

# ***COMBAT AND HEALING***

The Magazine Of The World Taiji Boxing Association



*June 1997 No. 29*

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The Magazine Of The World Taiji Boxing Association

June 1997 Number 29

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## THE FRONT COVER:

1/ Laurel, doing what she does best. ... Well, almost best!

2/ Harmony on Taiji Farm Australia

## CONTENTS:

p. 1/ **Should you enter into a competition?**

By Mike Babin, WTBA Ottawa.

p. 2/ **The Welsh Gathering, it will be bloody huge!**

p. 3/ **Taijiquan, The Vital Signs.**

Erle Montaigue

p. 5/ **The Correct Sequence Of Learning.**

Erle Montaigue

p. 8/ **Goodbye Gus Powell.**

By Lyn McAlister, Auckland

p. 9/ **WTBA News.**

p. 10/ **Rules For All WTBA Instructors.**

WTBA Executive Australia

p. 13/ **The Qi Meridian & Collateral System.**

Rick Bauer, Italy (USA)

p. 18/ **Next Issue**

## Australasian Fighting Arts Magazine

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## SHOULD YOU ENTER A COMPETITION?

*Michael Babin*

**T**here's an old expression to the affect that:

"Those who want power should automatically be barred from having it." I think the same principle should also apply to those who want to enter a tai chi competition — if you want badly to win, you should not compete!

However, it is also true that any practitioner who is serious about his or her commitment to their discipline should enter a form competition at least once. Doing "your best" in front of a panel of judges and an audience certainly encourages you to maximise your understanding of *sung*, on many levels, so that those watching can, at the least, get an appreciation of your enthusiasm and dedication, if nothing else.

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Doing "your best" in front of a panel of judges and an audience certainly encourages you to maximise your understanding of *sung*,

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There are many positive reasons to participate as a competitor judge and/or organiser at the local or national level: the intensive training which is a pre-requisite; learning to deal with "on-stage" jitters; having fun, making new friends and comparing how you understand your discipline with the

interpretations of others.

There are also many negative reasons to enter such events — but you can learn from them as well — whether you are a competitor, judge or organiser: the inter-style rivalry; the favouritism that can be shown by judges and/or organisers for certain forms or competitors; realising that some of the experts present are not as "evolved" as they would like to pretend or believe; and, the childish bickering (and occasional fist-fight) among the competitors over who is doing the "real" thing.

Especially if you are only starting to realize the difference between "doing tai chi" and "being tai chi", attending such events can give you the opportunity to see a seemingly endless variety of interpretations of mastery.

At a certain stage in your development, this is essential. For example, if you have never seen taijiquan done differently and/or more competently than the way you do it, it's going to be almost impossible to improve your own practice or recognise quality when you see it. Many instructors imply that their practise has this quality but far fewer actually do.

It would seem sensible to be suspicious of the self-styled master who refuses to demonstrate any aspects of his/her art even to their sup-

posed peers; however, such people are often accepted at face-value.

It is also sadly true that you already have to be able to know what to look for in order to appreciate the subtle or overt expression of, for example, fa-ching or opening/closing. Most of those watching a competition are either there to be entertained or to support a friend/family member who is competing. They have no understanding of what differentiates "good" from "bad" taiji; and, no real interest in learning the difference between the two. Why "cast pearls before swine"?

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**Similarly, too many of those competing are primarily concerned with being seen as excellent rather than in developing excellence.**

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Similarly, too many of those competing are primarily concerned with being seen as excellent rather than in developing excellence. What do high kicks, slow-motion gymnastics, fancy uniforms, pushing contests, and winning medals have to do with the self-healing and combative aspects of the traditional internal arts?

I have been talking about entering form competition and/or watching demos by the experts in attendance.

You should avoid entering push-hands or sparring events as these are not anything but shoving matches or games of "tag" that have absolutely no relationship whatsoever to the sensitivity and self-defence skills that should come from serious training.

The skills that work are too dangerous to do in a competition and the watered-down techniques that do work "within the rules" will ruin your potential for self-defence if you start training only to win such events.

