

## BEN LO'S FIVE TAI CHI PRINCIPLES

- 1 - RELAX
- 2 - SEPARATE YIN AND YANG
- 3 - TURN THE WAIST
- 4 - BODY UPRIGHT
- 5 - BEAUTIFUL LADY'S HAND



### COMMENTARY

1 - **RELAX:** means “relax and sink” - it Involves the Tai Chi concept, “SUNG” (or “SONG”) which means complete, total relaxation but with the condition that the “I” (pronounced “YEE”) or the “mind intention” fills the body. Mentally sink each inhaled breath calmly into the “Tan Tien” (pronounced “Don Tea in”) by relaxing the lower abdomen and expanding it as you inhale and gently allowing it to contract as you exhale. The Tan Tien is the “SEA OF CHI” and is located between 1 and 2 inches below the navel and 1/3 way back toward the spine. In the beginning just breathe NATURALLY - don't try to control it - just follow its movement into your Tan Tien with your mind.

2 - **SEPARATE YIN AND YANG:** Yin and Yang are the opposing but complementary polarities in Taoist philosophy - hot/cold - male/female - hard/soft - night/day - etc. - etc. One only exists because it is in relationship to the other. In this case we are discussing “substantial and insubstantial” in the weight bearing of the legs. One leg is “empty” (no weight) and the other leg is “full” (bears all the weight)... so the weight distribution is 100% and 0%. The weight is centered over the “BUBBLING WELL” acupuncture point (Yung Chuan) just behind the ball of the foot. We want to generally avoid being “double weighted” in Tai Chi (50/50) since this condition is “stagnant” and warned against in the Tai Chi Classics. The most common stance at the completion of many postures is 70/30.

3 - **TURN THE WAIST:** The turning of the waist is accomplished by opening and closing the “Kua” which in English would be the “hip joint” area. This large “ball and socket joint” is the largest joint in the body and is where the power of the legs is transferred smoothly to the upper body. The various Tai Chi exercises commonly called “THE CONSTANT BEAR” in Cheng Man Ching style schools is practiced to gain more range of motion in the Kua to deliver power smoothly as needed and enable us to “TSEO HUA” more efficiently and effortlessly. To “Tseo Hua” (sounds like “Zo Hwa”) means to neutralize an incoming force by harmonizing with it and redirecting it as opposed to using force against force. “Tseo” means to shift the weight... and “Hua” means to turn (spin) on your vertical axis.

4 - **BODY UPRIGHT:** We avoid leaning to any side. We imagine that we are hanging from a string at the top of our head lifting us from above with the vertebrae of the spine hanging straight down like a string of pearls. The lower back curve is straightened by gently “tucking under” the buttocks so it doesn't protrude and hinder the transfer of power from the legs.

5 - **BEAUTIFUL LADY'S HAND:** We generally avoid bending the wrist (with some exceptions) in Cheng Man Ching's version of Yang style as it inhibits the flow of chi... similar to the way a “kink” in a garden hose tends to slow the flow of water. We try to keep the hand smooth and relaxed with a slight curve and push or strike forward by dropping the elbows.

## “CONSTANT BEAR” WARM-UPS (& VARIATIONS)

### 1 - CONSTANT BEAR

Begin with your feet are a little wider than shoulder width and with your **TOES POINTING STRAIGHT AHEAD**. When properly done, the energy source comes from each foot alternately “sinking/relaxing into the ground” & “pushing out of the ground” from the “Bubbling Well” point (just behind the ball of the foot), while simultaneously opening and closing the “Kua” (the “hip joint”). Totally relax the arms & allow them to swing loosely around while your mind focuses on the effects that gravity and centrifugal force produce. Gently tapping the lower back or waist with the backs of the wrists is optional. Generally this particular exercise is done with the central axis (spine) kept over the midpoint between the legs. Some teachers call this exercise “drum swings”. Note also that you may sometimes twist & rotate the spine while performing this exercise (just for flexibility & health of the vertebrae), but, keeping in mind that, as it relates to the TAI CHI FORM, the twisting of the spine goes AGAINST proper Tai Chi principles in that **THE HIPS AND THE SHOULDERS ARE ALWAYS KEPT IN THE SAME PLANE!** Though this exercise may appear very simple to the Tai Chi novice, it involves profound body mechanic principles... so much so that Professor Cheng Man-ching once said, “Constant Bear is the very essence of Tai Chi - aside from that, there is nothing more!”

### 2 - BEAR WALKING

Begin with your feet are a little wider than shoulder width with your **TOES POINTING OUTWARD** toward the NE. & NW. corners. Initially with hips & shoulders aligned to the North, & with all the weight 100% on one leg, SEQUENTIALLY, first **TURN THE WAIST** (that is: open the “Kua” or “hip joint”)... and secondly **SHIFT THE WEIGHT** forward toward the opposite corner... **being VERY careful to keep the knees aligned with the toes**. Now the weight has totally shifted 100% into that leg. So the action becomes: OPEN THE HIP JOINT - SHIFT THE WEIGHT, OPEN THE HIP JOINT - SHIFT THE WEIGHT. In effect it begins to look similar to “ice skating” or “roller-skating”. Close your eyes and nurture the feeling that the earth is a “giant ball”... and that you can “move it” with your feet. After that **an option is to begin to add arm movements** and express the “cumulative energy flow” by engaging the expansion of the arms into either a “Ward-off” or “Diagonal Flying” posture as you alternately approach each corner with your weight shift.

### 3 - TURN THE MILLSTONE

Begin with your feet about shoulder width with your **TOES POINTED INWARD**. Turn alternately to the EAST & the WEST - very slowly at first - alternately “emptying” each foot (zero weight), allowing it to rest lightly on it’s heel. imagine that you are like a 2 ton millstone that is turning very slowly. Focus on **RELAXING INTO THE GROUND** through the “Bubbling Well” point of your weighted foot. After that **an option is to begin to add arm movements** by **HOLDING A LARGE IMAGINARY BEACH BALL** on alternate sides. Initiate this arm movement by sequentially first beginning to raise your arms as in the ‘Beginning Tai Chi’ posture, then allow them to drop into place, with the thumb & middle finger of the upper hand forming a circle (“tiger’s mouth”) as if lightly grasping a small ripe peach.

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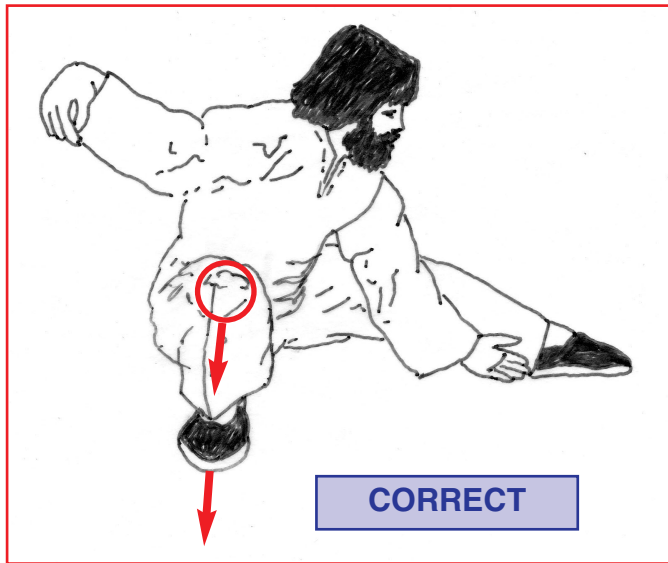
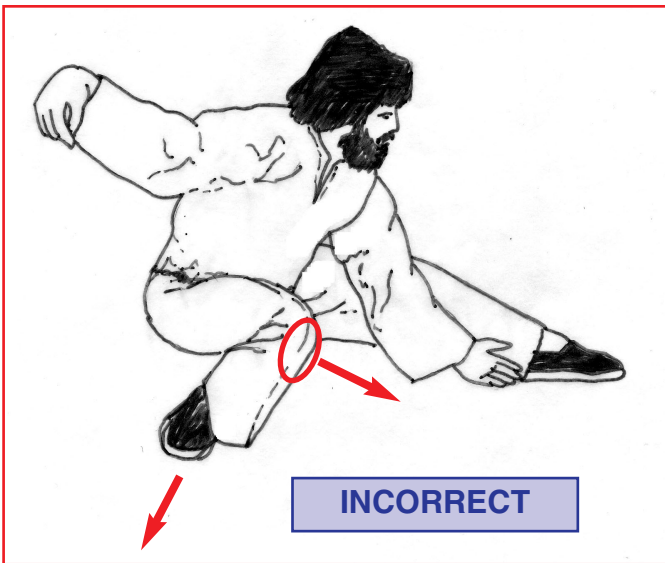
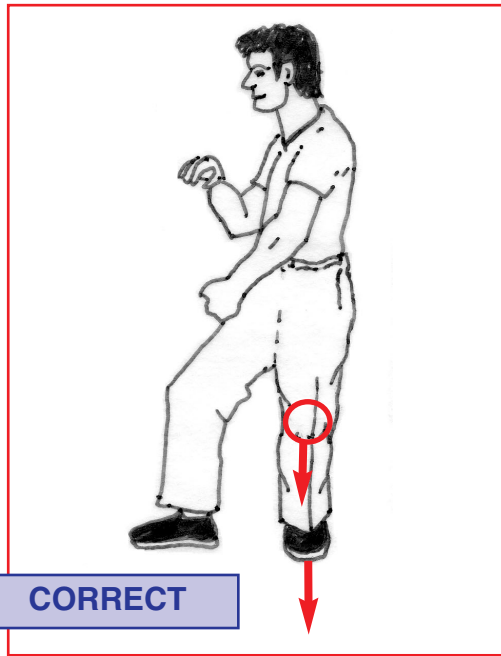
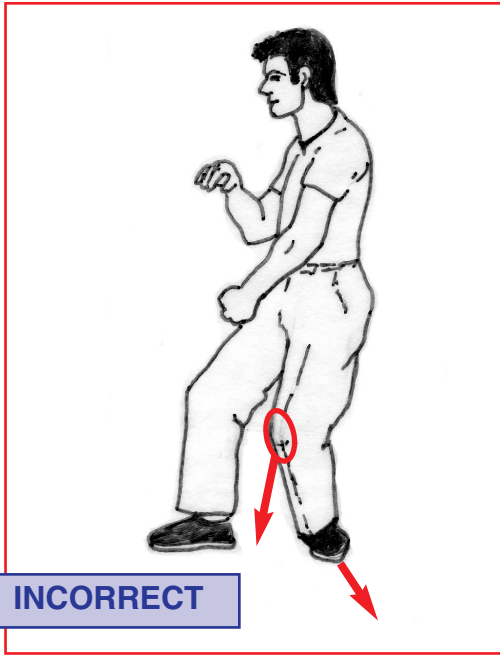
**“CONSTANT BEAR”** and all its variations are the **“FOUNDATION EXERCISES”** of Cheng Man Ching’s Yang style Tai Chi. In other words “Constant Bear” builds a foundation for all the Tai Chi skills that follow.

