

COMBAT & HEALING



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COMBAT & HEALING

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ABOUT THE COVER

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Jim's school can be seen in the background of the picture.

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Erle Montaigue

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, Chicago IL 60680-5619 U.S.A. Cost, same as Internal Strength.

How Much and How Hard Should You Train?

by Michael Babin

I once heard someone say "Writing is easy! All you have to do is stare at the paper until beads of sweat form on your forehead!" Training in an internal martial art is certainly comparable.

It should be self-evident to anyone with their feet on the ground (in itself, a prerequisite for the internal arts) that hard work and sweat must enter into your study of the "effortless" arts, especially for the first few years.

Such continuity is, of course, only possible if you train in a style that uses sound body mechanics.

With proper instruction and on-going practice, your practice will, eventually, no longer rely on the conscious mind and on physical strength. At this point in your development of the forms and methods of the internal arts, you can continue to refine your practice until the day you die --- hopefully while training!

The same cannot be said of external stylists. With few exceptions, their skills either wither with age or they stumble upon a "semi-internal" way of doing things. Sadly, most just wither. For example, I recently saw a local middle-aged shaolin instructor demonstrate his forms and it was more than a little sad to see someone my age huffing and puffing their way stiffly through such movements.

By contrast, many instructors of the internal stylists are entering their martial prime at age 40. The average older internal practitioner may have to modify the intensity of each session or substitute a slow form for a fast or slow/fast form as he or she gets older; but has no legitimate age-related reason to stop completely.

I know a Wu-style instructor who is 73 years old and he trains an hour a day, every day, and teaches several times a week.

Such continuity is, of course, only possible if you train in a style that uses sound body mechanics. Forms that allow the knees to rotate out of alignment may go un-noticed when you're a fit 25 year-old but, in the long-run, cause your joints to self-destruct when you hit 50.

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Aside from using proper body mechanics in your internal training, it is also important to practise moderately and on an on-going basis. Stop all activity/training for a few months or years when you are past 40, for example, and it will be more difficult to safely resume your practice, especially if you are practising vigorous forms and these are the ones that are the most beneficial to your overall health.

It is also true that it is more difficult to begin training in a vigorous form of Tai Chi or Pa-kua or Hsing-I if you are past 35. You should check with your doctor and pace yourself according to your level of fitness.

For example, two or three hours of instruction per week can be sufficient if it is bolstered by daily solo practice.

The length of each of your training sessions and their frequency in your schedule are dependent on a number of variables: your own level of interest; physical ability; time constraints; and, what your instructor recommends.

For example, two or three hours of instruction per week can be sufficient if it is bolstered by daily solo practice. It is certainly true that few modern teachers, much less their students, practise with the intensity that the old masters brought to their training.

Of course, in "those days" the latter had to be skilled at a variety of methods and weapons as they never knew when they would be challenged by a rival. In addition, many pa-kua and Hsing-I students/instructors earned their living as convoy or personal body guards and again had to train at a level of intensity that is alien to most of us.

When reading about a t'ai chi master who would routinely go through his long form 20 times a day or a Hsing-I instructor who would practice

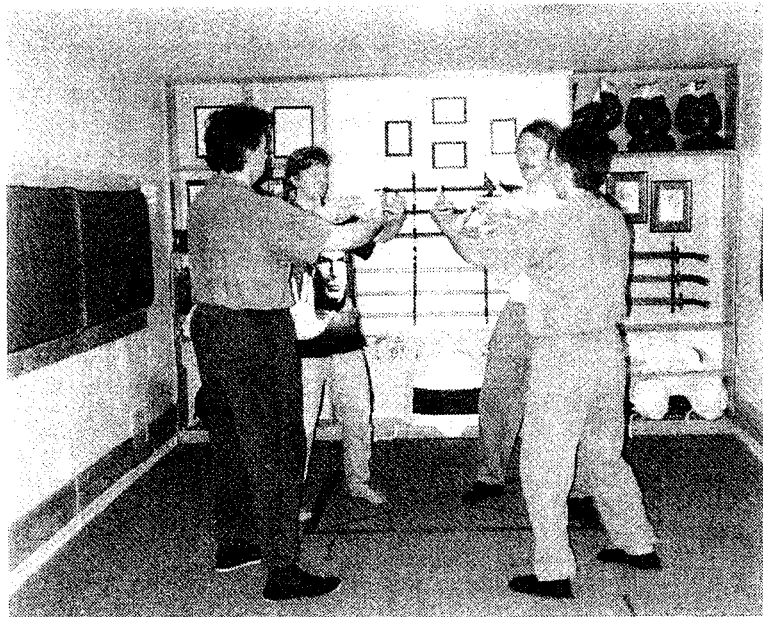
four to five hours in the evening after a full day of work in his business; it is hard to believe that anyone is capable of such intensity or interest.

These days, few of us with families or occupations can match such training regimes but it remains true that regular practice is essential to making progress --- especially if your interest goes beyond doing form. I find it difficult to be patient with the middle-aged tai chi practitioners and instructors that I meet who obviously believe that doing a short form once-a-day somehow makes them "internally" superior to a young hard-stylist who practices one or two hours a day.

recommendation for the serious student of T'ai Chi, it is to learn and practise a competent, traditional long form (no matter what style) or don't bother!

The long form should be done three times in a row, both in the early morning and evening. The first (at a quick pace) strengthens the body and acts as a warm-up; the second (at a moderate pace) trains the mind; and, the third (at a very slow pace) enhances the spirit.