If you are a devoted fan of "rubbery" push-hands or uprooting and have somehow convinced yourself that the skills necessary to win such contests would let you defend yourself against a serious aggressor, I suggest you rent or buy one of the videos showing any of the Ultimate Fighting Championships in the United States. It's not pretty and it's not as realistic as the organisers would like us to believe; but, it's essential viewing for any serious martial artist. Sports martial arts teach you to "play" not to defend yourself.

In conclusion, an internal discipline can change you, if you open yourself to the process of change, and not always in ways that you expect. The finest end-products of such a process are usually the least concerned with being in the limelight and winning public recognition.

## Welsh Gathering

You are invited to attend the W.T.B.A. training weekend at Pembrey Country Park, Llanelli, during the first weekend of July 1997.

Training will start on Saturday the 5th of July so please arrive no later than 7 pm on Friday the 4th of July. Camp will end on the 6th of July at around 12 noon.

Every one, including instructors and their students are welcome to attend as everyone will have a chance to learn and to share your own knowledge with everyone else.

Topics covered as the main area of teaching will include: The first "Qi Disruptive Form", an "Introduction To Bagwazhang", "Using Taijiquan as a fighting art", "The Erle Montaigue System", as well as taiji and bagwa forms.

The cost of the whole weekend will be £30.00 inclusive of all training, camping fees and all meals, including a barbecue on Saturday evening.

### WHAT TO BRING

Please bring a tent, sleeping bag, eating utensils and any other personal items you will require.

### CONTACT

For further information please contact the W.T.B.A. Wales at: Phone: +44 (0)1792 898721, or write to:

**Peter Jones  
33 Penmynydd  
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# Taijiquan The Vital Signs

By Erle Montaigue

**H**ow do you know when your training is finally beginning to reach an advanced level, or that some of the things that should happen with your training are actually happening. Dedicated students who wish to have some kind of sign as to their progress always ask me these questions.

Well, there are certain physical and internal signs that one is able to look for provided they are told about them. In just the same way that the body lets you know what it wants in the way of healing, provided that you are in tune with your body, taijiquan lets you know how you are progressing by having certain physiological signs appear in or on your body. These signs begin the moment you begin your taijiquan and qigong training.

## The Shakes

The shakes will begin about 3 minutes into your first qigong session. The reason for this is that the qi is already trying to flow more freely and is finding resistance in the form of tension. During qigong, the qi needs to be at full strength or flow so that more qi can flow freely to all parts of the body. The qi 'springs' from the *bubbling well* point or 'K 1' (Kidney one point, the first point on the kidney meridian). But first of all, the qi must flow downwards from tantien, an electrical point about 3 inches below the navel, to K 1 so that

it can then flow to all parts of the body, healing as it goes. The qi will flow downwards OK, but when it tries to move upwards from K 1, it encounters tension in the thigh muscles. So this qi flow is like a wave hitting against a wall until so much qi is built up that it **MUST** break through in big bits rather than an uninterrupted even flow, hence the shakes. Often when I have obviously strong men come to my classes and I ask them to stand in their first qigong position, they often have a look of "come on, is this all there is to it". But after only a few minutes they, more than anyone else, are shaking like leaves in the breeze. They just cannot understand why, as they are so strong, they are unable to do this simple exercise. What they do not understand is that it has nothing to do with how strong their muscles are, but rather that their qi flow is impeded because of their huge muscles and more-so, tension caused by exercising in the incorrect way.

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**The qi will flow downwards OK, but when it tries to move upwards from K 1, it encounters tension in the thigh muscles.**

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After some time, around perhaps 4 to 6 weeks of training in the basic qigong stance, the shakes lessen to a mild vibration and it becomes

quite pleasant standing there. This is your best indication of an increased qi flow and that finally something is beginning to happen. If you do not get the initial shakes, there is something wrong with your stance. Perhaps you have slowly stood up and not even noticed it, this is usually the problem. Everyone, no matter whom gets the shakes.

## Pain:

Pain is also an indication that either you are performing qigong in correctly or that you are performing it correctly! Your instructor, provided that he or she knows, will instruct you as to why there is pain and correct the stance accordingly, or not correct the stance accordingly.