It is of primary importance to remember that, prior to even beginning to move, you must consciously go through your mental checklist of Tai Chi principles and make appropriate adjustments in your body’s alignment to insure that nothing is in violation of the Tai Chi principles. It becomes an ongoing refinement process toward perfection. Beginners and advanced practitioners alike go through the same “daily process” of coming into harmony with the Tai Chi principles in their form. **Above all, the number one principle is “RELAX” (“SUNG”).**

It’s only through closely examining your form “internally” with constructive self criticism, combined with making the necessary adjustments, that harmonizing all the principles in your movements becomes **AUTOMATIC, NATURAL, and INSTINCTIVE**. Continuous daily practice over the years with your focused awareness on the principles brings about “internal refinements” that must be “felt” in your body to be appreciated. It becomes a “lifetime journey” of self exploration. “The mountain is high and the well is deep”... but... in the words of Lao Tzu, “A journey of 1000 miles begins with the first step”... and... you can only see the view by climbing the mountain.

# THE THREE ALIGNMENTS

- 1 - THE KNEE SHOULD ALWAYS ALIGN WITH THE TOE.
- 2 - THE SHOULDERS SHOULD ALWAYS ALIGN WITH THE HIPS.
- 3 - THE NOSE SHOULD ALWAYS ALIGN WITH THE NAVEL.



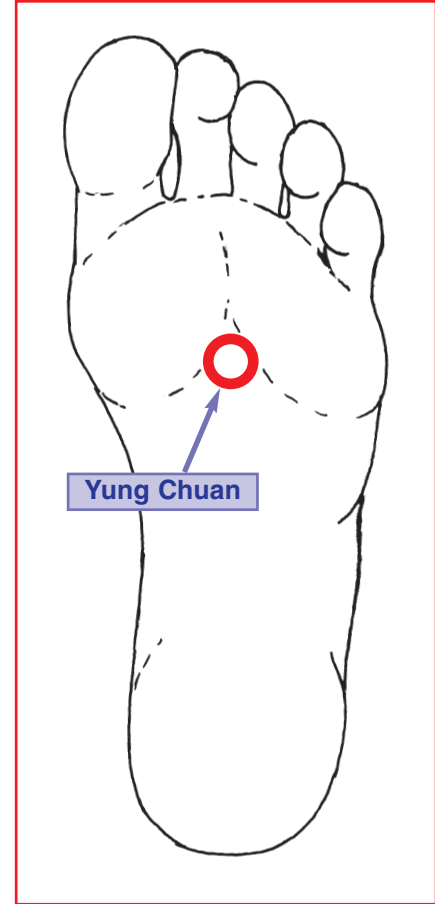
**SAFETY OF THE KNEES** is always of utmost importance while practicing Tai Chi. You must always be consciously aware of your knee positions in relation to the direction that your toes are pointing. The knees should ALWAYS point in the EXACT SAME DIRECTION that your toes are pointing. Avoid letting them stray either to the inside or outside. The method of controlling this is to fully open and close the Kua (the “hip joint”) as needed which enables the knee to pivot into it’s correct position.

## THE BUBBLING WELL

The section in the Tai Chi Classics that is attributed to the legendary Chang San Feng, generally thought to be the founder of Tai Chi Chuan, says this: “The motion is rooted in the feet, released through the legs, controlled by the waist, and manifested through the fingers”. We are also often told by long time practitioners of the art to “root down” through the Yung Chuan (Bubbling Well) and imagine sinking all your weight down deep into the earth through this important Acupuncture point.

This takes long term “pondering” to fully grasp as a concept but a simple test illuminates the obvious wisdom of a portion of this ancient advice. Sometimes you can better understand something by understanding it’s “opposite” (Yin/Yang)... so try standing with your feet shoulder width apart and rock back on your heels until you have the “internal feeling” of your “UNBALANCE”. Then rock forward on your toes until you have the “internal feeling” of your “UNBALANCE”. Then find that “spot” just behind the ball of the foot that settles you down into “BALANCE”. At that stage you can slightly adjust the alignment of the body to feel the foot as a “spring” making a direct connection to the power of the “Kua” (hip joint) without being inhibited by the knee. If you are off by just a little in your alignment you will feel internal pressure gathering in the knee instead of the smooth transfer of power traveling instantly up through the Kua.

Professor Cheng Man Ching, in his contribution to the Tai Chi Classics, “The Song Of Form And Function”, states the importance of this concept even more directly: “If the yung ch’uan (bubbling well) has no root and the waist has no commander, studying hard till death will be of no help”.



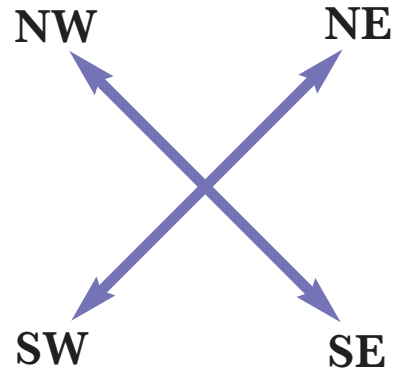
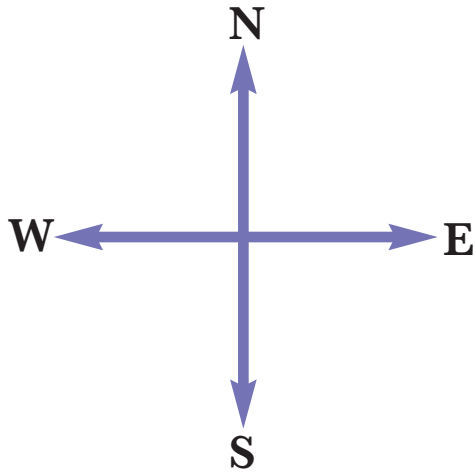
## “TUCK THE HIPS UNDER” TO STRAIGHTEN THE SPINE

A very common error in practicing Tai Chi is to allow the buttocks to protrude by arching the lower back. This disconnects the power of the legs from the power of the upper body. We want to minimize this lumbar curve so we can transmit power all the way from the ground to the hands. Tucking the pelvis “under” pushes the lower back out and eliminates the lumbar curve. When the curve is excessive the “chi” is partially blocked from going through the “MINGMEN” (gate of life) acupuncture point between the 2nd and 3rd lumbar vertebrae. Also, the excessive curve in the neck is eliminated by slightly moving the jaw to the rear which has the effect of pushing the neck vertebrae to the rear thus minimizing that curve. This whole process is part of the “hang from a string at the top of the head visualization” that we practice when doing our form.

