

COMBAT & HEALING

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COMBAT & HEALING

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ABOUT THE COVER

James Figg, 1720's. England's first bare knuckle champion. He was also a champion of staff and sword. The reason for putting him on the front cover is that I have three dogs and rather than put them on ... Nah, I'll put them on as well.

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Adults Only, 'R' rated stuff here, by Risni Cockorsanoff.

Recommended Reading

Internal Strength Magazine

Traditional Internal Information: P/O Box 280948 Lakewood CO
80228-0948 U.S.A.: \$US20.00 (\$10.00 extra for overseas) U.S.
funds. Quarterly.

Modern Kung-Fu Journal

Traditional Wushu, Neo-Classical Gung-Fu: P/O Box 5619, Chi-
cago IL 60680-5619 U.S.A. Cost, same as Internal Strength.

WHAT IS BALANCE IN AN INTERNAL CONTEXT?

by Michael Babin

A great deal of lip-service is paid to the concept of being "balanced" in the internal arts. In truth, learning to appreciate all aspects of this, in particular avoiding being "double-weighted", is the hardest part of understanding that synthesis of body and mind which makes T'ai Chi Ch'uan, for example, different from a Shaolin style.

Balance is not just physical; there are other dimensions to be considered: are you balanced in how seriously you take your training -- neither training obsessively day and night, sacrificing family and friends, education and/or career nor being lackadaisical, training sporadically as the mood strikes you.

In self-healing and martial terms, balanced training implies learning to cultivate the harmonious interplay of

yin and yang in your physical movements. It also implies that you will spend roughly equal amounts of time practising the slow forms and the applications forms/martial exercises of your style.

It also means that you will do your best to learn skills that might actually provide self-defense skills without turning yourself into a paranoid "hair-trigger" waiting to explode if someone looks at you the wrong-way on the street.

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Balance also implies that you will persevere as much because you enjoy the classes and solo practice as because you are determined to "improve yourself" in some way. With the right attitude, your T'ai chi work becomes play of the highest order. You don't have to be grimly determined to "do T'ai Chi" to see its greatest benefits.

It is also sadly true that balance is also often miss-

interpreted by those practising and teaching the internal arts. You only have to attend any of the form and push-hands competitions or watch such events on video to understand that it is most often being experienced solely on a technical/physical level.

However, balance in internal training is not simply a question of how well you can stand on one leg or how well you can resist being pushed by your peers even though doing both requires a basic understanding of essential "internal" body mechanics.

You don't have to be grimly determined to "do T'ai Chi" to see its greatest benefits.

In internal term, balance has as much to do with your mental activity while practicing [the Classics speak of the mind leading the ch'i and not the other way around] as it has with how you physically accomplish those movements [not the hands or feet leading the physical movement but the waist and hips leading the limbs.

In addition, our emotions can easily manipulate our sense of balance. For example, the instant a beginner supports his

body weight on one leg in order to do a kick, he or she will experience any of a variety of emotions: "Why is my supporting knee trembling?"; or "This hurts!" or "I'm going to fall over and look stupid!"; or "I can't do this smoothly and it looks so easy"; or "I can't get my knee up as high as that middle-aged guy next to me!"

In addition, our emotions can easily manipulate our sense of balance.

The more experienced practitioner has more technical skill as well as a new set of emotional responses when practising the same movement: "This is getting easier all the time!"; or "Wow, look how high I can kick, I'll be doing better than my instructor soon"; or "The judges have to be impressed by this"; or "I feel like I could stand here all day on one leg and the others are struggling to keep their balance."

By contrast, the expert, in the best sense of the word, moves through each posture with what looks like effortlessness and pays no conscious attention to its SPECIFIC DETAILS unless he or she

has a particularly bad, or good, day. Progress in the technical performance of form is still important; but has become much less-so than in the beginning.

"performance" has become totally inappropriate in describing such an individual's state of being while moving in form or doing a martial technique.

Eventually a few experts become master practitioners (Erle Montague and Liang Shouyu are two that I have had the pleasure of seeing do form) and both seem truly as unconcerned with impressing others as they are with the occasional technical mistake during their performance.

In fact, "performance" has become totally inappropriate in describing such an individual's state of being while moving in form or doing a martial technique. Their movement seems as natural to them as taking a walk or going up a flight of stairs. Sometimes they stumble when doing both; but, such minor losses of balance are recovered from automatically and have no bearing on their innate ability.

The first T'ai Class I ever did in the mid-70's was a more mundane example of this. The class was being held in a jujitsu dojo and we had just spent a few minutes at the end of the session listening to the instructor tell us how T'ai Chi practice would make us calmer and bring greater balance, co-ordination and a sense of attentiveness to our lives.

