

NEWSLETTER

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“500 TIMES EVERY DAY?”

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ENERGIES

Do you know where the following energies are within the forms you practice?

- * Wringing a washcloth
- * Missile launch
- * Scattering seeds
- * Fly fishing
- * Mouse trap closing
- * Dropping an Anchor
- * Tug of war
- * Chopping with an axe
- * Pulling a church bell rope



“The intensity and quality of one’s effort determines the value of one’s Tai Chi”

Wolf Lowenthal



“Treat yourself as you want others to treat you”.

Donna Lynn



MASTER GAO FU

***arrives mid June ***

GENE’S ADDRESS

Last month I forgot to list Gene’s new address. Gene and Sumara are enjoying Fairfield and have re-discovered joy in studying and practicing the arts.

Gene Burnett
P.O. Box 972
Fairfield, IA 52556
(no e-mail address Gene?)

OUTSIDE SESSIONS

As the evening stays light longer we will begin to have class session outside in the park. So . . . be sure to bring a sweater (perhaps gloves) to practice considering the occasional cool breeze at Discovery Park. Also remember the code: car on street we’re in the park.

SATURDAY SESSIONS

In June we will also be moving outside until fall. Due to the construction at our usual place in Woodland Park we will move to the area by the tennis courts on 50th and Woodland park way. This is the area directly east of hwy 99 just off of 50th street. There is one parking lot and one circular drive around. Though this is a little farther from the Phinney Center there are restrooms to use which was a problem at the other site. SEE MAP page 3

AIKI JO/T’AI-CHI PARTNER CANE Saturdays 9-9:45

Starting the first Saturday in May I will begin to teach the partner cane and partner aiki jo (short staff). This is the same form only slightly adapted to the cane or

As every student of traditional martial arts (or kung-fu movies) knows, teachers are prone to demanding seemingly impossible training feats of their students. I think of the old kung-fu TV show where the master and the tradition required that before he could leave the temple the young student had to snatch a pebble from the masters’ hand before he could close it, walk across a floor covered with rice paper and leave no trace of his passing, and finally to hold a smoldering caldron between his forearms and lift it, impressing dragon shaped burn scars into his flesh! When I was a kid this seemed totally cob! But realistically my first response to the old caldron is “couldn’t I just stay here in the temple?” In one movie the master had the disciple doing pushups on his fingertips with a raw egg under each palm. If he broke the eggs he had to eat them. Many omelets later, of course, he’s doing them on the edges of a well with the master sitting on his back!

Even in more modern times when I heard that Gao fu’s teacher Feng Zhiqiang did 15 repetitions of the Chen form each day in front of his teacher’s house before class, my legs hurt just thinking about it! And of course there was always master Tchoung’s famous declaration that this or that exercise is best practiced hundreds of times a day. I was present at one of these declarations. We had driven up to Vancouver for a lesson and visit and had just gotten loose from the 3 hr drive when sifu announced that he would show us a new exercise. This exercise would help us with an important skill, useful in tui-shou: a quick, tightly coiled grounding of someone else’s push followed by an equally quick bounce-back push to the opponent. The exercise was simple. I called it the ‘short spring.’

He had us sit in back stances. Front foot empty pointing straight ahead - back foot 100% weighted turned out at about 60° (2 o’clock). With our back legs slightly bent he had us bounce up and down while he counted “one, two, three . . .” Aside from learning how high sifu could count in English (about 20) I also learned that my thighs were not as strong or as springy

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as I'd thought! I guess we had done about 50 or so when he turned around and said "500 times, everyday, Verrrry good!" of course we all laughed, rubbing our thighs, grinning and shaking our heads. But I liked the exercise and soon included 50 reps each leg in all my classes. As a joke as well as an inspiration I often told my student about sifu's "500 times everyday!".

Now years later, I've stopped teaching formally, I living in a small town and I have the time to unwind from city life. Amazingly I've found that my practice has returned. I had lost touch with it over the past few years - doing most of my tai chi on a teaching schedule, preoccupied with making a living, deciding to stop teaching for a living, leaving Seattle, etc, etc. Now my practice has found me. I'm falling in love with tai chi all over again! I'm loving exploring and studying the connections between mind, body, spirit, heart, breath, energy, movement, nature, art and consciousness. This practice, and tai chi is of course a major part of it, is what makes life worthwhile to me. Without it life becomes about power and things with no real satisfaction or wholeness. With it - life is an adventure. My tai chi practice has become more spontaneous, inner-directed and relaxed. As has the rest of my life.

