

CLASSICAL TAI CHI FORUM 6 OCTOBER, 2003

WITH THE COMING OF FALL AGAIN, WE ARE CELEBRATING A YEAR OF SHARING MASTER HWA'S UNIQUE AND CHALLENGING TAI CHI EXPERIENCE ON TAPE! I HOPE YOU ARE ALL GETTING THE MAXIMUM BENEFIT OF PRACTICING CLASSICAL TAI CHI AND THAT YOU WILL CONTINUE TO SEND YOUR QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS. WE WILL, IN THE NEAR FUTURE, ALSO HAVE THE SERIES AVAILABLE ON DVD.

AS A NUMBER OF YOU HAVE REQUESTED, IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF THE FORUM, MASTER HWA WILL EXAMINE THE CLASSICAL THOUGHTS AND PHILOSOPHY WHICH ARE CONSIDERED TO BE THE FOUNDATION OF TAI CHI.

WE ARE IN THE PROCESS OF EXAMINING THE POSSIBILITY OF MASTER CLASSES IN SOME CENTRALIZED REGIONS FOR STUDENTS WISHING TO MEET MASTER HWA AND RECEIVE PERSONALIZED INSTRUCTION AND CRITIQUE.

IN MY NOTIFICATION TO YOU ABOUT THE FORUM, I INCLUDED A QUESTIONNAIRE. IF YOU ARE INTERESTED, PLEASE SEND IT BACK TO ME AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. THANK YOU.

E. MARIE

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Yi-Martial Art Intention

Most people are now learning Tai Chi probably for reasons other than for serious martial art applications. So the question is how much should we emphasize the martial art aspects of Tai Chi? Certainly Tai Chi Form movements make more sense and are easier to remember if they are corroborated with the martial art origin of the movements - why there are these sequences of movements, and what the positioning of body and timing of the movements mean. Besides this aspect, there is a more subtle but powerful reason why the martial art aspect of Tai Chi is important. I shall discuss that below:

Tai Chi Form should be practiced with "Yi" (martial art intention). "Yi" is not something complex and elaborate. It is single minded and somewhat intuitive with the *desire to deliver the internal power externally through hands, arm and foot, what ever the movement is*. If the hand is moving forward, then the Yi goes to the palm and fingers; if

the hand is moving laterally in a blocking movement, then the Yi goes to the leading edge on the side of the hand; etc. Once the practitioner masters the “Yi”, it is no longer a conscious effort any more. It becomes subconscious and comes naturally whenever the practitioner makes a move. At this stage, when you play the Form, you have both the internal energy and Qi (nerve signal - a simple-minded definition) circulating in the torso of your body. With the “Yi” as a catalyst, the Qi is able to flow to your hands and fingers while the internal energy continues to circulate in your torso until you need it for an application. Then the internal energy will follow the Qi to the arms, hands, and fingers for delivery.

External martial arts such as Karate also practice a solo form called Kata. Kata allows the practitioner to study movements at full power and speed and allows the student to move with the enemy in mind. So, both Tai Chi form and Kata is practiced with “Yi”. But, Kata is practiced with a tensed up arm moving with power and speed: while Tai Chi is practiced with a relaxed arm and moving at a slow speed. The “Yi” in Tai Chi is therefore purely mental.

For some students, “Yi” is fairly easy to develop. It is almost natural to them. For some students, it is quite difficult to be consistent – other intentions creep in subconsciously from time to time. Students who have studied dancing or are interested in dancing have such problems. Normally, the fingers become very warm after playing the Form even in cold weather. One of my students here who had already achieved good internal movements complained about cold fingers. Upon close examination, she frequently had small flourishes in her hands and fingers. After reducing that flourish, her problem of cold fingers improved. Extraneous motions, or nerve signals, along the path of Qi, such as shoulder, elbow, and arms, have the same effect of disrupting the flow of Qi between the body and the fingers. People who use their hands intensively, such as dancers, typists, and piano players could have such problems. It is important for them to keep localized nerve activity dormant and let the Qi from the body take over. This is a good reason to learn the square form from which the practitioner will get used to movements with steady arms and hands without localized impulses.

