

Combat & Healing

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True Fa-Jing

Mastering Internal Arts

Getting it all Correct

Realistic Self-Defence:2

What Belt Are You?

Welsh Summer Camp

Why Taiji?

WTBA News, New Videos etc.



Snow Falling On Eucalypts in Oberon

COMBAT & HEALING

The Magazine of the World Taiji Boxing Association

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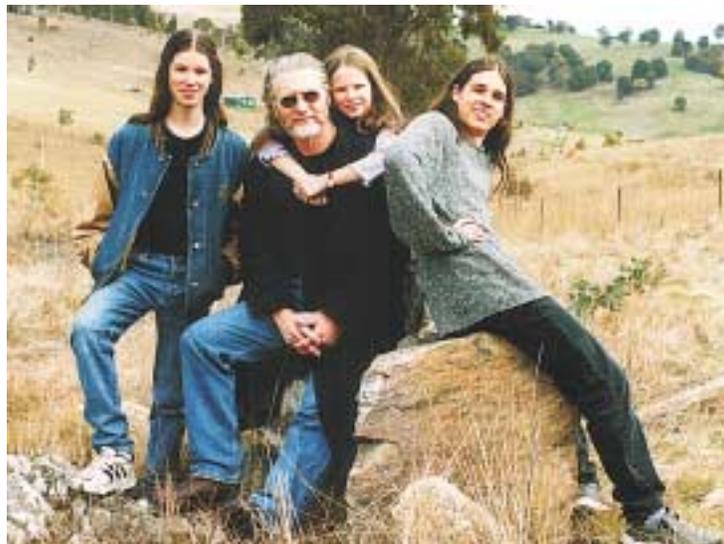
FRONT COVER

Winter in our new home. "Snow Falling on Eucalypts". Oberon NSW Australia. Taken by Kathleen Montaigne.

CONTENTS

Page 1:	True Fa-Jing: <i>By Erle Montaigne (Gwandanaland)</i>
Page 3:	What is Mastery of the Internal Martial Arts <i>By Michael Babin, (Canada)</i>
Page 5:	Getting it all Correct: <i>Erle Montaigne,</i>
Page 8:	Realistic Self-Defence <i>By Nick Jones (Wales UK)</i>
Page 11:	What Belt Are You? <i>By Kurt Levins (USA)</i>
Page 14:	Welsh Summer Camp <i>By Nick Jones (Wales)</i>
Page 16:	Why Taiji? <i>By Ron Beier (Germany)</i>

The Moontagu Band



True Fa-Jing

By Erle Montaigue

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The most recent letter I received was from a chap asking about fa-jing and relaying a story of some US martial arts master who was in the UK performing fa-jing on people and sending them backwards some 8 metres!

Firstly, fa-jing does not send people backwards. Fa-jing explodes inside of people causing them to simply shake and fall to the ground either unconscious or dead! It is PUSHING that sends people backwards some metres, not fa-jing. For instance when someone demonstrates fa-jing on a heavy bag, the bag should not move very much, perhaps a slight swing. However, the main thrust of the strike is a violent shaking of the bag with not much movement. This indicates that the strike has gone right inside of the object and has exploded inside and not on the outside, this is true fa-jing.

When, however, we strike to for instance a hand held mitt which is much lighter, the mitt will be thrust away explosively and often hurting the wearer's hand or arm. True fa-jing can never be done against a body as that body will be severely damaged. You can push people however, without hurting them. So, some instructor has 'pushed' someone backwards and not hurt them!

So what! He just gets back up. This is what most people mean when they say that they can perform fa-jing, it is actually a push! The instructor must be able to place his finger-tips onto the mitt and without withdrawing his hand at all, strike the mitt with such force as to explode that mitt away, this is true fa-jing.

Firstly, fa-jing does not send people backwards. Fa-jing explodes inside of people causing them to simply shake and fall to the ground either unconscious or dead!

If someone were to be able to force someone backwards by 8 metres using a strike, think about it for a moment logically. If someone were to be shot by a shotgun at close range, it would kill them and it would not send them backwards some 8 metres but only a few metres and they would be dead. For to be able to lift a 70 or 80 kg person up and then throw them backwards, would take so much power that it would kill that person. So it is obvious that In these cases 'student participation' is inherent where the student actually throws themselves backwards using their own leg muscles. The test would be to have the person sitting on a chair, feet off the ground, then strike him. He would probably be knocked over and fall on the ground but would definitely not be sent

backwards 8 metres or even one metre! For to lift an object that heavy up and thrown it that far away would require the power of a small bomb!

True fa-jing is the total power of the whole body shaking as it happens. This is when we put Qi into the object to cause it to die or explode from within, the object will vibrate and then fall in front of you, it will NOT be thrown backwards. I have not seen many people with this true ability of real fa-jing. All will begin the shot from much further away and if not, will actually push the opponent so that their hand actually moves some feet and not only 3 inches. You have to measure where the fingers begin and where the hand ends up in order to judge whether it is true fa-jing. I have a clip of true fa-jing on my site so that people can see the absolute power that the whole body can generate in such a short distance. One cannot actually demonstrate this on any one as to do so would be to severely damage that person.

True fighting involves many simultaneous or close to, attacks, thus never giving the attacker a break. If we were to push the person many metres away we would then have to run after him to finish him off!

True fighting involves many simultaneous or close to, attacks, thus never giving the attacker a break. If we were to push the person many metres away we would then have to run after him to finish him off! True fa-jing uses the total twisting power of the waist, rebounding the energy back from the opponent thus re-loading the next strike in a matter of a split second. The very instant that the first strike has struck, the next one is being felt by the opponent, then the third and fourth etc.

The power comes from complete 'SUNG' or the next best translation into English is 'relaxation.'

The power comes from complete 'SUNG' or the next best translation into English is 'relaxation.' So if there is seen to be any kind of stiffness at all during fa-jing then it is not fa-jing as the whole body cannot react if there is any tension in any part of the body. Even the fist is never closed until just about contact is made, and as soon as it has struck, it is again relaxed into a light palm. You cannot have fa-jing beginning with a closed fist; this is impossible and is only a karate type of punch or a type of push.

I am never impressed with people who push others backwards as this has no place in the martial arts or self defense other than to push the opponent into the path of an oncoming motor vehicle. In the internal martial arts, fa-jing is the motor of ev-

erything and without it, it isn't internal! It does not matter how good one is at pushing someone backwards, if he has not got true fa-jing then he has not got internal.

