

CLASSICAL TAI CHI
Forum 13
August, 2005

In Memory of my beloved teacher, Grandmaster Young Wabu

My teacher, Grandmaster Young Wabu passed away on April 18, 2005 at age of 101. With his passing, we have lost a precious link to the golden age of tai chi, the period from Yang Lu-Chan to Wu Chian-Chuan. As a disciple of Wu Chian-Chuan, he was faithful to the art he was taught by Wu. He could not understand why so many tai chi practitioners were so feckless with the art that resulted in the rapid degeneration of the art during his lifetime.

He loved teaching. A roomful of students always seemed to bring out his high spirit. He continued his teaching until last few years of his life. He was patient and yet exact in his teaching. He always started his students on the square form. For some students the progress on square form could be painfully slow. One student mentioned at the memorial service that after 15 years he had not completed learning the square form yet. It is a test on the patience of the teacher as well as the student. And it also shows his uncompromising nature of his teaching. He often told his students that it was his duty to propagate his teacher's art to the future generation. He also urged us to do the same. The responsibility of passing the knowledge on to the next generation is an obligation I felt deeply. I would like to include here a piece of his writing on Tai Chi:

TAI CHI CHUAN

Lao Tse, I Ching, Confucius, Shuan Tse
Studying Tai Chi you follow all these.
Within the rules any movement is tranquility,
Outside the rules any quietude is turmoil.

Solid but not dull.
Familiar yet retaining details.
Hands never above head,
Elbows never behind waist,
Knees never beyond toes.

Square and Round, Right and Left
Large, Medium, Small and Compact
All forms follow the rules.
The Square exactly
The Round more freely, yet precise.

Hands and feet have Yin and Yang,
And segments of the 4 limbs match the 8 trigrams
In harmony with the Universe.

Mind and body return to Nature
Mind leading, movements following,
Fitness, defense and healing result.

Neither detaching from nor blocking an opponent,
Learn to yield while retaining control.
Increase in sensitivity allows use of strategy
And virtue grows along with technique.

Each moment treasure and perfect the art.
Difficult diseases will be cured,
The Tai Chi Way will be perpetuated
And all will benefit.

Recorded by Leung Chan Ying and translated by Linyi Yeung & Paul Maslin



A most moving moment during the service for Grandmaster Young when his family and students played the Tai Chi forms before his casket to honor him. April 2005

With the passing of Grandmaster Young, I feel an ever more urgent desire to insure that Classical Tai Chi will be passed on to future generations.

Teaching Classical Tai Chi

Whenever I give a lecture-demonstration of the internal discipline of Classical Tai Chi, it always astounds the audience whether they have no contact with tai chi before or are an experienced tai chi practitioner. Invariably the response is extremely positive as though intuitively one can sense that it is what tai chi should be. As a teacher of Classical Tai Chi the abilities to demonstrate and articulate the internal discipline are essential since it is the soul of the art and the best attraction for recruiting students and setting a long term goal for them.

The crux of teaching the Form lies in the first eight lessons, including the first cloud hand. If the student can master these lessons, he or she will have no inherent road blocks to learning the rest of the Form. I find it quite useful to just concentrate on these lessons and repeat them until the student gets a good handle on them before starting the next lesson “kicking”. Even though these lessons only perform perhaps 30% of the total movements in the Form, a majority of the basic principles of the Form movements are already included in these lessons.

The footwork in these eight lessons is not complex, unlike those in the kicking lesson, and yet I find students have difficulties to take steps precisely which affects the upper body movements, balance and mobility. Using the Square Form as a reference and isolated foot work practice, it should not be a difficult task to minimize this problem. Footwork has definite utility and function in the Form movements while upper body movements are more abstract, guided by martial art intent only. Therefore, the upper body movements have great depth and nuance which often takes years to refine.

How does one teach the upper body movements? MINIMIZE EXTRANEOUS EXTERNAL MOVEMENTS first, such as a lift of shoulder, excess motion at the shoulder joint, stretching the arm out, pulling the elbow in, and swinging the arm without purpose or hand flourishes. Only when external movements are minimized can the internal movements be free to flourish. That is one of the purposes of square form-freezing the arm from external movements during certain Form movements. In the video I have repeatedly said that it is more difficult to teach “not to move” than to teach “how to move” in the beginning.

