

Classical Tai Chi

FORUM 15

April, 2007

Dear Students,

Ah the wonders of technology! We have been initiated to the potential of YouTube and Master Hwa feels it is the right technology to be able to show you, in concentrated bits, various aspects of learning Classical Tai Chi. The following is a textual companion to the video which is available on YouTube. See link in text below.

Please give us your feedback on using this method to illustrate points that Master Hwa makes. We value your feedback, comments, ideas and discussions.

Sifu James Roach created a searchable word index for the Forum (a monumental task!) which is available on his website: <http://www.classicaltaichiofbuffalo.com/>. Password is "classical".

We hope you are progressing well in your journey of Classical Tai Chi.

Sincerely,

Eva K.

We are pleased to announce and congratulate three more students who have passed certification in Classical Tai Chi, earning the title of **Sifu**:

William Cranstoun, Sacramento, CA

Gerry Shea, Rochester, NY

Ike Shultz, Pittsford, NY

Please visit: "**About Us**" on the Classical Tai Chi website to read more about them.

LEARNING THE INTERNAL DISCIPLINE OFFLINE – SILK REELING EXERCISE...FROM MASTER HWA:

There has been considerable discussion on this Forum and the Classical Tai Chi Discussion Board regarding how to learn and practice the internal discipline separately from learning the form movements, the so called "offline" learning approach. When one achieves a certain degrees of proficiency in both of these two parts, one can integrate these two parts. The offline learning could start with just a single move, such as moving the hand forward or lifting the leg, etc. and progress to simple sets of internal movements which can be played repeatedly in a continuous cyclic fashion. This is often called "silk reeling" exercise or qi gong. The beauty of this is that one could learn the simple sets relatively quickly so that one can have a taste of the pleasant sensation and some of the benefits of circulating internal energy or qi before one achieve the ultimate goal of playing the entire 108 forms with continuous internal energy or qi circulating in the body.

www.classicaltaichi.com

The two silk reeling exercises shown in this forum each concentrating on one of the two fundamentally important internal moves, the “turning move” and the “folding move”, from which most other internal moves of the upper body are derived, as seen in this Youtube video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ml4kisZwLZ4>

The movie was taken in my tai chi class at USA Karate. If you find the quality of the Youtube video is good enough to show the details, I will post more silk reeling exercise videos in the future.

The silk reeling exercise "turning + crunch" is very energizing internally. You will feel the intense energy circulation in the dantien. The “folding the body along the spine move” was discussed extensively in Forum 14. Several variations of “folding move” were tried in my class. The one shown in this Youtube video appears to be the most effective in training this move and also has great relevance to form practice. The movement gives strong stretching and contraction sensations at both the front and the back of the torso. Since it is carried out in square form, it is not a silk reeling exercise. There is not much continuous energy circulation. Because the folding movements exercise the muscle and tendon along the spine and stimulates blood flow in that region, it is a good way to keep the spine healthy. I will have a silk reeling exercise involving "folding move" in future Youtube distribution.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE NONMOVING PART OF THE BODY

Perhaps the most revealing in these two exercises is the importance of the nonmoving (ying) or the stable part of the body. I talked about this in the DVD set repeatedly, but I do not think I have emphasized this enough. I have observed that among my students the inability to hold the Ying part of the body stable is a major cause of problems during form practice. We all know that the Ying part of the body supports the moving (Yang) part of the body. For example, in the form, there are several moves which require one to swing the leg 90 degrees around while keeping the rest of the body stable. With any wobble in the stable part of the body, the power in the swinging diminishes and, in some instances, causing pain in the weight bearing knee due to slight twisting in the knee joint. The other important consideration, as shown in this Youtube video, is that the Ying part of the body essentially determines the Ying and Yang junction. Any deviation in the Ying part changes the junction location and alters the characteristics of the move. This is one of the reasons why learning square form is so useful since in the round form, the Ying and Yang are so fleeting, leaving little time to train the Ying and Yang correctly.

FROM EVA K.:

Have you wondered, as a distance student, how much help you can get in your journey of learning Classical Tai Chi? Wherever Master Hwa has traveled for family meetings or other business, he has offered his time to meet with students to help them with their practice. This past year, Master Hwa met with students in

California and Washington, DC. These meetings have been have proven a great way for Master Hwa to get to know personally some of his distance students and to help them with critique and advice. Please, if there is an opportunity for you to arrange such a meeting, take advantage of it. We will notify you of travel plans so you can make the necessary arrangements. This May we will be traveling through Pennsylvania, Washington, DC, Virginia and North Carolina. Another way to get help with practice issues is through the discourse offered at the Yahoo Discussion Group for Classical Tai Chi. The following are typical exchanges:

Hello!

