

Combat & Healing

September 2002 Issue

Issue Number 50

Self Defence
Training

Learning Forms

Taiji & Religion

Chang Yiu-chun on
Teaching

Internal Arts,
Secrets

Taiji Healing Power

The Law of 4

PLUS



WTBA News, New

Michael Babin: Canada

COMBAT & HEALING

The Magazine of the World Taiji Boxing Association

EDITOR

Bramsneed Blurnog

ART DIRECTOR

Ben, Eli & Kataleenas Montaigne

INSPIRATION

Sandra Montaigne

USA

Al Krych

Canada

Josephine Anderson
Michael babin

England

Peter Smith

Hong Kong

Ng Siu-wing

WTBA Secretary

Mause Eaglen

Combat & Healing is independently owned and published for the international martial arts community, distributed worldwide. Opinions and views expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of the owners or editor. In the interest of fair play in the martial arts community will be given a fair go. Articles go in to this magazine unedited apart from obvious spelling and grammatical and illegal items etc.

Combat & Healing is independently owned and published for the international martial arts community, distributed worldwide. Opinions and views expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of the owners or editor. In the interest of fair play in the martial arts community will be given a fair go. Articles go in to this magazine unedited apart from obvious spelling and grammatical and illegal items etc.

POSTAL ADDRESS:

POB 792
Murwillumbah, NSW 2484
Australia
Ph: +61 (0) 2 66724267
Fax: +61 (0) 2 66722246

FRONT COVER

Is this Michael Babin or Yang Lu-ch'an?
Perhaps only I notice the similarities?

CONTENTS

Page 1.....	Self Defence Training <i>By Michael Babin</i>
Page 4.....	Learning Forms <i>By Ron Beier, (Germany)</i>
Page 6.....	Is Taiji a Religion? <i>Kieren Nanasi (Adelaide, Australia).</i>
Page 11.....	How Chang Yiu-chun Taught Erle Montaigne
Page 12.....	Secrets of Internal Martial Arts <i>Morne Swanepoel (South Africa)</i>
Page 14.....	Where is the Art in the Martial Arts? <i>Bob Orbano, (USA)</i>
Page 15.....	The Healing Power of Taijiquan <i>John Scott Petty (UK)</i>
Page 18.....	The Law of 4 by <i>John Humphries</i>

Our New Address:

Moontagu Books

PO Box 792
Murwillumbah, NSW 2484
Australia
Ph: +61 (0) 2 6672 4267
Fax: +61 (0) 2 6672 2246

The E-mail and Web address stays the same.

Self-Defence Training

by Michael Babin

If you spend enough time studying the internal arts and have/make the opportunities to study with a variety of experts it will soon become obvious that most of those teaching are not teaching self-defence skills that would have much hope of working against an unstructured attack outside of the relative safety of their classes.

It is also true that there are many other good reasons to study Yang-style taiji or baguazhang or any other internal discipline besides being able to defend yourself. Most of us are fortunate enough (or mature enough) to never need to develop such skills. I'm reminded of the delightful story of the Hsing-i master in China who was supposedly lecturing his students on how important it was to study with a good heart and that the training was ultimately to teach the students how to avoid fighting. One student reportedly muttered, "if we're supposed to learn to avoid violence why practice fighting at all?" Master's answer was "If you don't want to learn properly, get out!"

However, it is also a shame to learn martial skills that you think might be useful but would actually be counter-productive

if you ever had to protect yourself or your loved ones from a serious attack.

What do you need to bring to your training?

Some physical strength and health is essential to safely train in any martial methods that might work in a worse case scenario, such training is not suitable for everyone, especially those with serious health problems or those unused to regular physical activity of any kind, much less that which involves physical contact.

It is also true that there are many other good reasons to study Yang-style taiji or baguazhang or any other internal discipline besides being able to defend yourself.

Patience is a useful attribute as internal style martial skills are not learned quickly, especially if you don't train in them everyday for three to five years. Most modern students don't want to learn so much as they want to feel that they already have all the answers — preferably yes-

terday — although the more patient will settle for tomorrow.

The willingness to "invest in loss" and learn from your mistakes rather than get mad at yourself or your training partner. This is easy to say and harder to put into practice when you are constantly being humiliated by a more experienced student. It becomes essential for students to see the martial learning process as one in which they help each other to identify each other weaknesses in the spirit of helping each other grow as practitioners. Of course, this is easier said than done when egos come into play!

What should you look for in your training?

An understanding of balance and body mechanics that relies less on muscle mass and strength and more on leverage, timing, sensitivity and efficient body mechanics (i.e., "whole body" usage). For self-defence, it is essential to learn and practise a few methods that suit your body type and physical attributes so that they become reflexive rather than practise many things in an indifferent manner.

Experience at hitting actual targets with some power as opposed to simply "punching the air" — it's easy to be smug with the speed of your strikes while

doing a fast form or practising solo and a far different thing to learn how to hit without hurting your limbs as well as how to absorb and/or transmit the impact without bouncing off what you hit.