There are different levels of internal moves; some are obvious, some are subtle. The subtle ones include transitional moves in the Form. All these internal moves thread together to form a continuous stream of internal motion with no break. Persons who can achieve this will be called a tai chi master. For a teacher, he or she should at least be able to use internal for large and obvious moves.

Experience in teaching young people classical tai chi: I always thought that it takes maturity to understand and learn Classical Tai Chi and that it will be difficult to get young teenagers to be interested and appreciate this. I was wrong. I have many teenage students. Again, it is the internal discipline that attracts them. They instinctively grasp the importance of that and enjoy working toward that goal. It is a delight to teach them. I encourage anyone thinking about teaching to recruit students from this age group.

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Teacher Certification

I have been striving to come up with criteria to certify teachers to teach Classical Tai Chi and to include their contact information on this web site if they wish since I do receive lots of inquiries about availability of local teachers. It is easy to select all-inclusive criteria, but the long wait required could squander the talents and capabilities which are more than sufficient to start teaching and propagating Classical Tai Chi and its internal discipline. In addition, teaching is perhaps one of the most effective outside motivation force for the teacher to excel.

The criteria I selected for teacher certification is as follows:

1. The teacher has to be able to demonstrate major internal moves.
2. The teacher has to be able to demonstrate both the Round Form and the Square Form to the end of the kicking lesson.
3. What I will look for in the Form demonstration are: the precision of footwork, the steadiness of arm movements without superfluous motion, and ability to use internal for those large and obvious moves.
4. The teacher should be able to articulate what he is doing.

I think in this way the teacher will be sufficiently ahead of the student to provide a good lesson. In case the teacher is very lucky to find a student who can learn quickly and catches up with the teacher, there is always my video which the teacher and student can both learn together.

I am pleased to announce and congratulate the first certified teacher of Classical Tai Chi is **Jim Roach** of Buffalo, NY. He is extremely dedicated and accomplished.

"Jim began his Tai Chi study in 1976. He subsequently studied Yang and Wu's Style of Tai Chi. He spent much of his time traveling back and forth to Toronto Canada over the years at least once a week, sometimes more to study with very notable teachers. Jim had the privilege to study with the Great-grandson of legendary Grandmaster Wu Chien Chuan, Master Wu Kwong Yu.Jim became actively engaged in study with Master Hwa in April of 2003 and he was immediately (to paraphrase Master Hwa)"fascinated with the underlying principles that unified Tai Chi's seemingly complex movements." In addition to the Ken-Ton classes, Jim is actively seeking out experienced Tai Chi or other Martial Art students in order to conduct further workshops and classes in Classical Tai Chi. While he was an employee of the U.S. Customs Service, Jim conducted self-defense classes at the Federal Building in Buffalo, NY. He has also conducted workshops and personal instruction in Tai Chi for Karate Instructors and Karate Studios in Buffalo."

You can visit his webpage:

<http://mysite.verizon.net/resp93dg/classicaltaichiofbuffalo2/>

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A Review and Analysis of Master Hwa's Lecture on Classical Chinese Philosophy in Tai Chi.

On April 14, 2005 Master Hwa gave a lecture/demonstration that was free and open to the public at the University of Buffalo, Philosophy Department, on the application of Classical Chinese Philosophy in Tai Chi.

Master Hwa gave the lecture/demonstration at the invitation of Dr. Jiyuan Yu of the U.B. Philosophy Department. Dr. Yu was also present at the demonstration along with many students from his classes. There were many people crowded into a small conference room. I attended the lecture as a member of the general public. As a student of Master Hwa, however, I was very eager to hear him speak. Before the class began Master Hwa stated that he would like some space between the chairs so that people could participate. When I heard him say that, I had a pretty good idea what was coming.

Master Hwa's lecture was quite lengthy in detail although it only seemed to take a short time. The group had been warned that we would have to take part in a fire drill and about 15 minutes into the lecture the alarm sounded. At that point the entire group filed outside Park Hall onto a nice area of grass in front of the building. There as well, Master Hwa continued lecturing and demonstrating the various postures used in Classical Tai Chi. The class had not only come to listen, they had come to learn.