While in a qigong stance, we are in the most natural position for the body to try and put itself back into alignment. You will find that bones will crack and pop just standing there. However, if bones and tendons are out of alignment and have been for some time, and tension is the cause, then this may take some time and there will be some slight pain when the body tries to get the bones back into position. So this pain is OK. All that your instructor has to do is to check that your stance is absolutely correct, then he will know that this is good pain. If however, there is pain and you are standing incorrectly, this is bad pain and must be corrected.

## Heaviness

Qi is heavy, or rather, it gives the feeling of heaviness as qi does not have physical weight of course. When you have advanced enough in your training, you will notice that your arms feel heavy when you raise them, this is the first sign that something is happening. Slowly, your whole body will have that 'heavy' feeling causing you to feel as if you are moving in water or oil.

The reason is that when you rqi is finally unblocked and a normal amount begins to flow again, it becomes a little more difficult to bend the joints because of this flow. It's not an unpleasant feeling however like for instance arthritis! It's more like a relaxed controlled feeling where the joints all move at the same pace with no jerky movements.

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**Your whole body will feel heavy especially when performing the form, you will feel your own weight under your feet and you will actually think about what is under your feet.**

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Your whole body will feel heavy especially when performing the form, you will feel your own weight under your feet and you will actually think about what is under your feet. A pleasant 'sinking' feeling will happen, joining

you to the earth like as if you are putting down roots into the ground. And indeed you are, energy roots that is.

This 'heaviness' will enable you to do exactly what your mind tells your body to do without any imbalances, and although you feel heavy, you will be able to move quickly and lightly because of your increased mobility and control that you now have over your movements and balance.

## Fingers Buzzing

This is a sign that you are really getting somewhere and not simply entering into old age! Your fingers and palms will begin to vibrate lightly at the end of each Yang movement, lie at the end of the posture known as "brush knee, twist step". There will be this uncontrollable vibration of the hand that is doing the attacking movement. Do not however, TRY to do this, as it will just happen naturally. And if you try to do it, it will be seen to be false and 'put on'.

This is a sign that the qi is streaming out of your fingertips due to there being no tension in your arms and torso which causes blockages etc. Eventually, this vibration will extend into any weapons forms that you perform, depending of course upon the rigidity of the weapon. For instance a hard stick will not have much vibration at the tip, but it will be there, whereas a sword will have a

seeable amount of vibration at the tip.

## Fingers Perspiring

This is one of the areas where you can really see that you are finally getting somewhere. We are told in western medicine and science that the whole body perspires because of thermo-regulatory factors, but that the palms, fingers and soles of the feet do not perspire because of this reason. They perspire because of emotional reasons, hence the saying that "he has sweaty palms" etc. In the Chinese martial arts, we say that this occurs because of "internal reasons". In other words, because the qi is circulating right down to the peripherals of the body, thus causing perspiration at the fingertips.

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This will be more evident when you practice your form at the 'lung' time of between 3 am and 5 am. This is the time when the

lungs kick in and the qi is activated in that particular meridian to get us going for the day. The lungs are our power source and so at that time in the morning, we need a power kick to get us started. When we practice form at this time, the feeling is amazing with all of the things that we read about that should happen, happening. And the fingertips will perspire profusely.

I am getting into the habit of rising at around 3 am and practicing my form at around 3.30 or 4 am. I go back to bed and to sleep afterwards and have had some of the most enjoyable sleeps during this time.

## Qigong

There is a certain way to perform the "four different palms" during three circle qigong. The palms are; the normal palms facing toward you (mother) yin, away from you, (father or yang), the daughter palm, facing downwards or 'little yin' and the son palm, facing towards each other with the thumbs pointing upwards or 'little yang'.

The times for each of these palms are as follows. You perform the two major yang and yin palms exactly half of the total time spent with the palms in the upper position. You perform the two lesser yin and yang palms exactly half of the time that you would normally hold the palms in the lower position. SO you would do the two

major palms while standing in the upper hand position and the two lesser palms with the palms in the lower position.