Fa-jing can be used with most parts of the body. All you have to do it to stick a peripheral into the 'fan' and you will have fa-jing just as long as your whole body can do fa-jing. You do not have to practice for hours doing punching for instance because all you have to have is the waist working. Then all one has to do is to lead a peripheral into the opponent and the body will do the rest. We can use hands, feet, hips, shoulders, elbows, heads even, knees etc., in true fa-jing and none of these will send someone flying backwards, they will cause great internal damage when done correctly and the opponent will just fall at your feet.

I am never impressed with people who push others backwards as this has no place in the martial arts or self defense other than to push the opponent into the path of an oncoming motor vehicle.

Once when I had my school in Sydney, I was asked to demonstrate fa-jing on someone using some body protection so that he would not be hurt. So we got two huge Sydney phone books (about 3 inches thick) and also a Taekwon-do body armour and tried out some fa-jing. With two phone books under his shirt plus

the body armour, I was able to strike him using a fist and only have him feel the tremour doing not much damage. I then used a Bagua palm strike using fa-jing and he felt it much more this time, winding him severely. But it was the elbow using fa-jing that did the most damage through all of this armor. After it, he fell to the ground and had a huge bruise around the mid-section. In each of these cases, his body was not moved backward, perhaps a half a step only. However, using strong pushes gained through my Taijiquan training, I was able to push the same person several metres backwards. However, the pushes did not hurt him in any way. On another occasion, I was doing some fighting training with one of my senior students when he attacked suddenly and very quickly. I simply struck his shoulder with my palm and he went down. This student had to go and have some treatment and the doctor who took the x-rays asked how he was struck as there was not external damage at all, but the internal ligaments were all torn. He said that it was impossible for such an injury to happen without any external damage!

Since then, I have never again used fa-jing on anyone in training or demonstration, as it is just too dangerous.

What is “Mastery” In the Internal Arts?

by Michael Babin

While there is a huge amount of interesting information on taiji and the internal martial arts available on the internet; visiting chat-lines and bulletin boards can also be very depressing. Many of the conversations seem less like those between informed adults and more like those you overhear between teenage boys whose hormones are in overdrive; heated arguments about minor details of practise or who is legitimate and who is not.

In these electronic forums, Erle has had more than his fair share of abuse but then again so has many another legitimate expert. He should take comfort in the knowledge that experts like Sam Masich, Liang Shou-yu; Mike Sigman, Yang Jwing-ming; William C.C. Chen, Cheng Man-ching, and I would assume many others as well have been criticized or insulted through the anonymous safety of the internet.

However, I have some sympathy for the confusion, if not the lack of common courtesy, shown by many involved in these debates as it is not easy to recognise the “real thing”. How does one find the real masters in the mob of wannabees and poseurs? Quite often those with the most grandiose claims and visible profiles are those with the least depth of knowledge. I

doubt that the famous P.T. Barnum was thinking of internal arts students when he wrote “There’s a sucker born every minute!”; but he would have been correct in any case.

While there is a huge amount of interesting information on taiji and the internal martial arts available on the internet; visiting chat-lines and bulletin boards can also be very depressing.

Even without worrying about the many frauds trying to get your money or your loyalty, it is not easy when you are a beginner as almost everyone is better than you in most ways. However, time and effort brings increased competence and with a few years of experience (assuming that you are studying something valid to begin with), it should start to be easier to sort out the outright frauds from those who have some level of competence.

However, conversely, the longer and the harder that you train at a competent style; the more difficult it can be to find better role-models much less the exceptional ones. Not many students are willing to travel to workshops given by other experts in other cities or even just to buy their videos for comparison purposes. This is sometimes

due to lack of time and financial resources and sometimes to the kind of blind loyalty that drives a student to think that it is disrespectful to their teacher to look elsewhere for inspiration.

It bears repeating that it is essential for an intermediate-level of student to make the effort to compare what his or her instructor is doing with the skills and styles of that person’s peers in the the internal arts world. It is easy to remain a “big fish in a small pond” and you have to make some effort to compare notes with the fish in the ocean if you are serious about your interest in becoming competent!

A master is content to offer “his or her own thing” without being overly-defensive about his or her interpretation of the art and without being overly critical of those who do things differently.

Let me offer some suggestions as to how to define the elusive quality of mastery in in your chosen role-model(s). These opinions certainly reflect my experience with Erle in the eleven years that he has been my main teacher; but are equally true of those few other “masters” that I have seen or experienced over the years:

- A master is content to offer “his or her own thing” without being overly-defensive about his or her interpretation of the art and without being overly critical of those who do things differently.

- He or she can actually do what they say they can. This may seem overly simplistic but there are many so-called experts who “can talk the talk but can’t do the walk” unless they are demonstrating on their students.

- A master has a strong foundation in traditional internal arts and continues to develop in a way that is a reflection of his or her foundation. It is not a case of “where once you had a goat, now you have a ”duck!”

- He or she is someone with a normal life and interests (family, vocation, hobbies) whose taiji or hsing-i or pa-kua is an aspect of their life — not their whole life.

- A master is someone who makes you go “wow” when they move and whose forms and training methods can eventually help you develop similar skills. In other words, their understanding is replicable and not just a unique expression of their total experience and/or personal genius.

Perhaps it is the ultimate mark of excellence that someone persists despite the frustrations of training and teaching to work at their art over decades; building on the foundations of what they

have learned while creating a structure that is uniquely their own. Erle has done that and his mastery of what he practices and teaches is there to see for those who have eyes and the relevant experience to judge.

He or she can actually do what they say they can. This may seem overly simplistic but there are many so-called experts who “can talk the talk but can’t do the walk” unless they are demonstrating on their students.

Oh, and one last thing, the height of mastery is that you don’t act like a master and expect others to treat you like one.

Addendum:

As some of you may remember, I left the WTBA a couple of years ago to find my own way in taiji and bagua. Having grown a little as a person and a practitioner while away I realized that I had, so to speak, “thrown out the baby with the bathwater” by resigning both my membership and the position of senior Canadian representative. I am pleased that Erle was willing, at my request, to have me back as a member in good standing in early May of this year.

Answer: Michael was never out of the WTBA, he was just holidaying! It is good to have you back old mate. (Erle)

Getting it all Correct

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It's one thing to learn the Yang Lu-ch'an form and an entirely different thing to get it right! It was said that it took at least 6 years just to learn the Original Yang style of Taijiquan which was invented by possibly the greatest Taijiquan master of all, Yang Lu-ch'an. They did not mean that that's how long it took to learn the movements but rather how long to actually get the basic form correct.