One day during morning chi kung practice, for some reason, the old "500 times everyday!" line popped into my head. I was doing the short spring exercise and decided to give it a try. At first I just doubled my 50 reps each leg to 100. Then about a week later I upped it to 150. The next week I started doing two sets of 150, about 10 minutes apart in my basic workout. The next week I was doing one set of 200 and one of 150. Within a few days I tried one set of 200 and two sets of 150. "Hey!" I thought, "that's 500 times each leg each day!" My next step was two sets of 250 which is where I am now. I must say the last 50 of each set is tough and I anticipate hanging out at this level for a while.

The main result is that my back stances are noticeable stronger and "springier" and all "sitting" into stances feels better, more grounded and relaxed. A secondary result is just the fun of living up to one of those legendary master's instructions. (Even if it doesn't mean bar-b-qing my forearms!) My next step will be 300/200 and I hope to eventually do 500 straight each leg, each day. I'm not sure this is possible but I'm going to find out! All I know is 2 sets of 250 is possible and that feels pretty good.

Note: If you want to try this exercise make sure you obey the usual knee rules. The knees stay bent the entire time. All the body weight is on the back foot. The knees point down the middle of the feet but don't go past the toes. It is a small movement, a slight pulsing bounce perhaps 1-3 inches depending on your height. It can be done at a fast pace which is easier, a moderate pace which is more challenging (my favorite) or slowly which is excruciating! It's really surprising how difficult and rewarding this simple exercise can be. What you should feel is thigh work and pressure even on the sole of your back foot. If you feel pain in your knees or feel your weight in your knees - **STOP**. Find someone who can correct your posture because you're probably doing something wrong. It's not a loose bounce you want but a coiled springiness. You should feel that springiness - that resistance - in your thighs throughout the exercise. The bounce happens against a background of this coiled sitting feeling. And remember : 500 times a day is not necessary to get results from the 'short spring' - any number that feels right will suffice!

staff. These sessions are an intermediate and advanced class so only members who have had weapon training before are welcome to join this group. In addition to our club members we will also have a few local aikido students joining us for practice. Since I will be gone a couple of Saturday in May this session will span May-mid July. On the days I'm gone it will give you time to practice and refine what you know. We will meet at the Woodland Park site.

CHAN SSU GUNG ZHAN ZHUANG

Also beginning in May will be the start of another basics/beginning class: Saturday 10-noon. For the next two months we will primarily focus on the Chen Tai Chi Chan Ssu gung and Zhan Zhuang/I-Chuan. These tend to be more martial type of chi methods that work the energy and the body deeply.

SUMMER RETREAT July 25,26,27,28

Visiting instructors so far: Michael Gilman, John Camp, Bob Iden, myself and some surprises visitors. In the June issue I will have a list of the instructors, approximate times and sessions they'll be offering.

KOOTENAY TAI CHI SUMMER CAMP

August 24-30th

\$425 Canadian \$360 US

This summer the guest instructors will be: Harold Hajime Naka, John Camp, Arnold Porter, and Rex Eastman.

Kootenay Tai Chi Center
Box 566, Nelson B.C.
Canada V1L 5R3
(250)352-3714 phone/fax

FORM COMPLETIONS:

Studying this form a bit more than a year I'm proud the following have completed the Cheng Ting-hua 24 Animal Palms:
Russ Fish, Steve Cousins,
Ken Astrin, Art Treffy, and Joel Hartshome

ALL SEATTLE TAI CHI PICNIC
July 13, 1997, noon till?
at: Meridian Park (Good Shepard Center) Picnic Shelter
information Chris: 789-9223

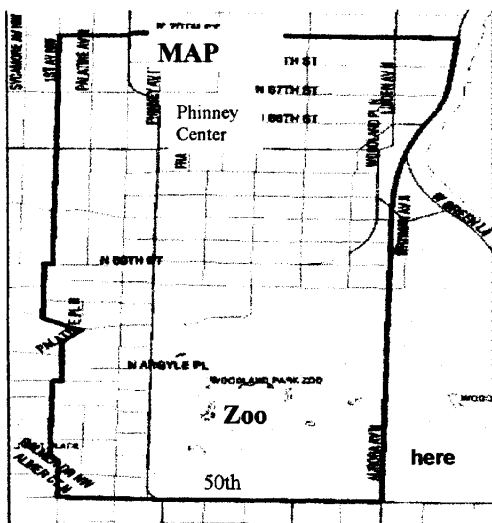
healers BEWARE!