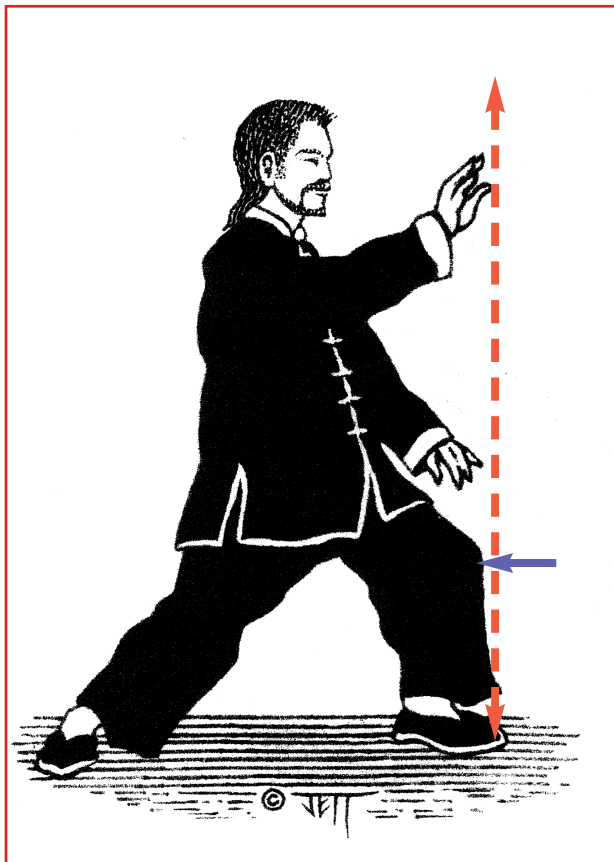


## ORIENTATION TO "THE EIGHT DIRECTIONS"

When doing our Tai Chi form we must have a very clear understanding of the direction that each of the 37 postures is aligned to... and how the energy flows to get there. For convenience sake we always imagine that **WE START OUR FORM FACING NORTH**. Then we can be very clear in our mind on how to procede from posture to posture. **NORTH, EAST, SOUTH, and WEST** are the "FOUR CARDINAL DIRECTIONS". **NORTHEAST, NORTHWEST, SOUTHEAST, and SOUTHWEST** are the "DIAGONALS"... or the "FOUR CORNERS".



## POSTURE DETAILS



70 / 30 POSTURE

Our ideal weight distribution between the legs is 100% in one leg and 0% in the other, which is often the case even at the completion of many postures. Most other postures are what we call a 70/30 stance (70% weight in the forward leg and 30% in the rear leg). An important concept in the 70/30 stance is to **NEVER LET THE KNEE GO PAST THE TOE**.

**THE CHEST SHOULD BE SLIGHTLY "CLOSED"** and **THE BACK SHOULD BE SLIGHTLY "OPEN"**... (never "poke out" the chest as if "at attention" in the military... as this causes the chi to rise up instead of sinking to the Tan Tien).

**THE SHOULDERS SHOULD BE "SUNK" (DOWN)...** and **THE ELBOWS SHOULD BE "DROPPED" (DOWN)**.

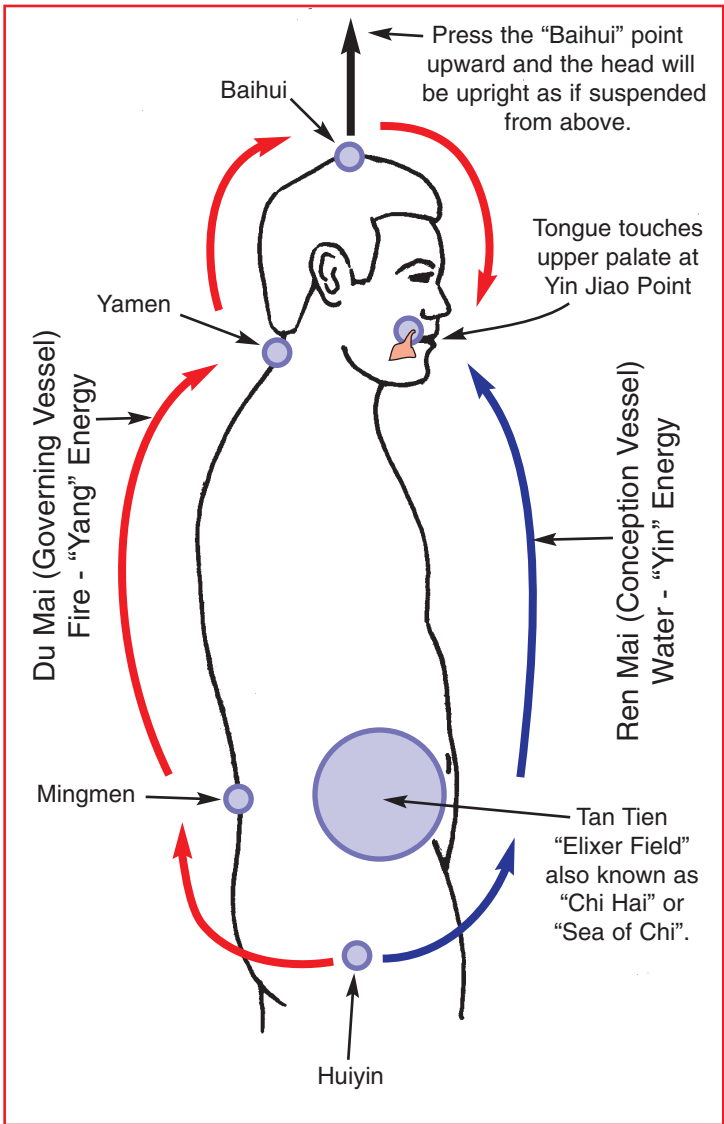
**THE JOINTS SHOULD ALL BE OPEN AND "ROUNDED" IN SHAPE...** (never fully close a joint while doing the form).

**WALK LIKE A CAT...** (always place the foot down with 0% weight - then shift the weight onto it - never "fall" into a step).

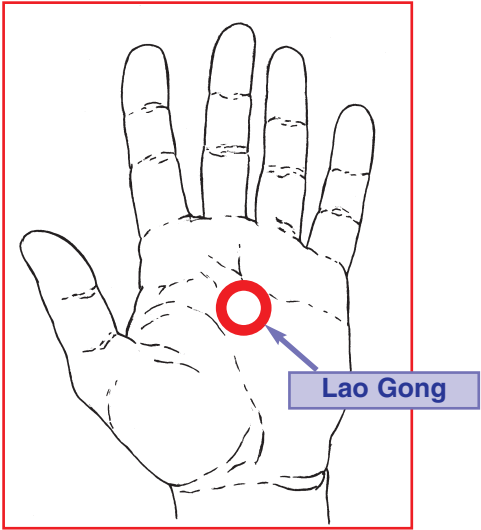
**MOVE THROUGH THE POSTURES AS IF "SWIMMING IN AIR" - RELAX COMPLETELY AND USE THE "I" (MIND INTENTION) TO MOVE AS IF THE AIR IS A "THICK FLUID"**.

**THE BODY SHOULD MOVE LIKE A "FLOATING CLOUD"**.

# MICROCOSMIC ORBIT



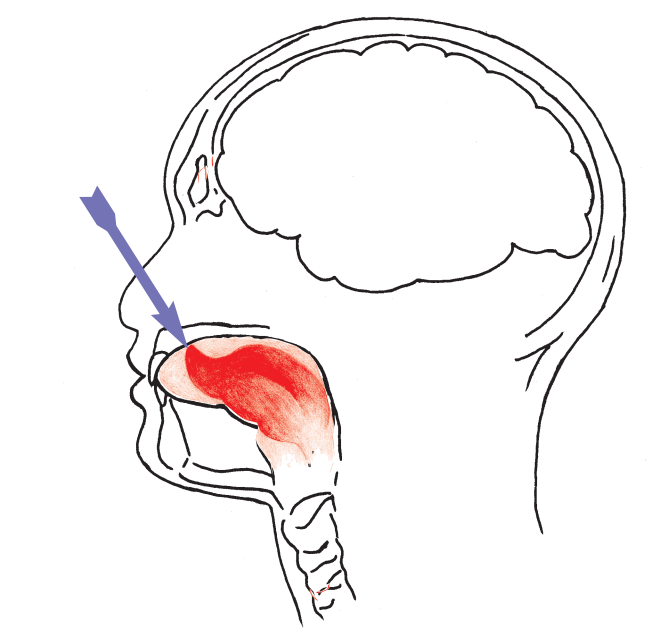
To become good at Tai Chi Chuan does not require the practitioner to have an in depth knowledge of Chinese Traditional Medicine (acupuncture, tui-na, etc). However a minimal understanding of a few very basic concepts and knowledge of some of the important “points” on the acupuncture meridians is essential to understand why we focus our mind on the things that we do when we practice our form.



It’s also important to understanding the “new and unusual sensations” that you may experience in your body with continued Tai Chi practice, including such things as the feeling of “electric currents” or “vibrations” that seem to run through your hands and forearms... or a “pulsating” sensation in the “Lao Gong” point in the palm... along with a feeling of “swelling” or “puffiness” radiating into the hands.