What I found so fascinating about the lecture was that Master Hwa was so able to blend a lecture about Classical Chinese Philosophy with a class in Classical Tai Chi. I was quite pleased at the thought that this was so interesting and how his many students could really appreciate participating themselves. I thought to myself that although I have read all of the Classical Chinese philosophers and studied Tai Chi for awhile I have never heard the two disciplines blended into one. Master Hwa coordinated the two disciplines in a very stimulating and appealing manner and made a presentation that would warm the heart of any devoted Tai Chi student.

Master Hwa urged the class to stand up and participate from the very beginning. With equal skill Master Hwa spoke about the Chinese Philosophers. He spoke about Chuang Tzu who is famous for not only his philosophical expertise but his delightful sense of humor. He spoke about the I-Ching, Lao Tzu, Meng Tzu and Sun Tzu. As Master Hwa stood in the small compact posture that is the signature of Classical Tai Chi he began reading from Chuang Tzu. He used Thomas Merton's text of "The Fighting Cock". "

...He stands immobile like a Cock of Wood, He is a mature fighter, Other birds will take one look at him and run..."

There it was I thought, there is no need for the ostentatious postures of Kung Fu and Tai Chi that the Martial Art magazines and motion pictures feed to us. Only the movies could make something so tasteless out of such a pristine philosophy and sell tickets to see it performed. The Fighting Cock has no need to strut and preen in a "vain and confident"

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manner as he did in his early days of training. There we are too, as students, we are portrayed as the “King”. In our impatience to “get better” at our Tai Chi, we are always in a hurry. “The King kept asking if the bird were ready for combat.” “Not yet, said the trainer” and there is Master Hwa as the “Trainer” urging us to be patient, “not yet, not yet” said the trainer.

“He is full of fire, He is ready to pick a fight with every other bird, He is vain and confident of his own strength”. The time passes in our training in Tai Chi, more time passes... “After 10 days he answered again, Not yet, he flares up when he hears another bird crow”, After 10 more days: Not yet, He still gets that angry look and ruffles his feathers”. “Again 10 days: The trainer said, Now he is nearly ready when another bird crows, his eye does not even flicker, he stands immobile...”

Drawing from the twin aspects of Chinese Philosophy, the Yin and the Yang, Master Hwa made a remarkable point about how difficult it is to train the Yin part of our nature. Of course he said, we are talking about the training in Classical Tai Chi. It is very difficult, the most difficult part of a student’s training to train the Yin. Here is the aspect that needs to be still, the challenge to be met by both student and teacher as to how to reach this stillness. It is embodied in our postures, personified in our very nature, and is the aspect that is stable , rooted and firm while all about us is moving.

Tai Chi is known as being 1 of the 3 “Internal” styles of the martial arts. They are Tai Chi, Pakua and Hsing I and their development is centuries old. The development of Classical Chinese Philosophy however dates back in terms of milleniums. For example, the I-Ching (The Book of Change is the earliest known book in China) dates back to 1000 BC. The symbols representing Yin/Yang and the Eight Trigrams were invented thousands of years before that.

As devoted students of Classical Tai Chi we need to understand how it follows the principles of Yin and Yang . I was curious as to what the Ching had to say about Tai Chi and in particular about the Yin and Yang aspects of movement. I “threw” the coins and consulted the Wilhelm Translation. I saw that the first Hexagram was 31 or Hsien/Influence and here is part of the commentary: “The upper trigram is Tui, the Joyous; the lower is Kên, Keeping still. By its persistent, quiet influence, the lower, rigid trigram stimulates the upper, weak trigram, which responds to this stimulation cheerfully and joyously.” Here I thought we have the Yin/Yang junction with stability in the legs (lower rigid trigram) and by “its persistent quiet influence it stimulates the upper, which responds cheerfully...” Master Hwa had talked about the importance of the Yin and its necessary stability. The rest of the Hexagram commentary should be read and what it talks about in terms of the different parts of the body and their relationship is uncanny. See Hexagram 31 at this website:

<http://www.akirarabelais.com/i/i.html>

Our bodies have Yin/Yang “junctions” where Yin and Yang complement• each other or this could be termed “boundaries”, “lines of demarcation” where the stationary part of the body meets with the moving part but each has the “seeds” of the other. The “junctions” also change locations on the body and exist as combinations of movements, for purposes

