

CLASSICAL TAI CHI FORUM

**VOLUME 2
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Dear Students,

Master Hwa was very pleased that you took the time to contact us with comments and questions and hopes that you will continue to do so. He feels that this ongoing exchange will enhance your practice and learning of classical tai chi as well as his instruction. When we are learning from a tape, we feel we are alone and might not realize that others are experiencing the same challenges.

The following are some excerpts and questions from emails that have come to us in the past month.

Please continue to send your observations and questions to me at:

parea10@yahoo.com

E. Marie

A general comment from Master Hwa

Some of the following letter writers seemed to have started the classical tai chi lessons rather smoothly and with a minimal amount of anguish. I have to say this is not the norm. A majority of the students in my class have a considerable amount of difficulties and frustrations with the first few lessons; in particular the tai chi beginning forms (Form Lessons 2). The forms in Lesson 2 are quite demanding in comparison to those of the later forms. I am not talking about the internal discipline here, just the external movements. It is tough for a beginner to jump right in at such level of difficulty. Therefore, a majority of current tai chi instructions often omit the beginning forms. On the other hand, if you are persistent and patient working through these first few lessons, you will have demonstrated to yourself that you can learn the entire form in due time.

FEEDBACK AND QUESTIONS FROM STUDENTS

I was very pleased to get the first issue of Forum. I do have a couple of questions, not about learning from the tapes--the main problem I'm running into there is just remembering to do the movements internally when I'm practicing--I'll remember to do some that way, then find I'm just doing some others without giving any special consideration to the "torso method," as I've heard it called by others (who couldn't seem to explain it). But I expect the more the movements themselves become second nature, the less likely I'll be to be distracted by a stray a thought about whether I'm remembering the external components right.

Before I got the overview for Classical Tai Chi, I had signed up for the forms competition at a small tournament that was within Saturday driving distance. I got the overview tape a few days before, realized from it just what sort of criticisms I was likely to get and wasn't disappointed. But

the sheets the judges gave me (one for each judge) did tell me a few things I didn't realize I was doing--some good, some not. The judges came from various style backgrounds and so did the participants, so the focus of the judging was on principles rather than style. There will be another couple of tournaments this year held by the same association..... **but I wondered if there would be any objection to my entering the fall one again, as a way to get a more objective check than I might be able to give myself on how I'm progressing.**

Also, a Kung Fu school which is a member of the same association, but not a "tournament" school is offering a Yang style class fairly nearby at a time I might be able to attend....I don't wish to become one of those people who know so many styles, they tend to get them mixed up, but my experience so far has been that anything I learned related to Taiji provided some sort of background for understanding something else about it. **I was wondering if Master Hwa would have any advice about how much is too much when it comes to dabbling in other styles.**

Returning to remembering to generate the movements internally, just one comment. On the Overview tape, **Master Hwa mentions that teaching yourself the left style after learning the right one is a very good learning experience. It is, and so is trying to explain "internal" to somebody else.** I'm supposed to give a short program on Taiji and demonstrate a little of it to a senior citizens group my parents belong to and find myself thinking extra hard about making the section of the form I'm going to do for them internal. Of course, I already know how to demonstrate more specifically by exaggerating the movement, since I have a good example to follow, but I'd hate for them to catch on so quick they'd be able to point out how I failed to put it into practice in my own playing.
B.R.

Response from Master Hwa:

Whether or not to dabble in other styles and get feedback from other live instructors is dependent on your understanding of the principles of tai chi. If your understanding is good, then you will be able to select the good points to benefit from them. If not, one may acquire bad habits, which may be difficult to correct.

I teach in a large Karate school. Some of my students are instructors in the school and of the US national team. They very much appreciate how tai chi, especially the Internal Discipline, can benefit them. But, I also learn from them. I found some of the topnotch "external martial art" masters also incorporate significant amounts of internal discipline in their instruction.

By all means do participate in the tournaments. It will certainly give you the additional incentive to learn and practice and valuable feedback.