Nowadays with so many 'masters', 'sifus' and others lofty named persons, Taijiquan has become only a bunch of slow movements and it's a real shame as this once great art has so much to offer in the way of self healing, healing of others and self defence. And I am continually amazed at the amount of new students who will simply take the word of the local teacher that he or she is knowledgeable in the complete art. Just because he or she wears a fancy little black 'Taiji suit' or they call themselves 'sifu' or 'master' and speak some Chinese and have a few Chinese paintings on the wall, they think that these people must be the real thing. Thing is though, that none of the greatest masters of all time such as Yang Lu-ch'an or Yang Cheng-fu or Yang Shou-hou or Ban-hou never expected their students to call them lofty prefixes, nor did they

wear anything else other than the street clothing of the day. They knew that to practice only wearing some uniform would bring disaster if ever one was really attacked in normal street clothes! So nowadays we see modern 21st Century people dressing up in street clothing from 100 years ago. It's a bit like Greg Norman dressing up in Plus 4's to play golf!

There is so much more to learning any internal form even in the way of physical movement, let alone the internal part, that the student should take the time to look around, ask what the teacher actually knows and more importantly see he or she doing something and even more importantly to know what to look for.

There is so much more to learning any internal form even in the way of physical movement, let alone the internal part, that the student should take the time to look around, ask what the teacher actually knows and more importantly see he or she doing something and even more importantly to know what to look for.

There are certain things that the student must be aware of in the way of simply performing the Taijiquan form and these are left to us by the old masters. Anything else is incorrect and will bring disaster to your health or in the least, just waste your money.

So here, I will attempt to write down some of the things that you must be aware of, those things that will sort out a mediocre form from a great one. These corrections have come from around 38 years of teaching some kind of martial art and around 24 years of teaching Taijiquan. These are the things that I see so-called grand masters doing that are absolutely incorrect.

1/. The movement must come from the Centre.

In other words, the movement must come from the whole body and not only the peripheral that is performing the final act of the movement. So if you see someone for instance performing a move like 'Brush Knee, Twist Step' and they get to the last part and their hand is still moving when the body has stopped changing weight, then walk out! This posture is one of the ones where it is relatively easy to see the movement that comes from the centre of the body (waist and hips). The striking hand must be

moving right up until the weight has fully transferred and visa-versa. Then at the end or rather just before the movement has finished, there is a tiny and almost imperceptible movement of the waist with almost no movement of the hand apart from a small twist. This is true fa-jing and teaches us about transferring Qi. The qi must come from the centre and is manifested in the fingers. As the Qi begins with a larger waving type of movement, it is concentrated down into a tiny movement when it finally gets to the last peripheral, in this case the fingers. So what you should see here right at the end of the movement, is a small 'left, right, left' movement of the waist and just a small twist of the palm.

2/. During attacking movements do not sit back before taking a step.

This is one of the most prominent mistakes that people make and it has come from those Chinese 'masters' who would make the form easier for we dull Westerners to learn! So using the same set of postures, (BKTS) you must look for any sit back or rock backwards onto the rear leg when the posture of 'holding the ball' is performed. Most people however, do it this way. When they hold the ball, which is a devastating dim-mak strike, they will have to turn their front foot out by 45 degrees. So to make this move eas-

ier, they will sit back which destroys the whole martial application of the movement. Taijiquan is one of the most deadly martial arts and there is very little going back but rather attack, attack, attack, slightly to the side in keeping with the Taijiquan principle of 'No Force on Force'.

What most instructors say is that doing this movement and not sitting back causes stress upon the front knee. This is incorrect, as they simply do not know how to do it correctly.

What most instructors say is that doing this movement and not sitting back causes stress upon the front knee. This is incorrect, as they simply do not know how to do it correctly. You have the weight still on your front foot but placed towards the heel part of your foot so that when you turn it, it is just like turning a steering wheel, only one small part of the heel is actually touching the ground so the whole body is able to pivot on that heel easily without any stress to the front knee at all.

3/. Every movement that an advanced practitioner makes should have fa-jing.

Beginners of course cannot get it right from the beginning and that's why Taijiquan is always taught incorrectly at first, so that beginners are able to actually learn the basic block movements. However, the instructor must be aware of this facet and also be able to perform his or her form at this advanced level so that the student is able to see what is coming. The old cop out for not knowing this is that this is 'secret stuff' and it will be taught 45 years down the track! At the end of every attacking movement there has to be fa-jing coming from the waist and hips with relevance to what the hands are doing. This indicates that the whole body is working and that a level of 'Internal Ability' has been achieved. For instance the posture known as 'Chee' or 'Squeeze' which many incorrectly call 'Press' and which is a part of the greater postures known as 'Grasping Swallow's Tail', has this fact of movement whereby right at the end of the movement just before the changing of weight has finished, where the waist makes a 'right, left right' very small movement while the hands only change from a yin to a yang state and back again in order to get the 'power' out and into the opponent. The Adverse Qi comes from the centre and is squeezed right up and out of the hands beginning from the tantien. If the slow fa-jing shake is not there, then transference of Qi is also not there! We do this slowly (some are done explosively which is the trade-mark of yang Lu-ch'an's form) so that we learn how to perform

fa-jing. And when we have to do it explosively, it is all there because we have learnt our form correctly.

I am currently making a series of video tapes which depict this aspect of one's training. The form was originally called 'Waving Form' and is simply a way of doing yang Lu-ch'an's form at a very advanced level. 'Small Frame' form has this aspect also as it has come out of Waving Form.

4/. There must be weight change in every movement:

Most people can see the weight changing during most of the postures like for instance, when we transfer the weight from the right foot to the front foot in the posture known as 'Single Whip'. However, it is a little more difficult to see any weight change for instance during the posture known as 'Stork Spreads Wings'. The reason is that for the most part, we are standing upon only one leg. So I get people who know about this come to me and say, "ah-ha! I saw a movement where there was body movement but no weight change". They did not see that even though I was standing on one foot, that the weight actually changed from heel to ball and back as the movement progressed. It's the same with the postures called 'Fishes in Eight Diagram' where the weight is seen not to move for the whole first part of

this posture. However, because of the martial application, the weight begins on the right heel and as the body turns right around throwing out the hands, the weight changes from heel to toe and back as you come into the 2nd part when you do actually change your weight physically from one foot to the other. So people will now say that there is no movement during the Brush Knee and Twist Step movements when they have to keep the weight on the front foot! There is in fact weight change even during this as the weight begins at only 70% front foot and is then changes to 100% front foot.