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of Classical Tai Chi the “primary junction” is always located in the torso. However, Master Hwa demonstrated that if the torso is neglected, the “junction” ends up being located somewhere in the lower legs, hence the “shuffling” steps of the elderly. The hard external punch is good example of yin/yang border being located at shoulder, very imbalanced. As Master Hwa demonstrated various postures he stressed the importance of Internal Discipline as the “energizing” principle which complements the “relaxed” or “stable” part of the body. He showed an abrupt, “jumping forward” movement which epitomizes “hard” or “external” martial arts as being solely “Yang” in nature with no Yin. One can see how easy it is to lose one’s balance from that type of abruptness since it has no stability. The posture of Cloud Hands is a very good demonstration of the “energizing/relaxing” principles at work.

We can develop martial arts “intent” and can learn to respond swiftly by practicing “slow” for “slowness” has the seed of “fast” and vice versa. Speed is not developed from “muscle” it is from “instinctive” movements which derive from understanding the “nuance” of all movement, understanding the “nuance” of all movement derives from practicing “slowly” in order to feel every nuance of a movement.

Master Hwa demonstrated the round form and square form and spoke of how they have each other’s “seeds”.

In quoting from Lao-Tzu’s Tao Te Ching (Robert G. Hendricks, Ballantine Books, NY, 1989) Master Hwa stressed the health benefits as we hear: “...at birth we are supple and soft, at death we are firm and rigid...”. We become supple and soft as we do Tai Chi and that is conducive to good health, to living. A hard clenched fist is not conducive to good health if we break it on someone’s head, keep a soft fist, like holding a Robin’s egg, yet it will penetrate much. Here we have our “base” for our practice of Tai Chi.

It gives us a primer on not only how we should practice but we see the Physical part of it as well. The statements about “birth”, “water”, etc. are meant to provide us with images or “templates” which if followed assiduously will give us the “principles” which lead to the many health benefits such as suppleness, endurance, softness and “living robustly in the springtime of life”.

“...nothing is softer and weaker than water, yet for attacking the hard and strong, nothing can beat it...” There we have the martial art application of Tai Chi and we are putting that knowledge into practice.

“...where there is no substance, is where we find usefulness...” Everyone knows the use of the useful but few know the use of the “useless”. The emptiness of a cup is precisely what is useful about it and the

“yielding” tactic of Tai Chi epitomizes its usefulness as a martial art. “...formless am I, ...shapeless am I, ...shapeless and formless...”

In that we find the small and compact postures of Classical Tai Chi not stretched out and ostentatious Tai Chi postures. We follow the Tao or the “great way” and that is none

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other than the “Internal Discipline” as we gradually absorb our forms into the subconscious, our bodies learn viscerally.

In Sun-Tzu: The Art of Warfare

How can we overcome without fighting? “...highest excellence is to subdue the enemy without fighting...” If our opponent does not move, we don’t. “...make himself invincible, wait for enemy to expose vulnerability...” Here we can sense the enemy weakness through our immobility.

Don’t show our defense. “...Not let defense be visible, ...force comes from nowhere, ...use element of surprise...”

Alternate “surprise” with “straightforward” “...surprise and straightforward operations give rise to each other...”

Again we see the value of having “No Form” being “Compact”, we need to eschew expansive Tai Chi stances and postures for they “expose” our intent, “shows” our weakness, and “retards” ability to respond. Do not succumb to “trench” warfare, “yield and counterattack”. A small stance prevents our opponent from finding our center of gravity and we can shift weight quickly.

Sun Tzu says: “...ultimate in , ...have no form...spies not able to look at it...not able to lay plans against it...”

In our Classical Tai Chi we hear the term “sticking to the opponent” and we see this mirrored in the advice of Sun Tzu through the terms “skirmish and probe”. “...he shows himself...skirmish to find out where strong and vulnerable...” Here we can see our opponents soft spots, if we see it is not a trap through sensing and “ting jin” (listening to opponents power) then lightening strike with “fa jin” “...bait him with gain, ...start out after, ...arrive before him...” We yield to an onslaught and he is committed to a forward movement because he has so much momentum, if he is cautious, you give him just a little resistance to let him think he has the upper hand.