## The Correct Sequence Of Learning Taijiquan

By Erle Montaigue

When we first begin to learn taijiquan, many expect instant miracles. But it takes time for taijiquan to even begin to have any appreciable effect upon your immediate physical health and your mental health. The reason for this is that taijiquan is indeed the supreme form of qigong. However, it takes time for a new student to actually be 'doing' taijiquan as opposed to learning it. And there is a big difference.

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When one *learns* taijiquan, he or she is in complete physical and conscious mode. I.e., you will be thinking about every movement just trying to get the physical movement correct. This is not *doing* taijiquan. It is said (by masters of past) that to *think* is to block the qi. In fact,

conscious thought is the same as physical tension and physical tension blocks or impedes the normal flow of qi. This is why we are told that we must attain a state of *sung* while *doing* taijiquan.

## Sung

Sung is that state that one gets into just before sleep, not quite awake and not quite asleep. Some call this an alpha state. Or, I like to express *sung* as being when we cannot feel the body moving (when doing taijiquan). This state is difficult for the beginner (under at least six years training) to attain just learning taijiquan alone. So, in order to gain the great benefits that this ultimate of all qigongs has to offer while we are still learning it, we have basic or standing qigong.

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**Sung is that state that one gets into just before sleep, not quite awake and not quite asleep.**

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This form of qigong will give you the benefits of taijiquan at a basic level while you are still learning and not perhaps getting all you should from your practice as yet. Once you have attained a high level of taijiquan practice and are able to perform the form without

any conscious thought of where to put the hands and feet, how to step, where to step to etc, then you can begin to lessen the time spent doing basic standing qigong. This should take anywhere from six to ten years and even now that I have been practicing taijiquan for over 30 years, I still perform my standing 3 circle basic qigong daily. Not for so long nowadays, but I still feel that I need it in some small way.

## Three Circle Qigong

The *three circle basic standing qigong* is the qigong that all beginners should begin with. No matter how difficult it may seem at first, you should simply stand there. When I first began my training, I was told nothing, just stood in the position and the master then walked out. I dare not move from this position as I was in the *master's house*. I did not know until later when I became one of his closest followers that he was watching from a secreted room upstairs to make sure that I did not move. If I had moved my arms down or had taken a break, he would not have taken me as his personal student, only one of the others.

You will get the shakes. This means that you are doing it correctly, it will feel like shit and you will perspire profusely, especially from the fingertips. Every time the master walks over to you, you

will be praying that he now stops you from this torture, but he will not! Not at least until you have shown that you are worthy of such torture! And that your qi is activated so that you are not doing this for nothing. He might feel your fingers, or stroke your arm, or back. This is his way of seeing how your level of qi is going. Only when it is sufficient and you are shaking like a leaf, will he motion for you to stop. Then he sends you home!

Well, you all know that I am not such a taskmaster, and I feel for my students, however, every now and again, I will just test you out to see how your level of qi is going.

## Advanced Qigongs

There are many other qigong methods that will only be given when the student has attained a high level of basic qigong. The basic qigong should be practiced for at least three years before going on to the advanced qigong, and only when the teacher is satisfied that the student is up to the more advanced methods. The reason for this is that these methods are not only physically more demanding but also can do you any damage if done incorrectly, whereas the basic qigong cannot harm you in any way, unless it is done very incorrectly. The advanced qigongs usually involve the one legged stances so it is important to have an instructor who knows what to look for in



order to not cause any harm.

## Push Hands

It was customary for the beginning student to not begin push hands before he or she had reached the end of the form training. However, I now believe that it is beneficial for one's training to begin learning push hands at the end of the first third of the form, so that the push hands will form a backdrop for your form training. In this way, your push hands will enhance your form and visa-versa. Only the beginning student should try the basic single push hands, as there is no value in going on to any of the advanced methods too soon. Advanced push hands, either single or double should only be learnt and practiced after the student has reached a high enough level in his or her form practice.

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In the beginning we train in push hands at a purely physical level to attain a high degree of upper body tone. Remember, that the old

masters and students in China had already good body tone from working hard in the fields from early morning, whereas we in the west tend not to. It is the push hands at the physical level that gives us this level of body tone which then enables us to go on to the more sensitive levels or *listening with the skin*.