I am practicing the tai chi walk and have the following question. The knee is not supposed to go past the big toe. There is straight line from the heel to the neck. But how much lean is too much lean? How far does one chin extend? should the toe, knee, and chin be in vertical alignment? In ending, I was just wondering how much lean is good and how much is too much? Are there any tips that one can use to maintain the correct lean? thanks. dennis.

Dennis,

If you take the stance of the knee of the front leg not going past the toes the lower back tucked and the back leg straight but not locked as a basis, then you will find exactly how much lean you can have while keeping a straight line from the foot through the knees, hips, shoulders and ears to the top of your head. So if you imagine looking at your body from the side and seeing a straight line going through those points you cannot lean more or less than one possibility without putting a kink in the straight line. That you have to discover yourself through a certain feeling of the posture's structure, and your imagination of the straight line.

Enjoy,
{sifu}Bill

Re: Principle of Internal Discipline vs. Internal Discipline as a Principle

The question about the parameters of "lean" is exactly what we mean about entering the discourse at a particular level. Bill's statements give a good description.

You can determine the proper angle of your body in the leaning position by the size of your step and the amount or degree that the front knee bends. Take a look at Lesson 9 in the DVD series and you will find discussion of the rationale...step size and knee bend.

The size of your step will really be determined by how tall you are.

I am 6'3" tall, and if I take a step like Master Hwa I will fall over my front toe when I lean. On the other hand, he takes a

www.classicaltaichi.com

step where his heel on the front foot is even with the toe of his back foot...I have to take a larger step. The heel of my front foot has to be several inches in front of my back toe.

Do not try to force your knees to bend alot with this size step, it will do nasty things to both your knees and back. This is a common concern for people just starting out and it may indeed feel awkward. The key is to look for a stretch from the neck down to the heel of the back foot...you must look for this stretch...that is the most important thing, I cannot talk about it enough.

In this forward lean position, with the minimal step that we recommend try to pick your back foot off the floor. That is the ideal...no weight on the back foot. Yet all of the weight on the front. As far as the chin goes...the chin tuck works with the rest to insure the "stretch". Too much chin tuck and it feels like you are choking yourself. Too little, and it feels like a "kink" in your neck...work for a stretch from the top of the head down to the back heel.

Relating this to the discourse on "Internal Discipline", the front leg is Yin during the lean and the back leg is Yang. You are supporting yourself over the front leg...not the back. The back leg can readily be picked up and moved either to another step forward or sideways, etc...because it is Yang...it has no weight.

*Yang is the moving part of the body

> *Yin is the stationary part of the body

> *Yin supports Yang

> *Yin provides majority of power

Believe it or not, the back leg during a "lean" is considered as a component of the "moving" part of your body. Since you should readily be able to pick it up (if your lean is correct).

Here's an example of how it should feel using body weight. Let's say you have a front foot on a bathroom scale and your back foot on another bathroom scale. You weigh 200 lbs., you will have 200 on the front scale and 0 on the back. Of course that is really an approximation, because the back scale will undoubtedly "quiver", but you get the idea.

In stepping from one scale to another...in a long line of scales that stretch before you to infinity, one leg will get to have 200 lbs. and the other 0. The important thing here however is that when the lean is accomplished, you get a "clean" shift of the weight...from 0 to 200...that quick. The "cleanness" and "quickness" of the shift improves with experience. Of course

that does not prevent you from shifting back equally as quickly if the situation warranted.

Yin changes to Yang, Yang changes to Yin in a never ending cycle.

If 200 lbs is Yin then 0 is Yang. Hope this helps.

{sifu}James

***MORE DISCUSSION FROM THE YAHOO BOARD:
{two newer students}***

FROM MARC:

I opened the overview CD with glee and anticipation of seeing and learning something spectacular. That I did. However, after then ordering the follow up CD's I have grown numb with overwhelm in seeing how much there actually is to learn in each move or sequence, let alone 108 movements ! I feel the overview CD alone could keep me busy for 4 or 5 years! So to say I am feeling overwhelmed and numb about it all would be an understatement. It seems to learn all the material well is a 20 year endeavor, and thats only to get "good", let alone excellent at it. Mastery seems reserved for the chosen few who are born talented in doing subtle movement. I am guessing many of the other 80 "lurkers" as you describe them, feel the same. I am also guessing one could get thru medical school faster than learning this form and doing it very well.

Literally!

I do believe the original tai chi came from 3 postures not 13 as most say. Why on earth couldnt we keep it that way, I am thinking!!!!!!! -)

I have heard Pakua practitioners talk of spending 30 years just to understand one move-- Walking the circle. So me thinks that in modern times, with bills to pay and many other responsibilities, this magnificent form may actually cause more stress in trying to learn it well, than it will alleviate. I mean, why is that in so many martial arts, the attrition rate is ski high, and it is always blamed on the "unmotivated students." Is this a fact? Anyway, for me, I am on temporary overload. Anyone here, with me on this?