Once a day should be the bare minimum if you hope to see any real benefits from the practice of long form.



Mike & Three Of His Senior Students Doing Qigong

While on the subject of length of form, and at the risk of offending many, I have come to believe that everyone, except absolute beginners, are wasting their time learning and practising any of the modern, short/modified forms. If I have one recom-

Standing chi-kung can be used to supplement such training; preferably for minimum of 15 minutes before you do your slow form --- twice a day.

In martial terms, you also should regularly practice a

few selected techniques at a fast/fa-jing pace to supplement your slow form practice. Pick one or two combinations that you particularly like and do well and do as many repetitions as you can manage without exhausting yourself. These techniques should be practised while striking the air; and, striking pads or heavy bags; and, against a partner.

You are much better off with one or two powerful, internalized techniques (especially if they are "driven" by fa-jing) rather than dozens that you have to think about before you can do them.

Even though the leg techniques in the internal arts are all aimed low on a functional level, it is important to practice them (in the forms only) as high as you can manage for the exercise value. Just be careful to not try to kick higher than your joints are ready for at any given point in your training.

If you are training in fast or fa-ching forms or weapons forms, these must also be fitted into your schedule on a regular basis. An hour of practice, three times a week, is the minimum for developing external and internal skill at these.

The Taoistic basis of the internal arts should lead us to understand that the self-healing and combat skills are gained gradually through moderate and balanced training. An internal martial art is difficult to cultivate through either obsessive or lackadaisical training.

The obsessive younger student may quickly develop martial skills but destroy his emotional/spiritual sense of balance; the older obsessive student may train too hard initially and burn himself out on a physical or emotional level. By contrast, the lackadaisical student trains only when the mood takes him or her and then over-inflates the value of such training.

You are much better off with one or two powerful, internalized techniques (especially if they are "driven" by fa-jing) rather than dozens that you have to think about before you can do them.

On a pragmatic level, if you never sweat or ache as a result of your training, then you're probably not doing enough to make real progress. If you ache all the time and feel exhausted after training, then you're probably over-doing it.

Without labouring the point, the serious student of an internal art must search out the best available versions of their art and practice them moderately and regularly to make progress. Once gained, internal martial skills are there for life and need not be practised as much to remain useful.

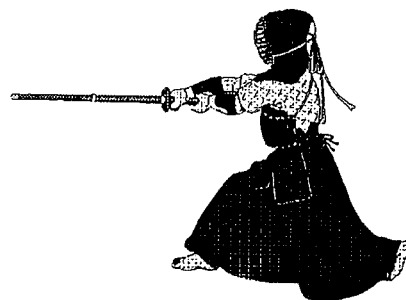
I still occasionally train with one of my former tai chi instructors who has retired from teaching and practises with partners only once or twice a year. In fighting terms, the only skill of his that seems a little rusty is his

sense of control not his tactics, timing or short-power (fa-ching)!

However, the health benefits of form practice are not as accumulative and regular practice is still essential though the movements usually become smaller and "softer" in appearance of their own accord.

In conclusion, developing an internal understanding of all aspects of the internal arts is EASY: find a competent instructor and practice moderately and regularly for the rest of your life!

Michael Babin runs the W.T.B.A. in Canada and is the chief representative for Erle Montaigue in Canada. He teaches Taijiquan, Bagwazhang, Qigong and Fa-Jing Ch'uan.



WTBA NEWS

When I first began my training, I learnt four brief katas or forms. I kept practicing these forms and still do today. Back then I did not know where they came from, nor did I feel confident in teaching them. So I have never taught these forms to anyone. A few years back, well about 9 years, a Chinese lad came to see me in my home in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney. He had with him a video tape of some old and young Chinese men training in a village in China. He told me that he had just been to this village at the base of Wudang mountain and that he had been allowed to film the first two forms of the original Chang San-feng H'ao Ch'uan (Taijiquan). Upon looking at these forms, I told him that I knew these plus two more. I knew then that what I had learnt were the first four of nine forms from Wudang Mountain. Probably the very beginnings of karate and kung-fu.

Since that time, I have been trying with meagre success to communicate with those who 'keep' the style on Wudang. At first, my letters and messages via this Chinese lad fell upon deaf ears until I sent to them on tape what I was taught. Then the doors opened and communication began. A spokesman for the village, Fu T'sai, told me that they would only show me the four forms that I already knew, and at great cost. This was not good for me as I would not teach these forms to anyone until I could say that I had the whole system.

It has taken me many years of bargaining, but now it has

paid off. I will be in China in mid 1995 to begin learning the last five forms. Around June, I will be travelling to China and hopefully I will return with the good oil.

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Learning the internal martial arts must be done with an organic natural growth. One cannot set out to make money teaching the internal arts or to make at least a good living. As a few of my ex-students have done. It must just happen. When I began teaching back in 1976 in London, I had no idea of where I would be today, I did not plan anything, it all just happened naturally. Even my first videos were only ever made so that my students could learn a little easier and look where that all lead to. If you have any ulterior motives for learning taiji or bagwa, then you will ultimately have to fail, this is the law of nature. A couple of my ex-students are now trying to make out that they did not learn everything they know from me..

Things like the 12 Deadly katas of Dim-Mak and H'ao Ch'uan could only have come either directly or indirectly from me. The 'way' that they both do the large san-sau and pauchui could only have come from me, and the advanced way of pushing hands definitely could only have come from me. I have not taught anyone until recently the 'dim-mak' push hands with the three