

Xingyi & Magui Bagua With Andrea Falk

Saturday 15 - Sunday 16 November, Basingstoke UK.
Contact: Neil <batesy70@yahoo.com>

November 22-23 Belfast, N. Ireland
Contact: Peter <p.gilligan1@ntlworld.com>

November 29-30 Nottingham UK.
Contact: Matt <matt@maguibagua.org>

Dalu & Taiji Applications' and the '37 Essential Forms

with Sam Masich
Friday 21 – Sunday 23 November 2009
Colegio San Saturio. Sebastián Herrera, 23 (Zona de Embajadores) Madrid, Spain
Contact: Javier (+34) 647 69 79 52
www.aprendeTaiChi.com

Teacher's Workshop with John Oliver Peel

Monday 11 – Saturday 16 August 2008
Temple Knights Retreat Centre
1018 Moot Rd., Lake of Bays, Muskoka. Ontario
Contact: (705) 767-1177 tknights@muskoka.com
www.templeknights.com

Magui Bagua with Andrea Falk

Sunday 7 December 2008
Quebec Wushu, 5445 de Gaspé, Suite 202,
Metro Laurier, Montreal, Quebec, Canada
Contact: Andrea Falk
andrea@maguibagua.org
www.thewushucentre.net

The Second World Junior Wushu Championships

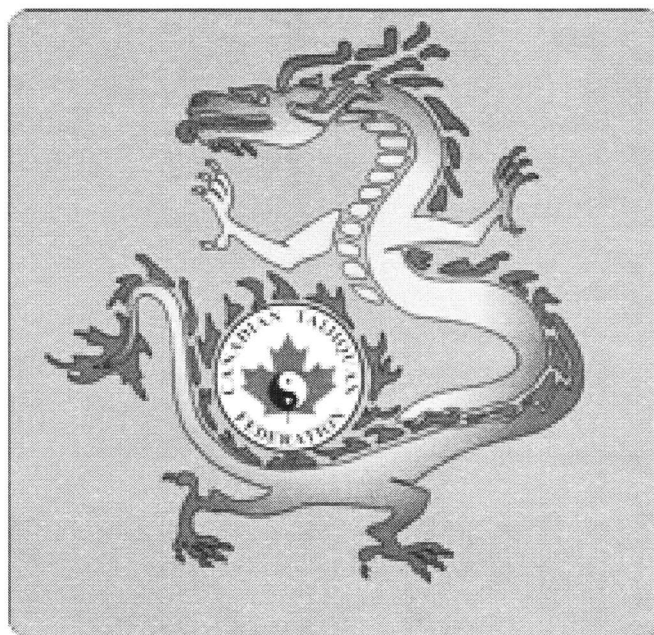
Sunday 7 – Sunday 14 December 2008
Bali, Indonesia
Contact: Antonio Han
www.cnwushuonline.com

Xingyi & Magui Bagua With Andrea Falk

Saturday 17 – Sunday 18 January 2009
Saturday 31 January - Sunday 1 February 2009
Halifax, NS or Victoria B.C., Canada
Contact: Andrew <cdn_wushu@yahoo.ca>
www.thewushucentre.net

Xingyi & Magui Bagua With Andrea Falk

Saturday 24 – Sunday 25 January 2009
Guelph, Ontario, Canada
Contact: James <james@maguibagua.org>
www.thewushucentre.net



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