He then dismissed the class and we all headed for the changing rooms in the basement. The instructor promptly slipped and rolled all the way down the flight of stairs leading to the basement. Everyone stood at the head of the stairs in shocked silence -- a few repressing laughter -- as he sprang unhurt to his feet and looked up at us with a red face. No one spoke as we all filed carefully down the stairs and followed him into the changing room.

The more experienced practitioner has more technical skill as well as a new set of emotional responses when practising the same movement:

I used to tell this story to my students as an example of how arrogance can lead (literally in this case!) to a fall and that even an instructor could make a fool of himself and survive the embarrassment. However, now that I am a lot older and my T'ai Chi a little better, I can also appreciate the skill with which he rolled his way to his feet -- unhurt except for his pride -- after a loss of balance that might have seriously injured someone else.

By contrast, the "non-master" is often overly-concerned about technical prowess and the outward beauty of what he or she is doing.

Even masters are human and will occasionally struggle briefly with the need to "do it right" or appear "infallible". However, in general such practitioners also obviously couldn't care less how their T'ai Chi or Pa-kua or Hsing-I looks to observers because of their faith in their own understanding of the art and because he or she is able to recover so smoothly from a "loss of balance" that the mistake is difficult for the average observer to see.

By contrast, the "non-master" is often overly-concerned about technical prowess and the outward beauty of what he or she is doing. Such a pre-occupation can easily become a source of internal and/or external tension that diminishes the quality of training.

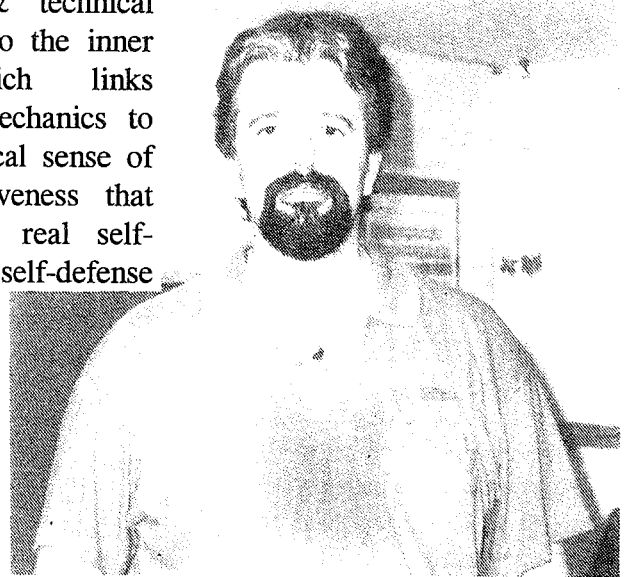
This is not to say that the ability to balance yourself on one leg is unimportant or that the technical beauty of your movements are unimportant.

If you go too far in the other direction you may develop an obsession with internal development that leads to other problems

The best practitioners manage to find true balance in terms of paying attention to both their physical & technical competence and to the inner experience which links effective body mechanics to that almost mystical sense of calm and attentiveness that eventually brings real self-healing and self-defense skills.

The best practitioners manage to find true balance in terms of paying attention to both their physical/technical competence and to the inner experience

Figure 1: Mike Babin



Push Hands, What the masters say

Erle Montague

It is my argument that when it comes to anything in life, one should experience it him/herself. It's just not good enough to take some master's word for things if we do not actually understand it ourselves.

My main teacher, Chang Yiu-chun said over and over, "stop asking questions, learn it yourself". Someone, had to invent the martial arts, and there had to be a time when the martial arts, all systems were contemporary and not classical. Something only becomes "classical" after many years of use. And even then, it must be still accepted by the public who make use of any particular "classic".

It's the same with the martial arts. A style only becomes a classic style after many years of continued and tested use. But does that make a "classic style" good? Perhaps thousands of people are practising something that is not good, simply because they take the word of the inventor, never questions. So often we hear the phrase, "is it a classical style", with the tone of, that it must not be good if it is not classical. We never once think that at one time, all classical styles must have been new styles yet to be tested.

Taiji and all of the other "internal" styles had an inbuilt mechanism whereby we are able to still practice the style as times change. Many of the ancient styles were built around the self defence needs of the time, when people roamed the streets with swords hanging by their sides. Or people would live in fear of spear attack etc. This is not usually the case in modern times and to remain a viable martial art, all systems must be able to change to deal with modern

times. I know of karate katas where one move is to slap the bottom of the foot during that doing of that kata. No-one knew for many years exactly what this slap meant until a friend of mine went to Okinawa and found out that this slap was representative of taking off the wooden "shoe" worn by ancient Japanese, to throw it at an attacker! But, the move is still right in there.