The focus here is on the arms and hands not on the legs and foot. The reason is that during form playing, the lower limbs have definite functions to perform and its energy and Qi are already integrated with that of the torso. During Form playing, the upper limb’s function is entirely abstract and mental and is easily distracted.

S. T. writes:

I have finally finished the “parting the wild horse’s mane” lesson. I thought I had learned earlier lessons well, until *I saw myself practice these lessons in front of the mirror. I realize I looked pretty bad. What a wake up call!*

www.classicaltaichi.com

MASTER HWA'S RESPONSE:

This is on par with most students at this stage. This is your first stage in learning those lessons. It will take quite bit more practice to make it look decent. You see, your eye is now much more discriminating than what you can actually do, because you have watched my video for so long. You know what the form should look like. You can actually correct yourself by watching yourself play. Mirror is convenient but not very ideal, because you have to turn your head to watch yourself in the mirror, which will distort your form playing. The ideal way is to use video to record your play and then analyze the problems from the video.

At this stage, you want to watch out not only your form position and timing of movements; but also those little extraneous movements unconsciously added to the form- a little shrug of the shoulder here and a flick of hand there etc. These extraneous movements are difficult to get rid of.

Carl H. writes:

.....I took two tai chi classes sometime before. This is by far more complex to learn. I do appreciate the reasoning behind them and looking forward to the next lesson. But, the *going is very slow trying to remember everything about this very structured lesson. In comparison, two previous classes were almost like a free-for-all*

MASTER HWA'S RESPONSE:

You have the tapes only a couple of months. This period is the most difficult part of the learning curve. Everything is so new and appears to be complex and too structured. Your yearning for freedom will come gradually. What I mean FREEDOM is that, for example: William C., a frequent poster here, is applying internal movement to the physical work he does in his job; Barbara R., another frequent poster, incorporates internal discipline into some simplified tai chi class she is teaching elderly people; My students in the karate school find that they are incorporating internal discipline in the karate sparring exercise which results in a much more powerful hit and kick; After I learned several years of tai chi, I found that my tennis net game improved; seemingly the ball come at me slower so that I had more time to hit the ball and I knew how to punch the volley like a pro. In other words, gradually, you will have the freedom to incorporate what you learn into most everything you do, consciously or subconsciously. **Structured learning with clear rational and common threads enables you to extend what you learn beyond my lessons to areas whether it is martial arts or every day activities.** Learning arbitrary movements without clear rational and common thread is a dead-end endeavor.

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Lori N. writes:

I just completed my first lesson -- the walk. Very tricky but also very fun. This is going to be exactly what I have looked for so long. I have always loved to dance but never enjoyed performing for people. ***This dance of Taiji will be that dance I have been needing for so many years!***

MASTER HWA'S RESPONSE:

I am glad you have made a good start. It is important that you feel fun and challenged while you doing it. Your comments about Tai Chi as a kind of dancing is what prompted me to write about the topic Yi – the martial art intent. I remember my teacher became unhappy when someone referred to Tai Chi as an exercise. Again, the “intent” is lost when it was called as an exercise.

Jay W writes:

.....some of these large movements like the parting movement in the lesson “parting the wild horse’ mane”, I feel there is momentum in my swinging of the arm. It kind feels good, but I understand you have said that momentum in movement is not good. Could you elaborate?

MASTER HWA'S RESPONSE:

Perhaps the word “swinging” should not be used. It conjures an image of motion with momentum; instead, “moving” is a better word for it. “Moving” seems to project a controlled movement, and that is what we want for all our Form movements – **CONTROLLED**; controlled by our internal discipline at all times so that the internal energy and the form movements both flow continuously without break. When the motion is taken over by the momentum, it is essentially a “runaway” motion not involving the internal discipline anymore. Circulation of internal energy ceases during that moment.

From a martial art viewpoint, a primary strategy in tai chi martial art application is to counterattack by taking advantage of the opponent’s “runaway” motion. Those great masters’ ability to exploit and amplify an opponent’s slight momentum into major advantages is legendary.