This is a common error especially in the postures known as 'Wave Hands Like Clouds' where people will turn their head more than the body to each corner.

5/. The nose and coccyx are pointing in the same direction.

This is a common error especially in the postures known as 'Wave Hands Like Clouds' where people will turn their head more than the body to each corner. Even during Single Whip posture, when the coccyx points to the NNW, the head must also be pointing to that direction and it is the all important direction of the eyes that looks to the West. You will see people turning their head to look to the

direction that they are about to step to when it should be the eyes, then allowing the head to slowly catch up with the eyes as the whole body comes around to that direction. This is part of the toning up of the Hypothalamus gland, which apart from many other things is responsible for your sharp reflexes. So you must also learn about what to do with your eyes for each posture.

6/. The movement must be coordinated with the breathing.

This is often a difficult one, as people just do not know how to do this. There is a yin and a yang part to each posture and with every yin part, there must be an inhalation while the reverse applies for the Yang movements. However, it is not as easy as that as there are certain postures where we are for instance doing an exhalation for the whole movement like the 'Fishes in 8' group. You must never try to force your breathing to suite your movement. You must train and train until you are able to take in more oxygen with each breath so that your movements can slow down in harmony with your breathing.

Realistic Self Defence Part Two

What to use and How to train it.

Nick Jones: Wales

In article number one the emphasis was on attitude when training. The following article is not separate and should be treated as an extension to the first.

When training for rapid powerful responses to attacks on the street.

THE SINGLE SHOT

It is easy to get carried away with learning numerous strikes when practising in the training hall. On the street it is no where near as easy to pull off these numerous strikes, in fact it is hard enough just pulling off one successful strike against an aggressive attacker. It is believed that you have a 90% chance of being on target with a single strike and only a 20% chance of being on target with your second strike (this evidence was obtained using a hard style of martial art).

TRAINING THE SINGLE SHOT

The first thing is to pick a single shot that feels natural and powerful for you to perform. Then practice this strike as an attack to the main frame i.e. head and neck along with the appropriate strike to the attackers attacking limb. Practice your non-technique until you own it; drill it to distraction on the pads, punch bag and eventually with a padded up attacking partner. Try and pick a strike that is multi-purpose and can be used against various attacks.

The first thing is to pick a single shot that feels natural and powerful for you to perform. Then practice this strike as an attack to the main frame i.e. head and neck along with the appropriate strike to the attackers attacking limb

POUNDING PALM

For example you can't beat a good Pounding Palm. In my opinion it is one of the easier strikes to learn and execute with Fajing. Also physically speaking it limits the chances of wrist

injury and damage to knuckles when compared with a punch yet is more powerful. I am having good results in teaching this strike to beginners. I start the training by telling them to shout, "get away" when they execute the strike and perform it as a violent push/strike with the emphasis on relaxation on a pad. As beginners they seem to be able to grasp this concept easier than just an all out strike. In the same lesson it becomes far easier to move to a violent, powerful strike from close range shouting PAH instead of get away. Also the Pounding palm can help you get into the reptilian brain by the action of stretching the fingers. The pounding palm can be angled all different ways to be effective on various parts of the body, limbs, neck and head. It can be used as a warning shot and as a knock out blow. As a bonus the pounding palm is, as I like to say a "buy one get one free strike". I say this because if you aim the heel of the palm on to your attacker's chin your fingers if kept relaxed will go into your attacker's eyes. So not only do you get knock out can be through the jaw pinching the nerve behind the jaw hinge and kinking the brain stem you also get the eyes and surrounding points get as well

THE WARNING SHOT

(mainly for those who work in security, bouncing and close

protection) If your attacker has began the attack in a verbal form, challenging you, swearing, shouting and spitting at you but appears to be just outside striking distance it may not warrant a pre emptive strike to a knock out area. Some people are just talkers who can go either way but if given the option will choose not to fight. You know the type they will walk right up to you and go nose to nose. Do not let them come that close, they are as in single push hands "in side your garden". In this circumstance if verbal disuasion fails, throw a warning at them, tell them if they take one step closer you'll fucking destroy them. If they do, slam your pounding palm into their chest area CV14. This could still cause the attacker to be knocked down and winded, but will also cause a psychological effect of adrenaline overload putting your attacker off. Be warned though, if you do not strike your attacker hard enough you will encourage a violent response from them and end up fighting anyway!

Visualisation

When practising solo fighting forms, katas and non-techniques it can sometimes help if you imagine an attacker in front of you, snarling, swearing, salivating and shouting. This method is useful when hitting the focus pads and punch bags etc. This method can help in two ways; it can create a mental state of anxiety and stress and thus give you an opportunity to

see if your Taiji will work in this negative environment i.e. a real life attack. Also it can help you achieve correct body position i.e. if for some reason you find your left hand in a low body striking position but you know it should have been a high body position strike by visualizing an attacker you will be able to see this and correct it.

The issue of whether or not you could pull off a series of strikes in combination has at times caused great concern for me. However teaching people my self and talking to my instructor and remembering something Erle said in a Workshop has made things a lot clearer for me.

WHY TRAIN COMBINATIONS AND KATAS?

The issue of whether or not you could pull off a series of strikes in combination has at times caused great concern for me. However teaching people my self and talking to my instructor and remembering something Erle said in a Workshop has made things a lot clearer for me.

NON TECHNIQUES, DEADLY KATAS, MOTHER APPLICATIONS, SUDDEN VIOLENCE, SAN SAU, AND SO ON.

All of these methods are effective on the street but their initial use is as training methods. Each of these methods teaches your body and mind certain skills necessary for good Self-protection. They teach you balance, timing, co-ordination, power, Dim mak, where to hit and the weapon to do so. Also they teach you Fajing, if this is not up to scratch then during realistic practice you will be found out as it is only with Fajing that you can pull off these combinations.

OVER KILL

If the bum is animal enough to attack you then they deserve to receive more than one strike. Also do not forget that you may not be successful with your first strike so following up with a second, third, fourth and fifth strike as a matter of course this increases the likelihood of something connecting. Remember with Fajing it is not PAH! First strike, PAH! Second strike, PAH! Third strike, PAH! Fourth strike and PAH fifth strike, it is PAH! and five strikes occur.