Having said all of this, I will now include what many of the masters had to say about push hands, and see if you can pick out the areas of change built in to the system.

One must keep in mind however, that when I am talking about "push hands", I mean the advanced method of "joining arms" and not the beginners form of push hands where we simply learn about joining with a partner/attacker.

Only at a high level of learning will all of the great benefits of push hands be available. In fact, I know of so called "masters" who have been doing the basic push hands for over 30 years, never knowing that there is anything above this and they have gained nothing, just going on some other old master's word that it will all work out in the long run. What use is a martial art if we are only able to use it when we are ninety, or what use a healing art if it does not heal us until it is too late!

Push hands is the basis of t'ai chi as a martial art, as well as a healing art. By joining hands with a partner we not only learn to 'feel' another person, we learn to listen with our skin. We learn to know about the centre, where it is and how to find it. In this way the whole body be-

comes highly sensitised and we just know where and when an attack will occur. There is nothing supernatural about this, it's just that we work with other people for so long that we begin to know certain signs.

For the purpose of healing, we learn to feel the changes in potential of the acupuncture points and are able to find them more easily. In order for all of the above to take place we must practise push hands the 'right way'.

Everyone is different but there are certain guidelines left to us from many years of trial and error by the masters. The following are translations of what the masters said.

Yang Sau-Chung

Yang Sau-Chung (1909 - 1985) was the eldest of the four sons of Yang Ching-Fu and the teacher of my main teacher. I also became one of the only westerners to be formally introduced to Yang.

He said:

"Keep yourself well in balance, lower your shoulders and elbows, push hard with the momentum of the waist and leg, keep your eyes on the opponent and at the same time hollow your chest and raise the back.

The strength comes from the whole and not just the arms. Do not exert force but the idea is there. Shift your centre of gravity as required, action and idea should be in harmony. Action is included in inactivity. Loosen the waist. Keep your mind on

the tan-tien. After a while a potential energy will develop and can be used to great advantage in attack and defence".

Yang Ching-Fu

Yang Ching-Fu was one of the greatest modern masters and is responsible for the founding of the modern Yang style. He did much good for taiji but in a way he also did much bad, as his style was so easy to learn that people nowadays think that, that is all there is to taiji.

Cheng-fu was responsible for changing his father's style into something that everyone could learn, leaving out most of the martial arts from the style.

He said:

"The head should be held vertical so that the spirit can reach the crown".

"Sink the chest naturally and pluck up the back".

This does not mean being hunch-backed. When the chest is concave then the back is naturally lifted. Relax the waist, it is the director of the movement and can't do its job if it is tense.

"Know the difference between yin and yang, your step will be lively and full of energy. Sink the shoulders and elbows".

If this happens you are able to use fa-jing (explosive energy) to great advantage. Use the mind and not force. The whole body should act as a whole unit.

"The ch'i is joined without breaks".

When we use force to attack there is a time when the power is broken waiting for the body to gain control again. At this time we could be easily attacked. When we use the power of the mind the ch'i is never broken but flows on and circulates back inwards leaving no openings.

Yang Pan-Hou

Yang Pan-Hou was the uncle of Yang Ching-Fu and apart from Ching-Fu's brother, Yang Shou-Hou, and Chang Yiu-chun, he was probably the last great Yang master to teach the original Yang Style as a full martial art. What Pan-Hou has to say is slightly 'harder' in tone than many of the others.

He Said:

"In p'eng (ward off), both arms should be rounded with a distance between the wrist and chest."

The arms are as if being held up. Whether active or inactive, the idea is always there for attack. Firstly we use 'roll back' then 'squeeze forwards' (chee), this leaves not much room for escape.

"When we apply 'press' (arn), we must look as if we might fall but keeping our centre we easily fool the opponent. Contact with both arms and stick to the opponent. If the opponent is heavy and fast then use the technique of 'split' to throw him many feet away. Elbow and/or shoulder are used if our technique is somewhat lacking and we are pulled or pushed off balance. We need not fear the great tech-

nique of the opponent, we move and change to the conditions. Move in close and take the advantage but be careful of your three fronts, hands, eyes and feet. Watch the opponent's seven stars, head, elbows, shoulders, hips, knees and feet."

Always attack from the side when attacked first. With a little practice most people can develop a strong p'eng so use pull down or split.

Always follow up a successful action without delay to finish the confrontation. Control your four sides but look for weaknesses in your opponent's four corners.