**The tongue lightly presses against the roof of the mouth (upper palate)** while practicing the form in the same manner as you would if you were pronouncing the word, “let”. In the “Microcosmic Orbit” (Small Heavenly Circle) this acts as a connecting point for the “Ren Mai” (yin) vessel on the front of the torso and the “Du Mai” (yang) vessel on the rear of the torso and completes the circuit in the same manner that a “fuse” does in an electric circuit. Not only does this action balance the “fire” (heart) and “water” (kidney) energy, but also increases the body’s protective Wei Chi.

In Tai Chi Chuan and other forms of Chi Kung (Qigong) powerful energies can manifest in the body which have the potential for both “health” and also for “harm” if a “blockage” or an “imbalance” is created. Pressing the tongue to the roof of the mouth helps to avoid these problems and promotes energy balance.



## “OVERTRAINING”, “UNDERTRAINING”, & “TRAINING”

Tai Chi is a “long term” commitment and only reveals its “secrets” to those who can persevere over a long period of continuous daily practice. The Tai Chi Classics say, **“Only after long practice will you suddenly understand”**. You have to be patient with yourself and give yourself “time”. Don’t compare yourself too much with other people as everyone has their own potential and sudden “breakthroughs” can come to everyone with “time”. You have to work within your capabilities and limitations and **have faith that “time” will bring improvement**. It actually becomes more of a “lifestyle” as time passes and can permeate all aspects of your daily life in a beneficial way.

We don’t want too much **“INTENSITY”** in our daily practice... we don’t want too much **“DURATION”** in our daily practice... what we DO want is **“FREQUENCY”**. Ideally, a short practice in both the morning and evening every day bears the most fruit in the long run. It’s much better (especially in the beginning) to practice only 15-20 minutes twice a day than to overdo and risk “joint damage” resulting in not being able to practice for several days. Gradually you can increase the time as your body adjusts and adapts... if you are inspired to do so. Avoid practice if you have a full stomach, a headache, a stomach ache, or otherwise are feeling ill or overly tired. When you feel like you are able to add a little more “duration” you can practice the form several times in a row. To add more “intensity” you can also increase the amount of time that you “hold postures” which helps to develop strong “rooting” ability. **Listen to your body** - your practice (and your health) depends on your perceiving the signals that your body is giving you.

**“UNDERTRAINING” shows lack of “INTEREST” - “OVERTRAINING” shows lack of “FAITH”.**

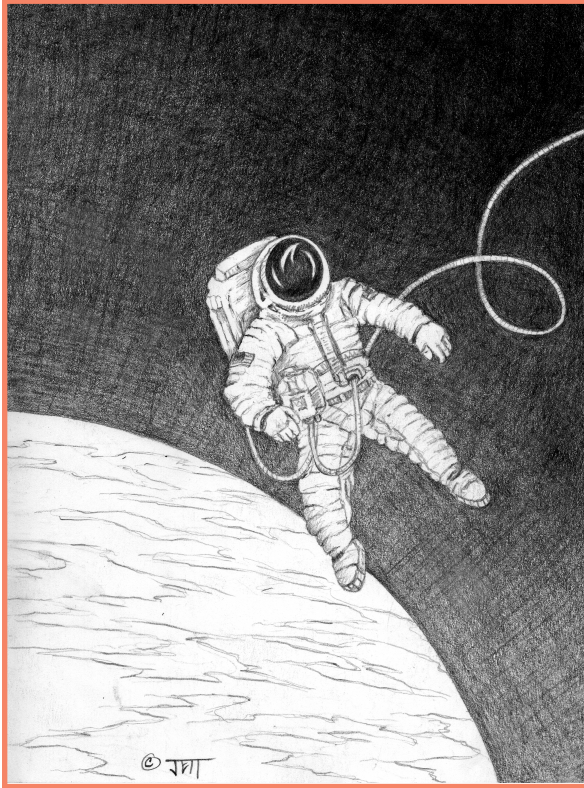
Eventually, after you have learned all the postures, your form will become “smoother” and more refined, your body will be more at ease, and your mind will be more at peace. This is the “KUNG FU” of your practice. Americans have the misconception that “Kung Fu” means only “Martial Arts” but in actuality it means “any complex skill that develops gradually over a long period of time”. You could have good “Kung Fu” at playing the violin, playing golf, playing the piano, fixing computers, typing, playing chess, or anything that requires long diligent practice to achieve a high level of skill. **THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR “TIME” IN THIS PROCESS**. It takes “patience” to allow yourself “time” to improve... and “perseverance” to keep practicing.

**Professor Cheng Man Ching used a good analogy for the “Kung Fu” of your Tai Chi practice. He said that each time you practice your form it’s like a sheet of paper - It may be thin and may not seem like very much... but, if every day you keep adding pieces of paper to a stack, some day you will have a “very impressive stack of paper”.**

## PRACTICE IN “BROKEN TIME”

One of Professor Cheng’s concepts was the idea of **“PRACTICING IN BROKEN TIME”**. If you contemplate this for a while you will realize his genius in coming up with this idea. In modern society what people often lack is “time”. Sometimes, even with sincere motivation, people find themselves very limited in what they can accomplish due to time constraints. This idea of “PRACTICING IN BROKEN TIME” can greatly enhance your Tai Chi study if you can find ways to make it habitual. Consider the idea that “BROKEN TIME” is segments of time where you have a short “wait” for something... like standing in line at the grocery store or Post Office... or waiting to meet a friend... waiting for water to boil when cooking at home... or waiting in line at a restaurant. All these are **opportunities for Tai Chi practice that often go unnoticed**. Consider that you can **“TURN THE MILLSTONE”** while standing in line, sinking the weight into the “Bubbling Well” without anyone realizing that you are practicing Tai Chi. You can **“SEPARATE THE WEIGHT 100% - 0%”** without even moving while waiting in line, while you are **internally focusing your mind on keeping all the Tai Chi principles**. You can practice **“CONSTANT BEAR”** at home when cooking while waiting for the toaster oven, coffee pot, or a pan of water to boil. You could **“TURN THE MILLSTONE”** while washing your hair in the shower... or while you’re brushing your teeth. Even riding in a car you can focus on your breathing, following each inhalation deep into your Tan Tien with your mind. The opportunities are endless for **“PRACTICING IN BROKEN TIME”** when your Tai Chi becomes a treasured part of your everyday lifestyle.

## NASA, BONE DENSITY, AND TAI CHI



NASA conducted extensive research on astronauts during the early days of manned space flight and discovered that after extended time living in a “weightless state” of zero gravity they suffered a very significant loss of “bone density” in a surprisingly short period of time. The lesson in that for us “average, everyday earthlings” is this: **GRAVITY IS OUR FRIEND** in the battle against “OSTEOPOROSIS” and various other forms of degenerative bone disease.

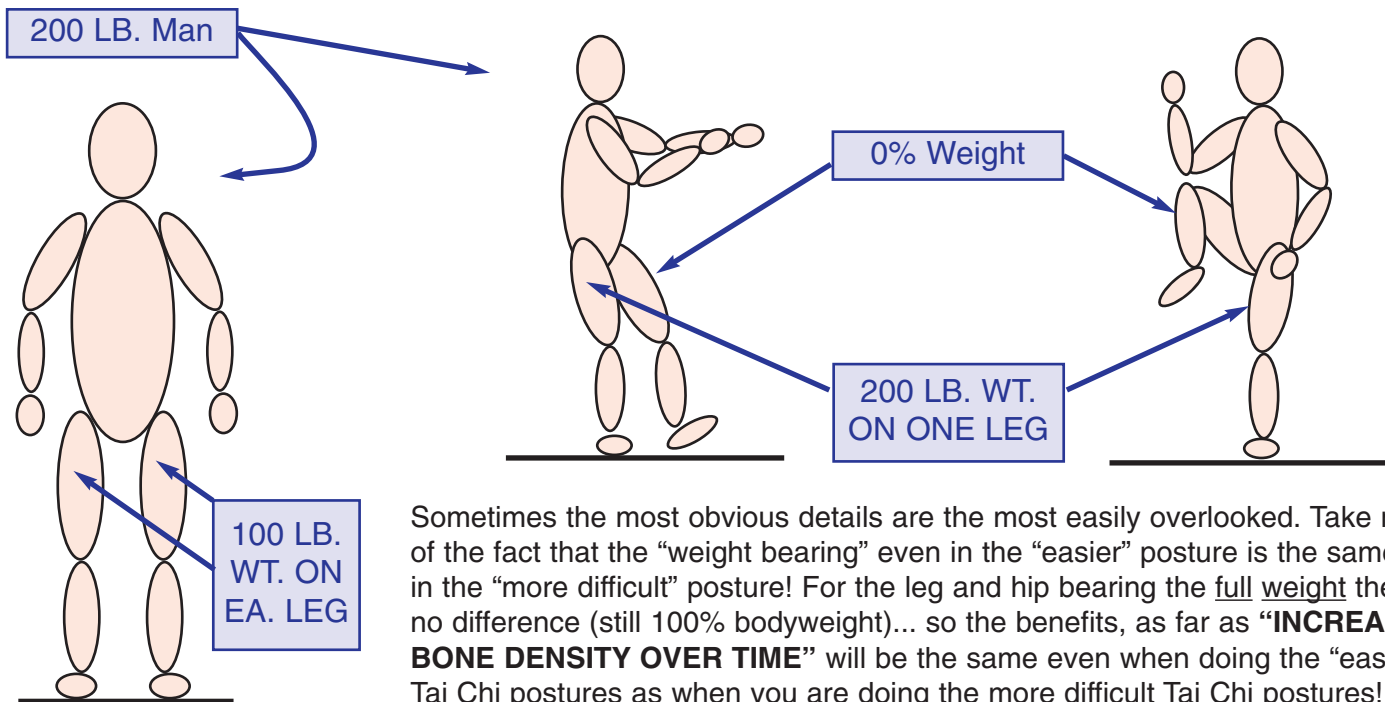
Tai Chi comes to the rescue in this battle in a very specific and focused way. Tai Chi provides a “low impact” form of exercise that not only puts “weight bearing” to work... but doubles the benefit by actually putting **ALL THE BODY WEIGHT ON ONE LEG AT A TIME**. After daily practice in this manner over an extended period of time there is an actual **INCREASE OF BONE DENSITY IN THE LEGS AND HIP JOINTS**. This is a very significant benefit as the practitioner ages because if a fall does occur there will be less chance of a hip fracture. It’s commonly acknowledged in the elderly community that “breaking a hip” often signals a permanent decline in mobility, independence, and general health from that point on.