Marc

www.classicaltaichi.com

FROM DB:

Re: Maybe many of us are still in shock!

Yes, I can identify with the feeling of shock and being overwhelmed upon viewing the classical Tai Chi videos for the first time. It was so different from all that I had ever learned or seen before that it definitely shocked me. In a good way.

I spent a few years studying from 3 different Tai Chi teachers and many videos. A little bit of Chen Tai Chi and a lot of Yang Tai Chi. I also read every book I could get my hands on, hoping to learn "the secrets". I even got into Hsing Yi and Baguazhang for a little while, hoping to learn exactly what makes the "internal arts" internal. Most of these teachers, books, and videos said many of the same things.

I learned some fighting applications that seemed very good, and some that seemed downright deadly. And I always heard of the incredible abilities of the masters as well as the great health benefits of the internal arts, especially Tai Chi. But, somehow I never found anyone who could explain the why or articulate the how in a way that satisfied me. And, I never seemed to experience the health benefits or the confidence in my self-defense capabilities that I should have had. I knew these things wouldn't come overnight, but they didn't seem to be coming at all.

Then, somehow, I found the Classical Tai Chi website. It was different than any Tai Chi instruction I had ever seen, but something seemed so right with it. I ordered the overview DVD. I was indeed shocked and overwhelmed. So much so, that I foolishly put the DVD away for months. I remember thinking, "Wow! That Master Hwa makes a lot of sense, but how can I learn without a teacher? It just seems like so much to learn. How will I know if I'm doing it right or not?"

Then, a few months ago, I was having serious hip and back pain. So bad, that I wasn't sleeping well. My hip hurt so much that I limped most of the day and was afraid that I would have to quit my job. I watched the Tai Chi Overview DVD, and followed along with Master Hwa's instruction. I'm still not sure if I do the quarter body movements correctly, but when I kept my pelvis fixed and turned my body, something significant began to happen. I also began the Tai Chi walk. Within a couple of weeks, my back and hip no longer hurt. I finally found the health benefits that Tai Chi had always promised. And only from doing the movements on the overview DVD.

www.classicaltaichi.com

Soon after, I ordered the form instruction DVDs. Again, I felt overwhelmed. However, this time I decided that I had spent years trying to learn Tai Chi and I was going to dedicate myself to learning no matter how long it took. After three or four months I'm only on the third lesson. There is indeed a lot to learn. I take it one small step at a time. Patiently realizing that things will sink in eventually.

I posted recently that I was learning the square form by pausing the DVD after each individual movement and drawing a picture with a description of the movement. I do this for my own reference so I can study and more clearly see each move. This method may be very pedantic and time-consuming, but it allows me to learn without being overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information and wisdom on the DVDs.

I'm also taking what Sifu James posted about using internal discipline in our everyday movements, and making that into part of my daily study. I will watch the overview and list each movement. Then I will make a checklist of how I can use these movements of internal discipline in my own everyday movements. For example, lifting a glass of water from a table to drink. (You can find a similar movement in the Overview DVD, and many others.) Obviously you don't want to practice some moves in front of people, or they may think you're pretty strange. :-). Just do what you can, and try to be more aware of how you can adapt internal discipline to your everyday moves.

I'm sorry for such a long post, but I thought I could contribute something by saying that I'm coming from the same place that many others are coming from. But, there is a way to deal with the feeling of shock and being overwhelmed. Think of things that may help you to learn it in tiny bits and pieces, or whatever method you think will help you to learn. I only spend an average of one-half hour a day with my study of Classical Tai Chi. I have a very busy schedule and hope to spend more time in the future.

Even this half hour is a step toward learning Classical Tai Chi. Even if you just watch a segment of the videos over and over again for a week. You will learn things. More and more will begin to sink in, and you will start to understand. Then, practice the movements and the form, and watch the videos again. More will sink in and become clear.

I hope that this information is helpful or encouraging to some who feel the way that I did when I started. I also hesitate to post on this forum, as I am a total beginner and feel that I have very little of value to contribute. One day I hope to learn from Sifu James and Master Hwa in person, but until then the DVDs have more information than I can learn in many years of self-study. I've already learned that things I was taught in my many previous Tai Chi classes were either wrong, or only partially correct. To me Classical Tai Chi is the final step in my journey to learn Tai Chi. I'm willing to be patient and progress at a snail's pace, since I believe that I've finally found authentic Tai Chi.

www.classicaltaichi.com