STAND ALONE TECHNIQUES

Within each combination there are many single strikes which can in most cases be used as stand alone techniques as a response to various attacks. So again your mind and body is being trained sub consciously to respond appropriately to various ranges, types and directions of attack.

MULTIPLE ATTACKERS

The combinations of strikes can also be used as methods of sub-consciously training to respond to attacks from more than one opponent so that when you have dealt with the first attack and dispatch the attacker after perhaps two blows you are ready to keep going with the next moves that you have been practising in your combination. The obvious down side though is the fact that the strike sequence of the non-technique probably wont follow the sequence of attack leaving you to get clobbered. However we must remember that these are still training methods and though classically speaking there is a set order of strikes to follow to perform a particular Kata or Form, on the street you can throw in strikes in any order.

This is the ultimate level for large San Sau where you pair up and perform the katas in ran-

dom order A and B-side and your partner responds using their San Sau Knowledge. Remember that San Sau means way of free hands! So all these things are gradually molding you to a fighter who can react to and pre-empt any thing and any body that comes at him. It is worth remembering that if multiple attackers attack you it is difficult for them to hit you all at the same time. So you have to look at it as a series of single attacks coming in quick succession. If you position yourself so they can only come one at a time at you then it makes things a tiny bit easier, and believe me in this sort of situation every little helps. So that said each time you drop an attacker it acts as a demonstration of your effectiveness. On seeing this a "courageous group" of five becomes a less "courageous" four, full of self-doubt when three and totally shit scared when two! So brutality and effectiveness on the first two discourages the others, giving you a chance to get the hell out of there.

So it is important to practice all these Katas and combinations in the correct sequence following your instructor to a tee. On the street though all this information stored in your sub conscious should come out in any order with your favourite and strongest strikes coming to the fore front as you respond to whatever is put in front of you. Also it is important to pick your favourite non-techniques and practice them over and over again. If you can pull these off when your training partner is attacking in a savage manner then

you know you have a good chance of success in the street. Never discard any technique or training method until you know what it is all about and have practised it a great deal. If you still don't think it is helping you develop then you must make a decision as to whether or not it is worth doing. That said everything I have learnt and practised with the WTBA over the last seven years has increased my skill and knowledge. Also it has improved my general well being and pointed out to me that I have a great life. To many people give up if things don't work first time.

PRACTICE.

There are people on this planet that are great internal martial artists but do not study Taiji, Bagwa or Hsing i. They only know a couple of strikes but they are so deft at them that it is all they need. The people I am writing about are street fighters who have had no formal days training in their lives they are simply a product of the upbringing. Someone like Lenny Mclean (The Guvnor) could tap straight into his reptilian brain and knock you out with a single strike and then go home and play with his children.

As authentic Taiji practitioners in the WTBA we have a duty to ourselves, our family and friends, our teacher, our students and Taiji itself, to realise how effective our art is and start practising in a realistic manner.

DIM MAK

I have written very little about Dim mak as I feel people get distracted by it. I know it works with devastating effect, but people are jumping steps. They are worrying about points before they know Fa Jing, before they can move correctly and even before they have tapped into the Reptilian brain. Knowledge of a couple of points is fine but it is getting to them that is the important thing. What is the point of knowing where stomach 9 is if you freeze every time confrontation occurs and don't know how to perform an explosive knife edge strike. As my Instructor Peter Jones would say Dim mak is the bullets but you must own the gun and know how to fire it before they work.

SELF PROTECTION AND THE LAW

It is all very well learning this stuff and having the ability to kill a small town's worth of people with one deadly swipe, but what about the law. There are always stories of someone who was attacked but sorted the attacker out and then ended up sharing a cell with them. Usually though it doesn't happen this way.

Reasonable Force is the key phrase here, so how does that fit in with the art of overkill. The most important thing to remember is that if you get attacked you must do what ever you can

to drop them if you do end up in trouble at least you are not dead and that's what's important, SURVIVAL. In the words of Geoff Thompson "it is better to be judged by twelve than carried by six"

KEEPING OUT OF TROUBLE

If you know a place is popular with troublemakers don't go there. Don't end up on your own at night. Don't end up down any dark alleys, or take short cuts over waste ground if you have the opportunity to run or draw attention to your self, do so.

If this is all said and done and an attack occurs strike first, fast and hard. In the law you can argue that you hit first as you knew that if you did not your attacker would seriously hurt you. Use open hand strikes, you and I know these can be deadly, but in a court of law a closed fist is far more aggressive than an open hand (use pounding palm for example) after all how many thugs do you know that will go to the police and complain about being slapped.

Your response must be comparable to your attack. If the attacker strikes you and you counter with a strike back, knocking him out, don't then stamp all over his head, just get the hell out of there.

Always remember you were the victim and this person chose to bother you. Fight out of love not hate. Fight because you do

not want to lose the life, family and friends that you love. Don't fight because you hate the attacker just don't let him destroy your life

So when practising this stuff or anything else you must build up to realism and savour everything you learn on the way there. Remember 'inch by inch life's a cinch yard by yard life is hard'.

So keep practising train hard and safe and listen to your instructors and your own body.

If you want to discuss anything regarding this article or the other article or if you want information please feel free to contact me on

Nick Jones WTBA Instructor
Wales

What Belt Are You?

Kurt Levins: USA

I am always amused when people ask me what “belt” are you? I either give a smart answer or take the time to explain that in my traditional Chinese School of Martial Arts, we have no belts or ranking, simply Sifu and the rest of us. To the outsider, this may be somewhat confusing, but to anyone in the school, it is readily apparent who are serious and dedicated students.

It is when your brother and sister practitioners recognize your expertise and ability that you can truly consider yourself as having advanced. It is also at the same time that a good teacher will allow you to begin to answer questions. This is a sign of their security and knowledge. No teacher should ever be afraid of a student’s knowledge.

The single most common question I have been asked is often phrased as follows, “I’m having trouble with this technique, can you help me.” After a few questions and answers it almost always (and to be truthful in my experience this has been an ALWAYS) that the student is truly struggling with the technique. They practice it over and over, seemingly never getting it right. They ponder and think about it.

My first course of action is usually to explain the martial appli-

cation of the technique and have them demonstrate this back to me. Many times this diagnostic tool does the work. But often it becomes apparent that they are not struggling with the physical aspect but rather a mental aspect.

It is when your brother and sister practitioners recognize your expertise and ability that you can truly consider yourself as having advanced.