Perhaps an even more significant benefit of Tai Chi is the enhanced sense of balance brought about by daily practice of “the form” as this minimizes the chance of a fall happening in the first place.

The apparent “ease” of doing Tai Chi as demonstrated by a long time practitioner is very deceptive as to it’s many benefits... both physically and mentally. There is a lot going on - both “internally” and “externally” which all pay big dividends in health and well being.

**Over 2,000 years ago, Hippocrates, considered “the father of western medicine,” said, “That which is used develops - That which is not used wastes away.”**

### A CLOSE LOOK AT “WEIGHT BEARING”



Sometimes the most obvious details are the most easily overlooked. Take note of the fact that the “weight bearing” even in the “easier” posture is the same as in the “more difficult” posture! For the leg and hip bearing the full weight there is no difference (still 100% bodyweight)... so the benefits, as far as **“INCREASED BONE DENSITY OVER TIME”** will be the same even when doing the “easier” Tai Chi postures as when you are doing the more difficult Tai Chi postures!



## THE ORIGIN OF TAI CHI AND “CLARITY OF STYLE”

What differentiates Tai Chi Chuan from the many other martial arts of China is that it is generally considered to be a “soft” system as opposed to a “hard” system... meaning that It is considered an “internal” system as opposed to an “external” system. It is also a “Wudang” system from primarily Taoist origins as opposed to a “Shaolin” system which is primarily from Buddhist origins. Generally speaking there are considered to be primarily “three internal martial arts” in China... which are “Tai Chi Chuan”, “Bagua Chang”, and “Hsing-I Chuan”.

The origin of Tai Chi has been virtually lost in the dim mists of time, however, one often repeated legend states that it was created by the Taoist monk, Chang San Feng, after witnessing the techniques used in a battle between a crane and a snake. Another legend says it came to Chang San Feng in a dream. Other people say it all originated with the Chen family... but until further proof can be unearthed no one can say for sure.

The five major “styles” of Tai Chi Chuan are “Yang”, “Chen”, “Wu”, “Sun”, and “Wu” family (Hao) style. All of the many varieties of Tai chi styles practiced throughout the world today are descended from one of these five styles. Each has it’s own distinct characteristics and “flavor”. For instance, the “Yang” style usually has extended “large frame” postures all done continuously at the same slow speed. “Wu” style generally has a more compact frame. “Chen” style usually expresses more obvious “martial power” with slow and fast movements and emphasizes “Chan Si Jin” (“reeling silk” or “corkscrew” energy) in most of it’s postures. The “Yang” style also has the spiralling energy of “Chan Si Jin” but it is more subtle and hidden within some of the postures so it is much less obvious.

Tai Chi in all it’s different forms is, by it’s very nature, highly “stylized” methodologies of movements painstakingly created by it’s various founders. The precision of the movements make a distinct style what it is... and to stray away from performing the postures of a particular style in the precise manner of the founder is to lose the very nature of the style. Very often the “martial applications” are “hidden” within the forms. In China’s turbulent history “martial techniques” were closely guarded secrets jealously kept from outsiders and even within the “family” were passed only to trustworthy students who had proven themselves to have good character. With this in mind, for an aspiring student to take it upon himself to modify a posture in any way is to rob himself of the revelation of these “hidden gems” in his future... and develop bad habits in his form which will later be difficult to eradicate.

## CHENG MAN CHING’S TAI CHI CHUAN

The style we are practicing is Professor Cheng Man Ching’s version of the Yang style that he learned while studying under the famous Yang Cheng Fu, the grandson of the style’s founder, Yang Lu Chan. He also wrote the preface to Yang Cheng Fu’s 1934 book on Tai Chi. Professor Cheng Man Ching was famously known in China (and later in Taiwan) as “**THE MASTER OF THE FIVE EXCELLENCES**” (painting, poetry, calligraphy, medicine, and Tai Chi Chuan). In the 1920’s he was a Professor of art and poetry in several leading colleges in Beijing and later became a founding member of the “Shanghai College of Chinese Culture and Arts” where he served as Vice President. His considerable skill and attention to fine details as an artist probably contributed greatly to his subtle and amazing skill at Tai Chi Chuan... and his knowledge of Traditional Chinese Medicine gave him unique in depth insights into the nature of nourishing the “Chi” in the practice of Tai Chi Chuan.

Professor Cheng’s Tai Chi evolved over time to emphasize the advantages of “softness” as expressed in the *Tao Te Ching*, rooting ability achieved by the sinking of all the bodyweight into the “bubbling well” acupuncture point, and the complete release of all excess tension in the body to facilitate the skill of “Ting jing” (listening energy).

**Though “SUNG” is the ultimate goal in our style, it is very important not to confuse “relaxation” in our form with the “lack of precise movement”. The form should be both “relaxed” and “precise”.**

Professor Cheng’s unique contributions to the study of Tai Chi Chuan also include the concepts of:

1. “SWIMMING THROUGH AIR”.
2. “PRACTICING IN BROKEN TIME”.
3. “USING SWING”.
4. “INVESTING IN LOSS”.

**“THE FORM” (THE FIRST THIRD)**

In the “**INTRODUCTION TO TAI CHI**” class you will learn what is usually referred to in the Cheng Man Ching version of “Yang” style Tai Chi as “**THE FIRST THIRD**”. This should, by no means, be seen as a small accomplishment. This, along with the “Constant Bear” exercises, builds the foundation and the essential structure for learning the complete form that will be offered later. Each posture of “**THE FIRST THIRD**” should be performed with your mind focusing on the Tai Chi “principles”. If you are unable to physically incorporate and “internalize” the “principles” from the Tai Chi Classics into “**THE FIRST THIRD**” then learning the complete form will be of little use in the long run.

By mastering “**THE FIRST THIRD**” you will have already mastered many of the most important postures that occur throughout the complete form... as many essential postures are repeated several times throughout the complete form.

1 - **QUIET STANDING** - (SOMETIMES CALLED “PREPARATION”)

2 - **BEGINNING** - (SOMETIMES CALLED “RAISING ARMS”)

3 - **LEFT WARDOFF** - (“**PÉNG**”)

4 - **RIGHT WARDOFF** - (“**PÉNG**”)

5 - **ROLL BACK** - (“**LŪ**”)

6 - **PRESS** - (“**Ǒ**”)

7 - **PUSH** - (“**ÀN**”)

8 - **SINGLE WHIP**

9 - **LIFT HANDS**

10 - **SHOULDER STROKE**

11 - **WHITE CRANE SPREADS WINGS**

12 - **BRUSH KNEE, TWIST STEP**

13 - **PLAY GUITAR**

14 - **BRUSH KNEE, TWIST STEP**

15 - **STEP FORWARD, DEFLECT DOWNWARD, PARRY, AND PUNCH**

16 - **APPARENT CLOSURE** - (SOMETIMES CALLED “WITHDRAW AND PUSH”)

17 - **CROSS HANDS**

18 - **QUIET STANDING** - (IF DOING THE “COMPLETE” FORM THIS IS REPLACED WITH THE NEXT POSTURE)

In Chinese, “**Peng**”, “**Lu**”, “**Gi**”, and “**An**” are very important postures that comprise what is collectively known as “**GRASP SPARROW’S TAIL**”. It occurs 4 times throughout the complete form (in various configurations) and forms the fundamental basis of “Tui Shou”... which is the 2 person sensitivity drill commonly called “Push Hands” where we attempt to learn the skill of “Ting Jing” (“Listening Energy”).