On a recent visit with Master Yueng he wanted to emphasize that healers need to be very careful and take care of themselves. This includes nourishment, plenty of rest, and chi kung practice.

Like water, energy will flow to the lowest point. When you work with a sick person your energy will naturally be drained to that person. This is not a one way however, so in addition to being energetically drained you may pick up 'sick chi' or illness from the individual. Some of which you may not be aware of so you have to be in excellent shape and take the necessary precautions so that you maintain your health. Also, he emphasized, the person being treated needs to practice chi kung daily on their own. If not it's like a candy bar, a burst of energy from the healer but no long-term results. If the individual doesn't practice chi kung then there is no getting better and merely a drain on the healer.

I asked Master Yueng if there was anyway a healer could boost their energy aside from chi kung and resting. He said that if you take on the illness of the other person you just don't easily get rid of it on your own. Even with your own chi kung practice. The only way to cleanse yourself is practicing Tree Chi Kung. For those new to this world of chi kung, trees are considered the guardians of the earth and our natural filters. Plants take our toxins as food as we take their toxins as oxygen to sustain life. Standing or sitting relaxed by a strong tree or healthy grove will filter the toxins out of our system. For an ill person this is also a very good practice. Nothing special, just relax and clear your mind. ATDale

NEXT MONTH:
TREE CHI KUNG ARTICLE REPRINT



TO COMPETE OR NOT TO COMPETE

PART ONE

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Grandmaster Tchoung encouraged me to put on the T'ai-chi Ch'uan Championships at University of California Riverside in 1989. He felt it strengthened the art as well as bringing students together. One thing we have guarded against is bad attitudes. As in some martial art tournaments bad vibes get in the way of the fun. It is supposed to be a fun and a learning experience. Now we are going on our 7th event and sifu Tchoung continues to encourage me..(for updated information check out web site: <http://www.pe.net/~rvtaichi>

T'ai-chi is an odd duck to compete in, as most of what is going on is inside, not outside, and what is graded is just the shell. Though it is interesting that many people who play "Mr. Mellow" get very competitive and pale faced when things don't go their way. Some people cannot take the stress of scrutiny. It tests their relaxation under fire and gives them a dose of reality, i.e. stress. Sifu Tchoung feels this strengthens them and is good for the art in the long run.

According to Bob Engel in the Shr Jung Association Newsletter (Vol. 1, #1 p), "Internal exercise is centered on improving one's self and not defeating or performing for others. It would be right to say that when one practices t'ai-chi ch'uan, one is concentrating on the immortal inside, not the perishable outside. This differentiates t'ai chi ch'uan from other forms of exercise such as karate, aerobics, and gymnastics which are external forms of exercise." Bob makes a good point that when we do t'ai-chi we are doing it for ourselves, not for others. And that no one can really judge what is going on inside, though our teachers can give us guidance in energy flow and mechanics. Though I believe karate and aerobics can be made into an internal awareness exercise, as well. Bob also wrote, "When you think about something being performance oriented, imagine if what you are trying to do could be better done by one of those outstanding young Olympic gymnasts.. If so, you are looking outward, not inward. One of the most famous Balinese dance masters commenting on why she did not like mirrors in her classes simply said, 'I want my students to look into themselves, not at the illusions in the glass.'" This is especially important when watching the new wushu versions of t'ai-chi and Shaolin. Often these forms and competitors who do these forms are more concerned with winning and how they appear, rather than the energy of their art.

I observed several masters specializing in wushu t'ai-chi, and while they are very pretty to watch, I saw little internal energy. I also found some of the most boring looking forms often show the most internal power. For example in our six past tournaments, not one wushu or even Ch'en stylist has made it to the final rounds of pushing hands. In fact two styles have pretty much dominated, they are Cheng Man Ch'ing and Tchoung Ta Tchen styles, with a few Wu and Kuang Ping students thrown in. While Wu & Kuang Ping styles have had a couple of student who did well they were mainly trained in Cheng Man Ch'ing style pushing hands students, so their pushing hands is heavily weighted by Cheng style. Again no "Chinese Wushu