At these times my advice is always, “forget about it, and let it go.” Now there are probably very few who are reading this who have not heard this advice many times. Yet, as it always seems in tai chi, the true picture remains clouded.

Too often we remember to “invest in loss” during push hands and sink and transfer from yang to yin and back and forth but never consider this in our method of thinking.

For anyone familiar with the Yang Cheng Fu line, you have probably heard the phrase, “invest in loss” many times. Most see this as a guide to give in and retreat, absorb and move. For many years, and I mean many, I too saw this meaning.

Then during training I was told, “your thinking is too yang. You change your body from yang to yin, but your mind stays yang.” As Erle Montaigne has said, enlightenment often comes in small insights and was this a MAJOR small insight.

The constant shifting from yang to yin is a principle every tai chi practitioner should learn early in their careers. But rarely, if ever do they realize that this shift applies not only to physical shifts but also to spiritual and mental shifts. It should be remembered that in the Taoist river from which tai chi flows, the individual is an indivisible and wholly integrated union of mind, body and spirit. So from this point, the movement of thinking from yin to yang is logically as necessary as shifting your feet or changing your hands. Please recognize that this is not a statement of religion but rather is based in the historical roots of tai chi.

Too often we remember to “invest in loss” during push hands and sink and transfer from yang to yin and back and forth but never consider this in our method of thinking.

How many have ever doubted if standing still meditation whether the root, the tree, Three Circle Chi Gung or any other is really of the value that many make it to be? Not only is the physical posture of stillness so important, but also of equal im-

portance is the mental practice of nothing, of letting go of thought. When both are achieved together we glimpse yin.

One has only to pick up any of the glossy advertisement filled magazines concerning the martial arts these days and you can see unlimited examples of yang thinking.

One has only to pick up any of the glossy advertisement filled magazines concerning the martial arts these days and you can see unlimited examples of yang thinking. Every article in which one master, instructor or whatever other name they choose to use, says that their art is the best and the only, represents extreme yang thinking.

For a while I fought the torrent of Internet slurs against Erle Montaigue and the World Tai Chi Boxing Association, even back when I was not part of the group. It is only now I realize that I was up against a myriad of yang only thinkers. Now, when confronted by this extreme yang thinking, I shift, physically and spiritually to extreme yin, becoming waterlike. The deeper the water, the smaller the ripples that the stone makes. Now the ripples almost tickle me as I realize the futility of the rock fighting water. For those who doubt this futility, please see the Grand Canyon in the southwestern US. Water definitely won that battle.

In fighting remember this also. Recently while instructing a class of police recruits in self defense, I was advised that one of the students was a high ranking tournament student of a hard Korean Style. I used him to explain that true fighting occurs in close. Not far away and definitely not in the range that tournament fighters use. A brief sparring ensued where as soon as he moved, I moved in and gave him the best “stickiness” I could. I stuck to hands, his feet, turned behind him when he turned. When he would reach extreme positions he was met by a finger, hand or elbow. After about one to two minutes he confessed, “there’s nothing I can do against you. I was never trained to fight anyone like that.” I use this not to brag for I am far from special, but to show how enveloping him like water made his yang attacks empty. Yes, his very yang attacks caused him to become yin. At the moment of interception, my yin became yang and filled the emptiness of his yin.

This is the natural progression. Extreme yang naturally progresses to yin. Extreme yin naturally progresses into yang. Fight this natural process and disaster is around the corner. The cheetah is an awesome predator capable of greater speed than any other land animal. At his top speed he is pure yang. How could a gazelle ever get away from him? The gazelle knows he can not outrun a cheetah. The gazelle doesn’t try and outrun the cheetah, the gazelle moves into a yin aspect and cuts and turns. You see cheetahs are

extremely fast, in a straight line. But as far as cutting and turning, they loose.

Certainly, these physical examples of yang to yin and the return are easy to see. Remember, in every case, they also required a mental/spiritual change.

And now a simple question, how is your thinking? Is it too yang? What about in the street? Consider this – ever get agitated in a traffic jam? Try going yin, use that time to listen to music, do breathing or just smile at the other drivers and really piss them off (this is my personal favorite).

It is my hope, that this simple lesson that I took soooo long to learn may help not only in training but in daily life, for it is in living tai chi everyday that both true challenge and modest accomplishment occur.

Brief Biography

Kurt Levins has been a student of martial arts for 27 years. He has been student of tai chi for over 10 years. He currently studies at the Chi Lin Center in New Jersey. Mr. Levins is police investigator with 23 years of experience and has been a certified police instructor for 13 years. He teaches and lectures at various police schools in the South Jersey/Philadelphia area on the subjects of self defense, personal safety and critical incident survival.

WTBA WALES SUMMER CAMP 2001

Nick Jones (Wales)

Held in the Silver cross Scouts Camp in Penlleger woods the WTBA Wales 2001 camp could not have been in a more apt setting. The camp is situated just off a main road but seems miles away from anywhere. Surrounded by trees the camp has areas of open grass ideal for training and there is even a river running at the bottom of the camp. Facilities include a large hall attached to some dormitories, a lounge/eating area and kitchen.

If in the internal martial arts it is important to be at one with nature then this is the ideal setting to enable you to do so.

The content of the camp was to be pretty martial in variety and required a lot of partner work. However all the techniques could be performed as solo katas with each having a different healing benefit.

The majority of people arrived on Friday night and were greeted with a warm welcome and a tasty bowl of cawl (welsh soup). The majority of people who attended were from Peter Jones' club with a couple coming from my classes. However, eight people came from much further afield with many coming from various parts of England and a couple from Luxembourg.

Training began 10.00 am on Saturday morning on an open patch of grass in the woods and was taken by Keith Jones who was responsible for the Bagwazhang portion of the camp. Keith taught the first five modules of the Bagwa fighting techniques taken from the linear form. Some of these were covered in a previous camp some years ago. However everybody found these extremely interesting and quite a challenge to perform. These modules are very intricate in their movements with many requiring the twisting footwork that is peculiar to Bagwa.

Just before we broke for lunch Peter Jones taught the first four of the Twelve Deadly Katas. These are taken from the Taiji side of things and are a little shorter than the Bagwa modules and emphasised circular movement to gain speed and power in your strikes and were pretty brutal in the way they taught you to deal with your attacker.

After lunch Keith continued to teach up to number eight of the Bagwa modules and gave us the opportunity to practice the previous ones that we learned earlier. Training on Saturday finished at 4.45pm and everyone enjoyed a nice evening with more good food and great company.