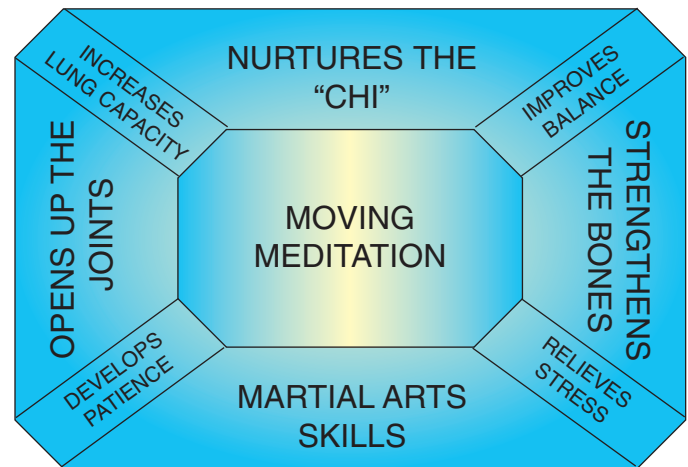
“**Single Whip**” is a quintessential Tai Chi posture that’s found in all styles of Tai Chi Chuan (in some different “stylistic” variations). It’s usually repeated multiple times and occurs 5 times throughout Professor Cheng’s Tai Chi form.

## TAI CHI - A "MULTIFACETED JEWEL" OF ANCIENT CHINESE CULTURE

What is "multifaceted"? After a jewel like a diamond or ruby is cut and polished we say it is "multifaceted" - it has many "faces". In the same way your Tai Chi form must be meticulously "polished" to reveal it's many "faces". Tai Chi has many different aspects and often practitioners find themselves going deeper into one specific aspect that fascinates or appeals to them above all the others. This is understandable as we are all unique individuals with different tastes and preferences and were often drawn to Tai Chi in the first place because of one or two particular aspects. This may, however, be a self limiting viewpoint. If you "think you know" what a certain aspect is all about... then you won't venture further into deeper exploration of that particular aspect. A clue about this "mindset" is written in the *Tao Te Ching*: "The usefulness of the cup is in its emptiness". Also, in the *Song Of Form And Function*, Cheng Man Ching said, "I have some words to reveal now to those who can know". Perhaps we should ask what does it mean - "to those who can know"? You can ponder for yourself: what determines who "can know" and who "can't know"? How do I approach my form... or what "mindset" do I need to nurture to be one who "can know"?

Tai Chi looks so "easy"... so "simple". It's hard to grasp that profound "internal principles" are at work. When speaking about the Professor's skill, Ed Young said, "The depth of his teaching is what you are able to see". In other words, if your level is not high enough you really don't know what you are looking at... it's "pretty" to watch... but a "mystery".

One of your Tai Chi teacher's jobs is to encourage you to "think outside the box"... and expose you to some of ALL aspects of Tai Chi (along with the form and the principles)... as soon as your practice deepens to the point where you are able to absorb it. The important key is that you will be able to then GO DEEPER into your own practice at home.



Often people embark on the Tai Chi journey with "preconceptions" and "expectations" that may be limited - not the whole "Tai Chi picture". Their "misconceptions" limit their imagination about what they may possibly be able to accomplish with "mind" and "body" working in unison. If they keep an "open" mind they may find a pleasant surprise in the fact that they may come to treasure some aspects of Tai Chi practice that are entirely different from what originally attracted them. For instance, people often express renewed enthusiasm when things start to "happen internally"... after their mind quiets down... and they are more able to "feel their chi". Usually these manifestations only occur after their practice has "ripened" over a long period of diligent practice... so, as has often been said, there is no substitute for "daily practice" at home. IN TIME YOUR BODY SHOULD BE AT EASE... YOUR MIND SHOULD BE AT PEACE... AND YOUR PRACTICE SHOULD BE A "JOY".

Many people start Tai Chi practice mainly for "health and longevity" - increased "joint range of motion"... "stronger knee and hip joints"... and increased "lung capacity. Question: How do you emphasize that as your primary goal? Answer: PRACTICE YOUR FORM AT HOME... EVERYDAY... RELAX... AND DO THE FORM.

Some people start Tai Chi practice to "nurture their Chi" (Chi Kung). Question: How do you go deeper into that? Answer: PRACTICE YOUR FORM AT HOME... EVERYDAY... RELAX... AND DO THE FORM.

Some people start Tai Chi practice for "martial arts" (self defense). Question: How do you go deeper into that? Answer: PRACTICE YOUR FORM AT HOME... EVERYDAY... RELAX... AND DO THE FORM.

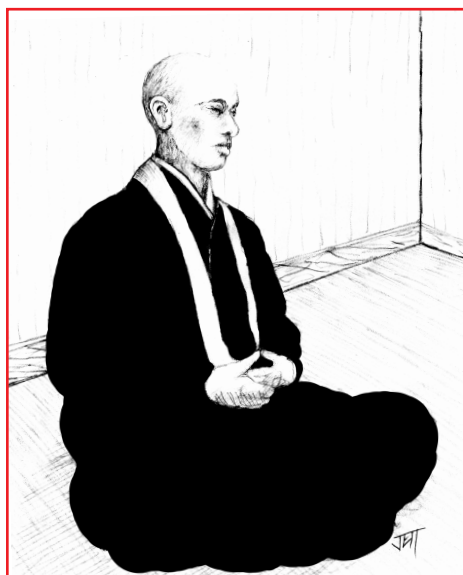
Some people start Tai Chi practice for "meditation" to "de-stress". Question: How do you go deeper into that? Answer: PRACTICE YOUR FORM AT HOME... EVERYDAY... RELAX... AND DO THE FORM.

I think you get the idea - THE FORM has the POTENTIAL to give you ALL of the above... but to REALIZE that POTENTIAL takes dedicated daily practice at home. The teacher can only show you the path - YOU'VE GOT TO MAKE IT PART OF YOUR DAILY "LIFESTYLE"... You've got to climb the mountain to see the view. Ben Lo said, "If you really want to learn it nobody can stop you... if you don't practice then nobody can help you".

## TAI CHI PRACTICE AND “MEDITATION”

You might say that “MEDITATION” is probably as old as mankind itself. In some manner or form it has evolved as a practice on every continent... but, ultimately, it’s something uniquely “human” in that, on a very basic level, it can mean only “introspection”... or the act of a human being consciously looking inwardly at the workings of his (or her) own mind. To the best of our knowledge no other creature on earth is “self aware” to this depth. Only humans seem to have the natural capacity for this “inner exploration” and control of our mental faculties to this degree. Most of us seem to only accidentally tap into a deep “meditative” state of mind on occasion. We all certainly “concentrate” when necessary, but, often, our minds drift from one thing to another with our thoughts scattered and jumping from one thing to another. At those times we say that we are having a hard time “focusing”. Our mind seems to have “a mind of it’s own”... sometimes even creating a constant “chatter”. You might say that meditation (and Tai Chi) serve to quiet the chatter... and, over time, give us more insight into the nature of our minds... and the “mind/ body” connection.

“Meditation” is a difficult subject to put into words, and clearly it’s not everyone’s “cup of tea” as the practice is very demanding. It is often meticulously delved into by some and sometimes branded as just some “new age wierdness” by others, but, in actuality, THE ROOTS OF MEDITATION ARE ANCIENT and “HARD WIRED” INTO THE HUMAN PSYCHE. It is anything but “new age”. That being said, Meditation (and Tai Chi done as meditation) seem “alien” to most people and a close examination of the concepts involved will also seem unfamiliar territory to most. So, at the risk of my appearing to



Zen Monk in “Meditation”

seem a little bit “out in space” from a “psychological” standpoint, I’ll attempt an examination of this complex subject... as long as the readers remember that it’s not “OUTER SPACE” we are talking about here. Really what we are attempting (in the practice of our Tai Chi form) is a journey into “INNER SPACE” and from the standpoint of YOUR Tai Chi practice it’s YOUR INNER SPACE!... This is normally a subject only approached by highly advanced practitioners but I’ll give it a shot... so, BRACE YOURSELF... HERE GOES!