When using elbow or shoulder stroke, move in close in order to uproot using little energy. Use the 'fa-jing' to surprise the opponent then use spinning energy from the side, turning the waist with great speed. If we are close to the opponent and the longer techniques will not work, use shoulder, elbow and knee. Not knowing about yin and yang is like having a cart without wheels. When we have the opponent 'in our palm' and feel yin, be wary, if we feel yang then attack. The maximum power of the hands and feet must arrive together from the side out of the free circle. To know about the circle we must first of all know about timing. We must use defence then offence, evade and attack simultaneously. If the opponent locks the joints, follow the movement and block the lock. Sink the body to escape from pulling of the wrist and turn the wrist.

Chang Yiu-chun

Chang, I regard as my main teacher nowadays, although I

have had many other teachers. Chang was a true warrior and a true man of the internal. His words matched his external appearance and way of moving, very economical. But, like his movement, his words, although not many, held much greatness within every word.

"When touching the opponent, think with your skin". "You should never hurt anything, let your body do it". "If you do not want to be pushed over, then you have already lost". "Lose yourself in the movement". "Do all Australians think like you!". "Your eyes are open, but closed". "Feel your opponent like you feel your woman, tenderly, he attacks and you aren't there". "Everything is alive, do not hurt it, walk on the grass and thank it for making your path soft". "You eat too much!" "You talk too much!" "When you do push hands, be like that tree over there".

Using the right muscles for the right job

In order to make the best use of your given physical strength you must know how to use only the amount of muscle necessary for that particular work. In particular, you must know how to relax counter muscles. For instance, you do not want to use your biceps muscle if you are pushing or your triceps if you are pulling. Lean up against a wall with the back of one of your palms touching the wall, lift one foot off the ground so that there is a lot of pressure on the arm. Now feel your biceps - they should be totally relaxed. Next, grab some object which is attached to something solid and lean backwards with your arm slightly bent as before. Now your triceps should be totally relaxed.

Using ch'i

Ch'i is quite indefinable; the closest translation is energy or electricity. All I am able to say is, do all of the right things as in the main points of ch'i kung and t'ai chi and you should start to feel something new. I have seen some seemingly supernatural feats, some fake and some for which I have no answer. I have discovered more to be fake than otherwise, but it is the one in a million that I have seen that makes me believe that there is something extra to be gained. Even if it is just great good health, what more can you ask for? With a little more training, you might just find out something else.

The main idea is not to start t'ai chi and ch'i kung to become a superman. If this is your idea you will never succeed, as the following story illustrates.

A young lad in Japan wanted to study sword play with the most famous master in Japan so he gained an audience with him. The boy asked the master how long it would take him to learn the sword if he practised every day. The master told him about 25 years. The boy looked shocked and asked how long it would take him if he practised night and day and had mastery as his only goal. The master told him that he would never learn.

Keep in mind that if your own technique works against your friend who is perhaps at the same level as yourself, it may not work against someone more experienced. Only keep what is useful for the martial art. Do not try and be 'good at push hands'.

Still being in workshop mode, after having attended the annual W.T.B.A. camp, Debbi, Martin and I descended on the Brisbane Martial arts bookshop, burrowing into every corner and shelf, equipping ourselves with Qi kung and Pakua **books**, swords and Pakua staffs (seemed we weren't the only ones bent on a look around as a familiar face of a Cairns-ite came smiling through the door).

Armed with our excessive luggage, we settle down on the plane and decide to put to good use the 3 hour flight: Debbi and

THE KIWI CONNECTION: PLANNING A WORKSHOP

By Lyn McAlister

I will plan a workshop. The first decision is to determine what group of students we intend to cater for- we settle on all graded students: Intermediate and Advanced levels, and therefore will have to base the instruction to fit the needs of the individual, with the latest advance techniques being taught to the higher graded students.

We next decide that the content should include both TAI-CHI and PAKUA with as much vari-

ety as we can fit into the 2 days, rather than concentrate on one or perhaps two aspects:- as we both had a one day workshop earlier in the year in which only one topic was focussed on.

The time factor gave us scope for multiple choices; so we wrote a list of ideas that we would like to include:

- 1) New techniques learnt at the Midginbil Hill workshop
- 2) Qi kung that the students had not done in class before
- 3) Applications from the 3rd. Third, Yang Lu- Chan form
- 4) Mitt work: with fa-jing being the focus for more advanced students
- 5) Small San Sau: at basic and advanced level
- 6) Large San Sau: at basic and advanced level

Elaborating from this list we looked at each item to see what we want to include:

1) —

- i: As the students had all completed the circular Pakua form previously, it was timely to proceed onto the applications, particularly as we had concentrated on learning these at Midginbil Hill; due to the complexity of these applications we knew that we would get no further than the end of the 3rd. palm change in the allotted time.