DAY TWO

Unfortunately Sunday started with a little rain so training took place in the hall. Peter continued teaching the Twelve Deadly Katas and explained that traditionally only one per year was taught, taking twelve years in total to learn them all. Peter also demonstrated how the Katas could be performed as moving qigongs with each one healing a different organ at specific times of the day. Peter gave us time to recap over what we had previously learned and continued teaching up to number seven of the Twelve Deadly Katas which seem to become more brutal as you progress. Keith concluded the morning session by teaching numbers nine, ten and eleven of the Bagwa Modules. There are 32 of these modules and they re performed on both sides so eleven was plenty to learn. Keith also gave us the opportunity to practice the previous eight.

A grand lunch was provided and enjoyed by all, with some greedy buggers coming back for seconds!

The final session of the camp was held outside and was taken by Peter who taught numbers eight and nine of the deadly katas and again gave the opportunity to practice the previous ones that were learned.

The beauty of this workshop was the fact that you were able to gain knowledge in two different types of Internal Martial Art

that were obviously strongly related but still very different. As usual the atmosphere was very relaxed yet the content was detailed and the quality of tuition excellent. It is worth mentioning that in learning these techniques you were also learning Dim Mak and Fajing.

Peter and Keith would like to thank all those who attended and hope that you enjoyed yourselves and will all come back next year. Special thanks goes to Adrian, for sorting out the money, Ivan for cooking and Edgar for being a stand in cook and cooks mate.

I find it quite strange that Wales should have such an availability of WTBA instructors offering regular tuition, yet only three were present at the camp, and two of those were running it! Never mind there is always next year. In relation to this point some of the new comers to the camp could not get over the fact that such a high quality of tuition was available on their doorsteps and that other people had to travel miles to get any tuition. When I write '*quality tuition*' people need to know that when former WTBA chief instructor Allan Williams came to Wales, on two separate occasions, he stated that Peter Jones was the best Instructor in Europe and had one of the best Taiji clubs in the World!

So on that note writing on behalf of everyone who attended, thanks Peter and Keith for another excellent camp, keep up the good work and we are all looking forward to the next one.

Training Camp in Oberon

Erle Montague held his first training camp in the new home of Oberon NSW last weekend in October. It was such a success that it will be held every 3 months.

They came from everywhere, even overseas and in Australia from as far off as Perth WA (3000 miles for those who do not know how large Australia is), South Australia, Brisbane and Sydney.

Erle taught the first 6 of the Wudang Hand Weapons as well as the 12 Wudang Form and Yang Lu-ch'an corrections. ON the last day with about ½ and hour to go, the snow came down in buckets! Those who chose to stay on another day in Oberon were snowed in until the following Tuesday. However, you would not find a nicer place to be snowed in. Josh and Larissa from Sydney slid off the road while trying to make it through to Sydney and had to hitch back to the hotel. They were picked up by the local butcher's truck!

Training Camp 2002

Erle will again be holding his annual week long training camp in The Northern Rivers in May of 2002. Please contact Mause Eaglen on either wtba@better.net.au or phone her on +61 (0) 2 6679 7015 for details.

Attendees at the Oberon Workshops



Please note that we had a large number of articles submitted this time and many had to be left out of this issue. They will be included in the March 2002 issue.

Why Taiji?

Ron Beier (Germany)

At the beginning of their first lesson I always sit down with my students and ask them why they decided to learn taiji and what they expect to get out of the course. I do this for a number of reasons: first and foremost I'm a curious bastard and would sure like to know what other people think, I'd dearly love to know those motivations and secret wishes and urges and the driving forces that doomed them to become my students. Maybe deep down I feel that hearing them tell me what they expect to achieve will shed some light on my own reasons for learning and continuing to learn. Hope springs eternal...

One elderly lady gets up and says: „I saw this documentary on TV about taiji and they showed all these Chinese people moving so slowly and gracefully in the park and I thought, I'd love to learn that. I'm such a hectic person. They also said that it was good for your health.“ Well that's legitimate. And it proves that Public TV does have some merit, doesn't it? This same lady asked me some weeks into the course how one is to reconcile the time that should be devoted to practicing taiji and the busy schedule of modern life. She just didn't seem to be able to find ten minutes a day to do the first third of

the form we were learning. I didn't have the heart to tell her how much time I spend meditating, qigonging and taijiing every day. And I refrained from telling her that time can't be „found“, that it's just there in one form or another and that it was up to her to set priorities. People often seem to have troubles setting priorities, especially if it means opting for an activity which seems like a Sisyphus trial and the anticipated benefits are all long-term.

A young woman, no more than 17, tells us that she has so much stress in school that she was looking for a way to deal with it. Oh boy, another big disadvantage of the school system: stress above and beyond the call of puberty.

A young woman, no more than 17, tells us that she has so much stress in school that she was looking for a way to deal with it. Oh boy, another big disadvantage of the school system: stress above and beyond the call of puberty. Or is the stress she's talking about just a disadvantage of being a teenager? I tell her that things should get better once she goes to university. If I remember my time at W.L.U. with any sort of accuracy, the only stress I was

subject to was having to find time between beer, pizzas and squash to actually show up at a lecture or two. I tell her that taiji may help to reduce stress. Supposedly if you've practiced correctly for long enough you can get increased alpha-wave activity while going through the motions. I can't say from personal experience; my stress level will hardly have a chance to reduce until both sons leave home to seek their fortune (or whatever boys seek when they leave home nowadays). And that won't be for another 10 years or so.

A young man tells us that he's ruined his sinews and tendons doing Taekwondo and that he's looking for something that might help him get back on the track to a functioning body. I wonder what the difference is between sinews and tendons and decide to look it up when I get home. Having seen some Taekwondo people go to it and watching this young man move, I can well imagine that he has problems.

Actually, the question of „why“ isn't really fair because most people have a hard time fathoming the true intent behind even the most inconsequential decisions. Why did *I* begin? I was not prone to stress attacks, having practiced yoga and meditation for well-nigh 20 years before beginning with taiji. I hadn't practiced any extreme sports, so my body was in

a reasonably sound state. My only contact with other martial arts was the fact that my brother had some dark-coloured belt in some form of Hunger Kungfu, but that sort of thing apparently isn't infectious.