First of all it’s important to understand that we are clearly talking about something that can’t be put into words. it’s an “experience”. It’s like the old Zen concept of “a finger pointing toward the moon - don’t mistake it for the moon”. Ultimately, we can only talk about it - because meditation (and Tai Chi done as meditation) is the very essence of cutting off “conceptual thought” (words) through controlling our minds in order that we may more fully concentrate on the “REAL” “EXPERIENCE” (“REAL” as in “REALITY”) so as to “experience” it directly. In the *Tao Te Ching* (an important source of early Taoist thought attributed to Lao Tzu) it’s

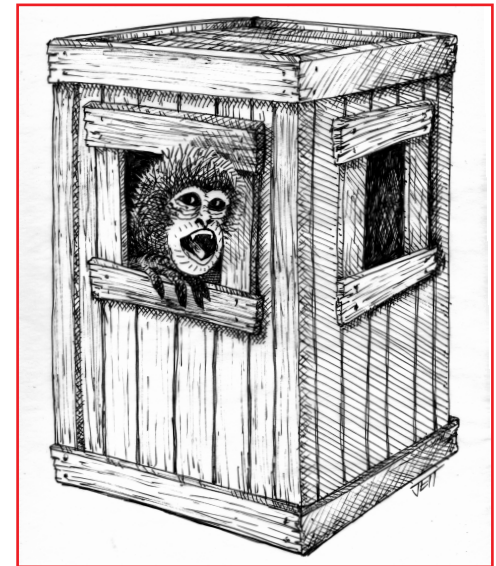
written, “He who knows does not speak - he who speaks does not know”. With that in mind, for the sake of my Tai Chi students, I will play the “fool” and try to “point a finger at the moon” in the hope that someone, at some point in time, will read this and move toward the “glow of the moon” that I cannot give you... and, for that, I’m sorry - you must find it for yourself... in your Tai Chi practice.

In Taoist philosophy they say, “You must climb the mountain to see the view”. But naturally, human nature being what it is, many people don’t even see the mountain... or, if they do, they think it’s foolish to spend all that time “mountain climbing”. They want you to summarize it for them all in a couple sentences so they will “KNOW” what it is and they can evaluate the “journey” to assess if it is “worth their while”. But it can’t happen - it’s primarily “EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE”... not “CONCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE”. In practicing Tai Chi (as in “meditation”) we take time to “climb the mountain” - to see the view, bit by bit, day by day, moment by moment, as it comes. We just have “faith” that the “whole view” will come in time. For some people it may appear a “foolish” pursuit - very “time consuming”!... and, truthfully, Tai Chi (or seated meditation) when done seriously certainly IS “time consuming”... but we endure the “self discipline” of daily practice because of the “payoff” - the “effect” that it has on our “mind/ body” connection in all the rest of the 24 hours of our daily life.

## TAI CHI PRACTICE AND “MEDITATION” (cont.)

Meditation, like Tai Chi (often called “Moving Meditation”) is something that must be really embraced as a part of your lifestyle to be fully appreciated. It’s ONLY by putting in the time and effort of “CONSISTENT PRACTICE” that you will eventually see it for what it is. The Tai Chi Classics say, “WITHOUT LONG PRACTICE ONE CANNOT SUDDENLY UNDERSTAND IT”. Take careful note of that word “suddenly” - that’s the “AHA!” moment - the “epiphany” where you understand a Tai Chi “concept” or “principle”, not only intellectually, but deep down in your bone marrow... like realizing a “koan” in Zen meditation - a “knowing” that goes beyond words. In our daily lives words and “concepts” are very useful and important “tools” to understand things “intellectually” and attempt to relay information to others... but “conceptual thinking” is NOT the EXPERIENCE itself. In fact we miss much of what’s in front of our faces - the “REALITY” of “HERE” and “NOW” by our mind’s over reliance on words and “concepts”. It’s like I sometimes tell students, “I can tell you all about eating a Fuji apple - I can say it’s “crisp”, it’s “sweet”, and it’s “juicy”, but a little “tart”... but, no matter what words (which are only mental “concepts”) that I use to describe it, you only truly know if you take a bite out of the apple and TASTE IT YOURSELF”. Ben Lo said, If I drink tea and you say “Is it hot?”... I say, “Yes - HOT!”... you say, “How hot?”... I say, “VERY hot!”... do you know?... NO!... only when you drink the tea - then you know - “Oh! - HOT!!!!”

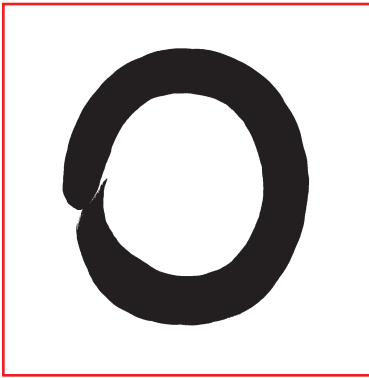
In Eastern Philosophy the understanding of our mental “chatter” that often interferes with our direct experience of “the reality of here and now” has often been understood by using the analogy of a monkey. The monkey lives in a wooden box - the box has six openings - the monkey frantically races from one opening to the other - every day, with no rest, as long as he lives. That’s kind of a sad story isn’t it? But, the real truth is that ALL sentient beings (“feeling” beings) naturally want two things: the pursuit of things that they think will give them pleasure... and the avoidance of things that they think will bring them suffering. Sadly this story is meant to represent the “human condition” and the way that our own mind can bring about our own suffering if we don’t see through the tricks that it can often play on us. The analogy here is that the monkey is like the human “heart or mind”... the openings are like the five senses: “sight”, “hearing”, “touch”, “taste”, and “smell”... and number six is the big one: “thought”. Often, as humans beings, we also are all prone to race from one thing to another... seeking things that we think will make our lives “better”. This is all well and good (and “normal”) except that we often become habitually “somewhere else” in our mind (not “here” - not “now”).



Monkey in a “Box”

We imagine the “FUTURE” - what we will do “THEN”... what we’ll buy at the store, what we’ll have for lunch, what time we will visit our relative ... what’s our next chore... and on and on... never ending... whether it’s thinking about next week, tomorrow evening, next year... or right after we get finished reading these pages... always “jumping” from one thing to another (like “monkey mind”). Sometimes it’s what we call “in the back of our mind” (mentally multi-tasking)... or else it’s a “current” active thought - but still on the “FUTURE” - NOT experiencing reality “HERE” - not experiencing reality “NOW”. All these scenarios represent “FUTURE MIND”. Then we are often also lost in “PAST MIND” - what someone just said a few seconds ago, what a friend said last week. Both “future mind” and “past mind” are “unreal” - it’s all “imagination” and causes us to TOTALLY MISS what is happening in the “RIGHT HERE” - “RIGHT NOW” until we come “back” from that little mental excursion. In effect we often “wait to live”. This is not to say that all this is not “normal”... on the contrary - it’s “ESSENTIAL”. It’s the way our minds function and efficiently deal with everything around us. Our mind must “organize” and make (future) “plans” for us to survive and live efficiently... and it must also “remember” (the “past”) to learn from experiences and not repeat mistakes. However, when allowed to become excessive and habitual without our “introspection” and “conscious oversight”, it sabotages our experience of the “HERE” and “NOW”... and often stressing us, giving us no rest at all, and contributes to health issues. In effect, the human mind is a “very good servant”... but a “very poor master”. So, the key is to remain in control through understanding how it functions and gradually come to an understanding of how your “consciousness” works. In Tai Chi we address this issue to some degree through the concentrating on our “I” (our “Yi” or “mind intention”) when we attempt to combine our “I” and our “Chi”. In the *Song Of Thirteen Postures* (in the Tai Chi Classics) it’s written, “The i (mind) and chi (breath) are king, and the bones and muscles are the court”. So, basically, “conscious awareness” is required to remain “King” (or “Queen” as the case may be).

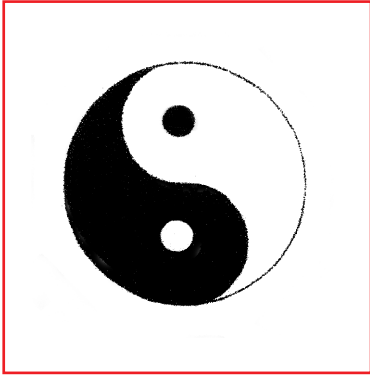
## TAI CHI PRACTICE AND “MEDITATION” (cont.)



“Wu Chi”

You could say that Tai Chi (and meditation) also gives us a “mental vacation” at times from the mind’s “chatter”. After consistent daily practice over time we can see the chatter for what it is... and, eventually, we can learn to calm our minds. Ideally our body should be at ease and our mind should be at peace.