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Affirmations and Visualizations in Training

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It sometimes amazes me the amount of negativity that people program themselves with while in class. I have heard "I can't do that."; "I'll never get this."; "My body can't do such things." and similar statements far too often. Your words directly affect your subconscious mind and subsequently your performance. I realize that most often people are not even aware of what they are saying. Whether the conscious mind is aware of what you are saying or not, it directly affects the subconscious mind. In fact, the less aware the conscious mind is, the easier it is to program the subconscious. The subconscious mind can not differentiate between reality and fantasy/imagination. Consequently, whatever you say, is what it believes. Naturally what you believe will be reflected in your actions. You have heard the computer phrase "garbage in, garbage out". Your mind is no different. A big help to your training will be to eliminate any negative beliefs from your vocabulary and thoughts. After all, if a woman like Gao Fu can master Tai Chi as a beginner when in her 50's, so can you. You can help yourself tremendously by using the well known positive thinking techniques of affirmations and visualization.

AFFIRMATIONS - Consult any of the many affirmation books on the market for an in depth study of this. However, the basics of affirmations are very simple. 1. Construct a sentence of the desired outcome. This should be a statement as if the outcome is already an accomplished fact. 2. Repeat it frequently to yourself to ingrain it in the subconscious. (Minimum three times a day.) 3. Act as if it is already true or an accomplished task. Examples of affirmations: "I am a master of Pa Kua." "I perform the Yang long form flawlessly." "My Hsing-I is unstoppable." The affirmation can be repeated as

frequently as you want during the day. It is recommended repeating the sentence several times in each session. The more often you repeat the sentence the better. The more frequent the session are the better. Repeating the sentence out loud is also recommended as being more effective than repeating it quietly.

VISUALIZATION - Again consult any of the many visualization books on the market. The basic technique is to imagine in your mind doing the form or technique perfectly, just as if you are watching a movie. This can be done from an external or internal point of view. In external visualization you picture yourself performing from an observers point of view. This would be similar to watching a movie with you as the star. See yourself going through the routine flawlessly. As you get better doing it, add sound, kinaesthetic feeling, and emotion to your movie. In internal visualization your point of view is from the performer. So instead of watching yourself perform, you imagine yourself performing perfectly from the point of view of the performer. It does not matter how much detail the scene has. For instance you can have birds singing in the background. You can imagine your setting as a forest or a desert. The subconscious mind won't know the difference. The only important point is to see yourself as doing the form correctly. It is recommended that you do the visualization a minimum once a day. Although the more you do it the better. Usually right before you go to bed is the best time. The next best being first thing in the morning or do both. This does not have to be a long process. You can run through a visualization of yourself doing the Tai Chi long form in two minutes. You can also vary the time and amount of detail you add to your visualization. Play with it.

What you put in mentally is what your body will put out.

The results of these techniques are sometimes dramatic and sometimes subtle. After all, you have years of negative programming to overcome. What is known, through numerous scientific studies, is that these techniques are very effective. The key to getting results is consistency. As with any practice, the more consistent you do these the better the results will be. Personally, I prefer the affirmations. If you compose them right, you can sing them as you drive down the road.

(TO COMPETE - Continued from page 3)

Champion" form experts have even placed in pushing hands. This tells me there is more real t'ai-chi and internal power developed in these outwardly more boring styles, which focus on relaxing and internal development.

But I think in terms of competition the outward structure can be judged. Alignment, softness, feet, knees, connection can all be evaluated. It is the superficial movements that confound the issue. And the added stress (both of getting ready for the event and going through the event) can help one break through plateaus. This is the same as getting ready for a major demonstration as well. But most important one can get feed back from peers as to if what they do is bogus or not. Often there are teachers with very little skill who are teaching horrible t'ai chi ch'uan mechanics. Really piss poor stuff. They may mean well and it may be a nice exercise class, but horrible form. Tournaments and demonstrations help to teach the public what is good t'ai-chi and what is crap.

PART II IN JUNE ISSUE

Harvey Kurland received his Masters Degree from the University of Washington and has dedicated himself to public health issues for the last 30 years. He has degrees in public health education and exercise physiology. He is a certificated chief instructor of t'ai-chi ch'uan by Grandmaster Tchoung Ta-tchen and teaches at the University of California at Riverside and Loma Linda University. He also holds certification from the American College of Sports Medicine and International Sports Sciences Association