To sum things up: Our bodies, minds and spirit mirror what is happening in the universe and we exist as embodiments of the complimentary but opposite pairs of Yin/Yang. Male/Female, Offense/Defense, and many others. We see the twin aspects further mirrored in our Tai Chi but in particular in what has been re-developed in Classical Tai Chi. There is nothing that is dominant that does not change/evolve in a cyclical manner into its opposite/complement, each contains the “seed” of its opposite for development. Someone who is aggressive for instance does not stay in that state forever because the very nature of that imbalanced state has its “seed” so it evolves or changes into its opposite, that of submissiveness. If the individual does not acquiesce to this aspect of their nature it leads to distress of the system. Hence, we see the fruits of aggressiveness, striving, dominance and other “admired”

characteristics of modern life. The evolution of these characteristics to their opposite state is inevitable, we are part of the Tao whether we wish to “participate” or not. We can “fight” that part of our nature that wants to be compassionate instead of aggressive or we can “go with the flow” both realizing and nurturing the other part of ourselves. Fighting with ourselves and others because we have to be “right” will lead to imbalance in ourselves, our families, our work and is directly responsible for the development of “Stress” and all of its related diseases. Classical Tai Chi can give us the ability to not only “go with the flow” but to direct that flow as well.
Sifu **Jim Roach**, Classical Tai Chi Instructor, Buffalo NY

Q&A's

Greg W. writes:

...In this 12 year period, I studied under four different well known tai chi teachers of Chen, Yang, and Wu style. Learned their form quite well, I think. But, always feel there is something missing that tai chi with such distinguished reputation should be more than what they were teaching. That was the reason I search out one teacher after another. Since I got Master Hwa's DVD nine months ago, I know I finally find my tai chi home. I am enjoying the richness and depth of the teaching realizing that it will take me years to be good at it. But, that is what I expected to learn the real tai chi. During discussion with my tai chi friends, the questions often touch the subject of “forward lean” of the body, especially the lean during “walking backwards brush knee”. **You have explained in the earlier forum about the advantage of forward lean for forward fa jin during martial art application. What is the advantage of forward lean when walking backwards? Is this the only way of body going backwards during martial art moves?**

Master Hwa's response:

The movements in question, sometime called “walking backwards brush knee” or “step back brush knee” or “step back repulse monkey” are shown in the following photos: Motion starts on picture 1 to picture 2 and picture 3.

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Picture 1

Picture 2

Picture 3

From picture 1 to picture 2 shows the forward lean by the foot moving backwards. This is the repulse monkey move. It is a move to set the forward lean body structure ideal for forward fa jin (see forum 8, 9 and 10 for details) and deliver the forward fa jing. It also could be a move to repulse the opponent behind by thrust foot backwards since this is also the ideal structure to project the power from dan tien to the back foot with the body and the back foot on a straight line. This is a move with internal power. During Form practice, even though we do not project the entire internal power outward, there is the up-down energy flow and the sensation of a stretch between the neck and the Achilles' heel indicating that the channel for internal power flow is established and ready for action.

From picture 2 to picture 3 is the sit back move. This move does not have to be connected with the move discussed above during application. In other words, moving body backwards does not have to be associated with the forward lean move during applications. For example, during moving step push hand, the step back move is done with the body vertical to the ground, since there is no need to set the body structure for forward fa jin. In this case, just take a step back and sit back.

During martial art applications, one has to use moves appropriate for the occasion whether it is internal or not. But, the mid frame Tai Chi Form we practice has to use internal in every one of its moves to keep the internal energy and qi circulating without break. The differences in emphasis between Form practice and martial art applications will be discussed more later.

Greg W. further writes:

The other question I have is that you have instructed **when one takes a step, one has to use the lead foot to pull the body forward or backward, no pushing from the trailing foot. Why this is important?**

Master Hwa's response:

The movements from picture 2 to picture 3 show the sit back movement where the back foot leads the body backwards without the front foot pushing. This sit back move was

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discussed extensively in forum 10. When one is trying to neutralize an opponent's incoming force, it certainly has no reason to add to the incoming force by pushing on the front foot. In fact, as discussed in forum 10, the front foot heel grabs the ground to help absorb the incoming force.