A key factor to enable your Tai Chi form to become “MOVING MEDITATION” is the ability to “still your mind” - to think of “nothing at all” for longer and longer periods of time. As the Tai Chi classics say, “SEEK STILLNESS IN MOTION”. Of course that is easier said than done - anyone who has attempted learning to “meditate” knows how difficult that is to



“Yin” and “Yang”

think of “nothing”. Our “ego” seems to always want to create constant mental “chatter”. In various Eastern traditions that teach meditation this “stilling of the mind” can be approached in many different ways but always, ALWAYS involves some type of “REPETITION”. The real key is sustained daily “REPETITION”. In India and Tibet it could be the repetition of a “MANTRA”... in China and Japan it could be silently counting your breaths from one to ten over and over... or intense mental concentration on a traditional Zen (“Chan” in Chinese) “KOAN” which is a “question”, “riddle”, or mental “puzzle” which is impossible to solve with the intellect. The “GOAL” (if you can, paradoxically, call it that?) is to think of “NOTHING” and objectively observe the “REALITY” in this “PRESENT MOMENT” in time and space RIGHT HERE - RIGHT NOW. From one perspective you might say that “what you have left” in the ABSENCE OF “CONCEPTUAL THOUGHT” is “THINGS AS THEY TRULY ARE”... only the “you” that observes it has become “ONE” with the “here/now” reality. In other words, it’s the elimination of “DUALITY”. In Taoist symbolism this might be referred to as returning to the “ONE”... or returning to a state of “WU CHI” prior to the birth of “YIN” and “YANG”. The concept of “WU CHI” is symbolized by an “empty” circle. The familiar “YIN” and “YANG” black and white parts within a circle represent the created world of “opposites” - opposing but complementary polarities in Taoist philosophy - hot/cold - male/female - hard/soft - night/day - etc. - etc. One only exists because it is in relationship to the other.

**Did you hear about the Japanese Zen monk who was visiting New York City?  
He walked up to the hot dog vendor and said, “Make me one with everything!”**

Conceptual thought, performed primarily by the “left side of our brain”, is an extremely valuable mental “tool” in our daily life but is actually, in and of itself, “UNREAL”... It’s only a FIGMENT OF OUR IMAGINATION. In addition, the entertaining of any thought of a “GOAL” is counter productive in trying to meditate in that it implies that there is an “I” (an “ego”) that desires to achieve a “GOAL”. At the moment we introduce an “I” we instantly create “DUALITY” again and then “ONENESS” instantly disappears. In effect, in meditation, we are trying to LOSE our “SELF” when we attempt to think - or mentally “repeat” - something over and over until that “SOMETHING” becomes “NOTHING”. You may remember at this point that Professor Cheng is said to have repeated many times, “INVEST IN LOSS!”... which, as your practice deepens, you may realize could apply to many different facets of Tai Chi (and to life in general).

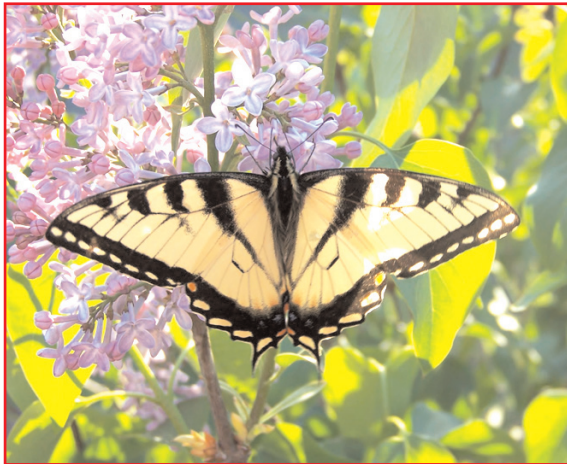
If this state of “no thought” sounds to you like it’s something that’s really “out of the ordinary”... consider that you may often “involuntarily” do it quite naturally. At certain times in your daily life you might find it happening... though, if you are not “consciously” watching your mind’s activity, you probably won’t notice at all. For instance, you may happen to see a beautiful sunrise or a sunset with the colors of the sky and clouds glowing so incredibly vivid with reds, and yellows, and blues, and violets that, for a brief moment in time, it stops you in your tracks... and it seems “breathhtaking”. For a second or two (or five or six if you’re lucky) your mind sort of shifted into “neutral” - and, with “no thought”, was totally in the here/now. For that brief moment “you” were completely ABSORBED in that sunset. “You” became “ONE” with it until “thought” began.



Photo Credit: Juanita Alessi

## TAI CHI PRACTICE AND “MEDITATION” (cont.)

Photo Credit: Juanita Alessi



Then, of course, the left side of your brain kicked back into gear to put it into “words” - to “conceptualize” it (as if that would be able to “capture it”). Instead of savoring the “union” (the “oneness”), that side of your brain seeks to “analyze” it, “categorize” it, and “conceptualize” it (put it into words) to “compare” it to every other sunset you have ever seen). Does this sound familiar?... Do you recognize how your own mind sometimes works this way? Many things in your daily life might “trigger” this temporary “no thought” / “oneness” state of mind... often things in nature... a butterfly suddenly lighting on a beautiful flower, ocean waves breaking on the beach, a puppy rolling around in the grass on a bright sunny day... or a baby giggling as it takes it’s first steps. It could be anything that makes your mind instantly “stop” the “chatter”... and allows you to briefly become “ONE” with the moment and “more fully” integrate your “self” with the “experience” as it happens in the “here” and “now”. I say “more fully” because we

must admit this “ONENESS” is a matter of “degree”. As average human beings, we live in a materialistic society filled with constant “distractions”... assaulted by relentless “marketing strategies” designed to convince us that we’re not “happy” as we are - our present “reality” (“NOW”) is “not good enough” - we need to buy more “things”... so we will be truly happy “THEN” (in the future). Actually, even as we pursue this clarifying “meditative state”, we are only able to truly perceive our experience of “reality” on a very superficial level - in truth, we can only “scratch the surface” of this “ONENESS”. Unlike monks in Japan, Tibet, India, China, and all over Southeast Asia who seclude themselves from society and dedicate their lives every day, 24/7, to meditation, we are incapable of becoming “FULLY” integrated with reality to that degree and realizing the “ONENESS” of what might often be called “enlightenment”. What we CAN do, however, is aspire to reach our own individual potential... including the understanding (to some degree) of how our mind functions... and how to maximize the benefits of this “no thought” state of meditation in our own Tai Chi practice.

The transformation of our Tai Chi form becoming “MOVING MEDITATION” can occur, as our practice “ripens” over time, because it’s possible to purposely “premeditate” this “no thought” state of mind when we begin the form. However, you must have reached that stage of evolution in your practice... consistently doing it daily (“REPETITION”) until the postures, the flow, the Tai Chi principles of movement are so thoroughly “INTERNALIZED” that it really REQUIRES “no thought” whatsoever. From the perspective of Taoist philosophy this then becomes “WU WEI” or “effortless doing”. For this to happen (even momentarily) requires you to hold your mind in a state of “DETACHMENT” from any “desire for a result”. In effect, a “desire” would again re-introduce your “ego” (an “I”... a “self” that “wants”)... creating a “SUBJECT” and an “OBJECT” which instantly creates “DUALITY” as opposed to “ONENESS”. So, you could say that your Tai Chi form is practicing being “PURPOSELESS” on “PURPOSE” - a paradox for sure! So... how do we set out to “DO”... without “DOING”?... This is truly a pretty tricky “mind game” - a skill that only comes in time when you have practiced long enough (“REPETITION”) to where you can “RELAX” your “EGO”... as you “RELAX” your body. Have you ever heard a Tai Chi teacher say, “RELAX”???? (Uh Huh!... maybe 1000 times or more????). From a practical standpoint, to spell it out step by step: you begin (on “PURPOSE”) to approach the spot where you start your form, adjust your body in “QUIET STANDING” position (on “PURPOSE”), and then “RELAX” and allow “IT” to “START” (with “NO PURPOSE”). When you can TRULY PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY “RELAX” and allow your form to effortlessly begin... then you feel that the form is “DOING YOU” instead of “YOU” (your ego self) doing “IT”.

Of course, when beginning to learn Tai Chi, this “no thought” state of mind is not possible - you must go through the stages that REQUIRE thought and even intense concentration: which direction do I face?... what does each hand do?... which foot steps out?... which way do I turn my waist?... how is my weight distributed in my legs?... Is my spine straight like hanging from a string?... is my weight over my “bubbling well” or partially on my heels?... am I really and truly relaxed?... where is tension hiding that I can release?... and on and on... until all the movements and principles of movement become automatic. Just like first learning to drive a car, or type, or swing a golf club... or play a musical instrument - it takes LOTS OF THOUGHT until you can finally ABANDON THOUGHT and just LET it happen. At that stage your form may potentially, just “possibly”, become “MOVING MEDITATION”... just depending on your ability to “EMPTY YOUR MIND OF ALL THOUGHT”. Ultimately, this is a personal choice that’s consciously (or unconsciously) made moment by moment - what “aspect” of your form do you want to emphasize at this particular moment in time? You may remember in the Tai Chi Classics (in the section, *Tai Chi Chuan Lun* by Wang Tsung-yueh) it is said, “Missing it by a little will lead many miles astray.” If you ponder this for awhile you may realize that this may apply to many “aspects” of Tai Chi... in relation to BOTH your “mind”... AND your “body”.