Again, one should stick with basic single push hands for as long as it takes, and not go on too soon as to do so would keep you in the realms of the physical for ever more, never entering the wonderful world of the internal.

## Small San-Sau

This wonderful exercise should be learnt after one has learnt the physical movements of the third third of the Yang Cheng-fu form. This exercise is one of the best that I know of for developing what is known as *fa-jing*, the 'motor' of dim-mak. Small san-sau teaches us many of the pre-requisites of any internal martial art such as *timing, balance, and power*.

The timing allows us to not think about where to strike, it just happens when it needs to happen for any given self defense moment.

Balance is what we get physically as well as internally. Without balance, we would never be able to defend ourselves physically and without internal balance we would never be able to defend ourselves against pathogenic attack. Without real power, we

would have to rely upon huge muscles where the strongest physical person wins. With internal power, it does not matter how small one is as we rely upon an internal power generated from the tantien through the practice of taijiquan.

As one's small san-sau level increases so too does one's taijiquan level and so on.

## Old Yang Style Of Yang Lu-ch'an

It is at this stage that one begins one's training in the *Old Yang Style*. This is the first Yang style of taijiquan invented by Yang Lu-ch'an. Originally it took around 6 years just to learn the physical part of this form, then further time to take it internally. Now, when one learns the Yang Cheng-fu form, it takes around 2 to 3 years to learn the physical movements of both forms. Yang Cheng-fu (the first form that one learns) changed his father's form so that all could take the great benefits from taijiquan and not lose the original essence. Unfortunately, others took it upon themselves to change this form even more, thus losing the essence of taijiquan.

Once one has begun learning this form, it is also time to begin *double push hands*, which takes you even further into the pre-requisites of internal martial arts.

## Large San-Sau

This form done as a solo exercise as well as a two person set is the pinnacle of the training methods from taijiquan. It teaches us at a basic level, how to deal with physical attacks from all directions and with all kinds of weapons. At its most advanced level, this form is the greatest of all for learning about life and how to deal with any confrontation. It will give you total balance as well as total timing and power.

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**This form done as a solo exercise as well as a two person set is the pinnacle of the training methods from taijiquan.**

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This exercise should be given when one is through learning the Yang Lu-ch'an form and knows it physically fairly well without having to think about the movements.

## Da-Lu (The Great Repulse)

This exercise is the greatest for teaching us about the *Four Corners*. Whereas push hands teaches us about the four major directions, this teaches us about the corner directions and how to defend against attacks from these directions.

This exercise should be taught when one has reached an acceptable level of physical double push hands.

## Qi Disruption

I was once of the opinion that it is important to have at least studied the Yang Cheng-fu form before embarking on learning these original internal martial arts forms of which there are nine.

Of course, the beginner will never understand what there are about especially the fa-jing part and the advanced qigong that one must know. But at a purely physical level, these forms will enhance one's training in general and to a certain degree one's health when done at a basic level. And ONLY at a basic level. The more advanced methods of these forms should NEVER be attempted for at least 6 years.

These are the original forms from whence all other internal systems came. You cannot get any more original than these. You can see elements of all three major internal styles within these nine brief, but very complicated katas or forms.

I know that many students will still wish to speed ahead with their physical training. But, sooner or later, those who would be *great*, will work out that they must go back to the beginning to simply, get it right. So if you get it right first time around, you will save yourself heaps in the long run.

## A Friend To Be Missed

By Lyn McAlister

Gus Powell was involved in the North Shore, Auckland, New Zealand Taiji classes, first run by Annie Blackman and then by Lyn McAlister for the past ten years.

He died suddenly on Sunday March 30th 1997.

Gus was keen to absorb every aspect of taiji and so was always at class, sometimes up to three times per week, with his cheerful smile and usually with a joke for us all.

His garage at home was set up like a gym with punch bags of varying weight, foam pads attached to the walls and often the car had to park outside so he had room to do his forms.

Gus approached everything he did with total enthusiasm; from his early days of mountaineering to a tandem parachute jump on his 65th birthday and a 10,000 feet sky-dive on his 70th.

He has been very supportive to me in class and a great friend to us all.

**We will miss you Gus.**