Once I had begun to practice the taiji form and had decided to learn a little more about what it was I was supposed to be doing, I read and heard that many people had begun taiji due to health problems. I also remember very clearly some of the testimonials given during my very first taiji course, absolved in a secluded Fransiscan monastery in the south of Germany. I had gone for a week of retreat, isolation and healthy food. And out of curiosity. To be fair I must admit that I had sent my wife on the same course a few months before, just to make sure it was OK. And now on the third day of my course, while I was still trying to figure out why my shoulders ached so badly after going through such stupidly simple movements, and why everyone else seemed to learn so much faster than me, everyone was gushing about the feelings of energy and rushes of heat and tingling hands and they all claimed to be full of this mysterious stuff „chi“. Everyone except me. Well, someone has to be the dunce in the class.

There were some people from other martial arts at that first course of mine. They had all been sent by their various sifus and senseis and masters, but they didn't really seem comfortable ponderously packing the sparrow by the tail or giving

themselves the single whip-lash, not to mention emulating the dying swan. Or was that the white crane? I settled on the name „McChicken cools its wings“, but some of the more advanced practitioners took offense to the renaming of the posture. I never got behind what the martial artists were really looking for in the monastery. Perhaps they were just being obedient. Not all of them stayed for the whole course.

There were two women who wrote down absolutely everything in notebooks the size of Webster's Third Edition. They hardly found time to actually practice the stuff we were learning, they were too busy writing. I found out that they both wanted to become taiji teachers, so they were taking the beginners' course as a sort of crash course in how to teach beginners. Taiji at home for fun and profit. Somehow I kept getting the image of the dog biting its own tail, spinning round and round, but I don't know exactly why. Perhaps they were designing a taiji correspondence course; learn taiji in five easy steps and eight directions without ever having to leave your keyboard.

One very new-age looking person claimed to be there in order to learn to defend himself without hurting the person attacking him. I had never really thought of taiji as a method of self defense, and the idea of whacking someone without his knowing it was novel indeed, but the pedagogical value of such an undertaking was surely limited. This got me to thinking, which has

proven to be a dangerous endeavour at the best. I remember seeing a cartoon in which one big-nosed drinker snarls at this little guy in the pub:

„Hey pig-face, let's settle this like men, out in the alley.“

Upon which the little guy replies:

„OK, but I think it only fair to warn you, I know taiji!“

The big-nosed drinker thinks for a minute and then says:

„Taiji? Uh, well, umm, then let's forget about it. I haven't got enough time today.“

Obviously the general public opinion of taiji's usefulness as a method of self-defense is not very high, and my initial idea was no better.

During the last two seminars I attended in Swansea, as I was grunting and sweating my way through the twisted stuff Mr. Montaigne was trying to teach us, I was again confronted with the question: why am I doing this? You see, in the time since I began with taiji, I've discarded as unanswerable the question of why I started and have progressed to why I continue. Sort of like my father who always claimed to have failed at earning his first million so he was now working on his second. It occurred to me in a particularly lucid moment somewhere between the Wudang Club (or was it a spade?) and the Nun that one reason for continuing was to become a „chi manipulator“.

All this business of chi to the laogong point and up from the bubbling well and around the small heavenly circumcision (gotta watch out on that one) was surely aimed at conscious direction of chi? That could be a good reason for continuing: to learn to direct chi, to learn to use jing, to be able to leap tall buildings in a single bound etc. Immediately my spoil-sport brine (I hesitate to call it a brain, I think the former term is more fitting in my case) was reminded of the story of the man at the river bank who spent 40 years learning to walk on water. Finally, after forty years, Buddha came along and the man jumped up and said: „look, look, after forty years of practicing my sutra day and night I have finally accomplished something wonderful“ and he walked across the river. „See!“ he shouted, „I can cross this water“. The Buddha nodded and said: „yes, very nice, but why didn't you just take the boat forty years ago?“

In one of my flights through cyberspace I found out that taiji a teacher in England claims to teach a kind of iron shirt neigong which allows people to jump on his students' stomachs from a height of six feet after only six months of dedicated practice. That is to say, the students with the stomach practice dedicatedly, not the guys jumping from the ladder. Why anyone would actually want to climb a ladder and jump onto another person's stomach is beyond me, but stranger things have jumped into my line of vision in the last 30 years or so, so it doesn't surprise me. It re-

minds me of watching people breaking boards and bricks with their bare hands. As Roseanne once said: „Why learn to do that? When are you ever going to be mugged by a board?“ Yes, pragmatism has its virtues. But I am still left with the nagging question: why taiji? Why start, why continue?

Sometimes I'm reminded of what Oscar Wilde said: „The best way to rid yourself of temptation is to yield to it“. At first glance this may seem pure hedonism, (which, to be sure, can be just as virtuous as pragmatism!) but I suspect there is more behind the saying than meets the eye. Once you've yielded, you no longer need to be tempted. „Been there, done that“, as a friend of mine once said to me somewhat flippantly. If you're hungry, eat something. Then you're no longer hungry. A simple fact. Once you've learned something, there's no need to learn it again. Of course you can argue that you get hungry again, or that you might forget what you learned. Sure, but in a deeper sense, with each activity undertaken in the *conscious* fulfilment of a perceived desire, the need to fulfil that same type of desire is reduced, you are, hopefully, a little more free. A disclaimer here: this may not work in all cases and the surgeon general warns that the fulfilment of certain desires may be hazardous to your health. In other words, kids, don't try this at home. And the fulfilment of some desires may become addictive. Perhaps this applies to the practice of taiji forms. My late mother used to tell me: „Do

what you can't keep from doing and keep from doing that which you can't do.“ She was, like most Germans, also very pragmatic.

To make a short story long, I haven't got an all-time valid answer. After years of practice and malpractice, hundreds of books read, reread and misunderstood, a minor fortune spent on videos and seminars and many waking and sleeping hours spent thinking and contemplating, I only have a vague suspicion. And this suspicious thought is that maybe we should „do“ taiji in order to dispense with it, in order, ultimately, not to have to „do“ it at all. I suspect also that this requires great diligence, this transcending of doing, that this is the most difficult and frightening task of all. Wasn't it the late martial artist and actor Bruce Lee who said: „It's not daily increase but daily decrease – hack away the unessentials!“ So it turns out to be a bit of a Koan, doesn't it? „Why do you do taiji?“ „In order not to have to do it!“

July 2001

Ron Beier

Wiethagen, Germany

Ron Beier is a WTBA Certified instructor for Germany. He has attended most of Erle's workshops in the UK.