You are very right that trying to explain the internal discipline to other people is a valuable experience for yourself. I want to encourage everyone on this forum to do this when you have chance.

I have been working with the classical tai chi tapes for a couple of weeks now and as a twenty year practitioner of the Yang family style I want to make the following comments. I have never been so clearly informed on the differences in moving the waist while the pelvis and hips are still. I feel like a towel that is being wrung out with the center of the wringing out dynamic is in my abdomen. Also I have never been instructed in pulling from the leading foot. I was having a hard time with this until at last in practicing the walk I had the feeling at first in the backwards walk that there was a suction force pulling me back and it felt quite effortless.

It is taking some time to get used to but my practice formerly was to play the form with such big steps, now I really need to think a new dynamic and remind myself to place my heel near the toes of the other foot. **It's amazing that this small step produces such a good whole body stretch. I am finding ways to practice the quarter body movement in a repetitive manner in many situations including the physical work that I do. Mainly though in repetitive single tai chi moves. I have never been shown the difference between the internal discipline and momentum before..I am interested in the history of this form, not to prove its validity, that is borne out in the practice.**

Thank you Master Hwa for the wonderful instruction!
William C.

Response from Master Hwa:

Your method of practicing the quarter body internal movement is right on. Students in my class tell me that they practice such a single movement when they are driving, standing in the line, during working. One could therefore concentrated on learning the external aspects of the form movements initially, without worrying too much about internal discipline, keeping the learning of internal discipline “offline”. Later on, one can integrate the external aspects with the internal discipline.

The history of this form is well recorded up to the Yang family founder. There is a very interesting article talking about large circle tai chi and small circle tai chi, and how Wu, my lineage, learned the tai chi from the Yangs’: <http://www.wustyle.com/essay.html> . Earlier history about the form which passed down from the Chen to the Yang is not quite as clear.

The form I am teaching is actually an intermediate circle, simply because small circle or the compact form as I mentioned in the video, should not be taught to beginner. When one is proficient with the intermediate circle, you will be able to evolve into small circle naturally.

I bought your four tapes with lessons about 2 months, or so, ago ... I have been taking my time and have only gotten through the first 6 or 7 lessons. Wow ... lot's to learn (for, the movements are much harder when trying to learn the internal discipline as well) **What is 'taichi sword'? What is 'taichi knife'? What is 'taichi spear'?**

DW

Response from Master Hwa:

Each tai chi weapon has its own special form. The common denominator is the ability of delivering internal power instantaneously, at will, through the weapon. Therefore, the proficiency of tai chi is a prerequisite before learning tai chi weapons. I myself have not got into weapons.

i have always been told **sink sink and sink**
so i sink my hips and never allow them to come up.
i started letting them come up and i can feel the
muscles in my abdominal area working and stretching.

KL

Response from Master Hwa

This is a common misconception that tai chi needs to be practiced with a low posture, i.e. deeply bent knee and large steps. No wonder so many practitioners develop knee problems. Proper "sink" is an internal concept that requires one to drop and relax the shoulder, keeping the elbow of a raised arm downward (not in flying wing fashion), diaphragm breathing, and tuck the behind in.

To make the learning from tape easier, Master Hwa has developed a two-hour ***PRACTICE TAPE FOR CLASSICAL TAI CHI*** ©. As the title states, it is for practice only. There is no instruction given. The setting is the same as studying with your teacher. It is the back view only with a series of repetitions going through the forms. The pace is slower than the Instructional Video for easy following. The repetitions allow you to practice without the need for excessive rewinding. You can easily switch between the instruction tapes and the practice tape. I myself and several other students here have found it invaluable to help our practice flow. The tape is offered to complement the instruction series at only the cost of the tape, mailing, and handling for \$8. You can order by mail, to Synerchi Publishing, PO Box 165, Penfield, NY 14526 cash or check, or using the "send money" feature of Paypal at www.classicaltaichi.com.