The forward move by pushing from the back foot renders both feet stuck to the ground; while pulling by front foot leaving back foot free for other moves. So the mobility improves. In other situations, whether or not one uses pushing force will depend upon the application. Again, the mid frame or mid circle Form which we are practicing needs to stick with internal move which is the pulling move not the pushing move. Large frame or large circle Form with the large steps and lower posture is where the pushing move practiced and strengthened.

(The pulling move is an internal move because when one starts such a move, one needs to energize the abdomen, back and buttock and the pulling leg to initiate the move; while the pushing move uses primarily the leg muscle.)

Tai Chi Forms of different frame size

Master Hwa: Often the questions I received have to do with the relationship and scope between different frame size of Tai Chi Forms. The following statements may clarify some of these questions:

The movements in both the Mid Frame (Mid Circle) and Small Frame (Small Circle) Forms are entirely internal to keep the internal energy circulating without interruption. Since internal moves are packed with power, they are the main source of the power moves during martial art applications. Mid Frame are suitable to teach students of all ages. Small Frame can not be taught as a stand alone Form. It has to be an outgrowth from the Mid Frame Form.

Not all moves in martial art applications are internal. For example, reposition moves like moving a hand in order to be able to stick with the opponent need not to be an internal power move. One only uses power move on opponent at the right moment for a decisive outcome. If an external power source, such as pushing by leg muscle, helps the move instead of hindering it, it should be included.

Large Frame or Large Circle Form helps to develop some of the external power especially the lower body strength useful in martial art applications. It is best to start learning when the student is young. For older students, the demand on the lower body joints may pose risks due to the low postures. Large Frame Form because of its external movements such as the outstretching of arms, large swings of the arm at the shoulders and pushing with the legs, is difficult to use to teach internal moves to students. Students will always opt to use the easier external movements. Only when external moves are minimized in the Mid Frame can students begin to learn the more difficult internal moves.

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As far as martial art application is concerned, Large Frame will be useful to take down the opponent when the opponent is already out of position. When two equally skillful opponents struggle to seek the upper hand, swift changing directions and tactics will be needed to avoid exposure, instead, creating openings in opponents' moves. Mid & Compact Form's training are more suitable for this task. Once the opening is created, one could then use a large move to take down the opponent.

The Square Form has no direct impact on martial arts application. It is an important preparation exercise for the Mid Frame Form. It drills and trains the nervous system of the body to carry out the yin-yang moves precisely. When the square form is carried out with the Mid Frame step size, it actually trains the lower body for all its internal moves. But, the upper body internal moves are learned in the Mid Frame Form.

All the Forms provide health benefits to its practitioner. But, the Mid Frame and the Small Frame Forms will provide the ultimate in health benefits by developing internal energy and qi and keeping them circulating in the body.

The Forms provide the necessary personal preparation for martial art applications. But, actual application needs training with the presence of an opponent which is beyond what the Form practice can provide. Therefore, the practice of push hand and sparring exercises are necessary for this purpose.

EVENTS: past and upcoming.

This spring and summer, Master Hwa presented a number of well received lectures and intensive workshops.

In April, the lecture at the University at Buffalo and then a workshop at Ken-Ton in Buffalo, arranged by sifu Jim Roach.

In early July, Master Hwa was invited to present two workshops at the Master Jou Birthday Celebration at the Memorial Park in NJ.

In late July he was in Kent, England for two lectures and an intensive two-day workshop arranged and co-sponsored by student, Alan Stirling Director of the Feng Shui Institute

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Kent, England workshop participants including Alan S. and Yubi N. The presence of more polished Classical Tai Chi students with newcomers provided a great experience for everyone.

In September 2005, Jim Roach and Classical Tai Chi of Buffalo is again presenting a workshop. See:

<http://mysite.verizon.net/resp93dg/classicaltaichiofbuffalo2/>

Plans are under way for **an intensive workshop in Northern California one weekend in Oct or Nov. 2005.** If interested, and to write to us with your questions, observations and comments about your practice of Classical Tai Chi, please send email to **parea10@yahoo.com**

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