Experience with close-quarters physical contact with your training partners. This is the hardest to cultivate in an internal manner (good teachers are few and far between); but even the crudest skill at taking a blow or being thrown will soon teach you many valuable lessons about what relaxation and balance really are all about in relation to self-defence. The lack of experience with any kind of body contact is the main reason that most modern students of these arts would have a rough time trying to apply their skills against a real street fighter or against someone who is really intent on hitting them as opposed to “playing”. For example, I have seen several interpretations of the Yang-style application set over the years and with the exception of the versions taught by Erle Montaigue and Yang Jwing-ming, it was not a satisfying sight from a martial perspective — like a bad dance without the music. One instructor even assured me with a hint of a sneer that it was wrong to make any kind of contact with your partner while doing the application set as you would not be training your chi properly! Sadly, his attitude is common enough in the taiji world. You have to have control in your martial contact; but you also have to have contact in order to

hope to eventually learn how to avoid it!

What to avoid in your training?

An over-emphasis on “sticking and yielding”. These essential skills are often taught counter-productively in terms of self-defence skills to make them easier to understand and practise safely in a large group. In the old days, the average taiji beginner was already a skilful martial artist who needed to refine and “sensitize” his approach and already knew the fundamentals of combat. The average modern Taiji student, in particular, has no relevant fighting skills to refine and must learn them first.

An over-emphasis on “sticking and yielding”. These essential skills are often taught counter-productively in terms of self-defence skills to make them easier to understand and practise safely in a large group

Complex methods that rely on the compliance of an overly stiff partner to have any success of application. I have met many supposed experts over the years who are teaching methods that have no hope of working in “the real world” even though they can seem to work in a class-

room setting. It is sad but true that real skill comes from seemingly endless drilling of the basics and then learning how to transcend/forget most of what you have so patiently learned. In other words, learning structure is essential to learning to react to a complete lack of structure (i.e. A real fight); but if you focus on structure for too long it becomes counter-productive to “being without structure” in martial terms. One of the many annoying paradoxes in the internal arts.

Any instructor who tells you that you can learn an effective martial art without any physical effort or risk of physical injury. In the long run, a competent internal art relies less-and-less on crude strength and technique and it is possible to continue to train with benefit when one is past his or her physical prime. However, an internal art that has some claim to being a true combative art will never be as effortless as it looks to the casual observer. In particular in Taiji, common-sense seems to go out the window if you judge by the number of schools whose teachers make their students fall-over, twitch and throw themselves by a flick of “master’s fingers”. While Qi exists and can be manipulated for good and for bad, such exponents are rare and those who make the most noise about controlling Qi for martial purposes are usually the least able to demonstrate such skills against anyone except their own students.

Final Words

I remember reading a translation of an old text on push-hands written in the 1950s in which the old master being quoted was apparently fond of muttering "True skill is found in understanding small things." I'm beginning to see what he may have meant. Speaking of old expressions that are useful in the long-run "Not to hit, is to cheat the student" and "You must eat bitter to be full" are two that hint that martial training may not be as easy as a lot of modern students of Taiji would like to believe. Of course, all these sayings are best viewed as starting points for long-term study by those who are serious in the training and have considerable experience. They are of much less value for beginners and even intermediate level practitioners.

As with all training, it is important to practice with a variety of partners: tall people can learn to use the reach of their long arms even more effectively; short people can learn to use a low centre of gravity to "get inside" a taller person's reach; heavy people can learn to use their mass even more effectively; slim people can learn to use their flexibility to even greater effect; etc.

Fortunately, few of us will ever have to use our martial skills for anything more demanding than friendly practice. In addition, NO martial training can guaran-

tee that you will be able to successfully defend yourself against any aggressor. However, such training should give you a "fighting chance" and, properly taught and practised, internal arts training is an insurance policy that also pays the dividends of physical and emotional good health.

To conclude, I'd like to quote the words of Miyamoto Musashi, the famous mediaeval Japanese swordsman who learned effective combat skills, the hard way, by surviving dozens of fights in which his opponents were often killed: "You cannot take a certain attitude and depend on it entirely. There are too many variations in attacks from the enemy. What you think is effective may in fact be ineffective because of the way in which the enemy is "feeling" at that particular moment. Your attitude must be such that you can shift into any other mode of combat without having to make a conscious decision. You must be flexible and have no particular liking for any particular set of techniques. ... If you do not develop this attitude, what are you doing there in the first place? Combat fighting is not done for fun. Even in practise sessions you must have the attitude of going in for the kill." (from *The Martial Artist's Book of Five Rings* as translated by Stephen F. Kaufman, Charles E. Tuttle Publishers, 1995)

New Videos From Erle Montaigne

MTG233

Advanced Wudang Spear Form. (Now Available)

For health, you cannot go past either the Wudang Broadsword form or the Wudang Spear form. And if we were allowed to walk around with such weapons, you could not get a more deadly weapon other than a gun. On this tape, Erle teaches not only the Spear form, but also the deadly applications making use of Dim-Mak strikes. Some excellent training methods for the spear are also included. This is indeed the top weapon for health and self defence and it is possibly the most beautiful form of any martial system. Erle also gives a complete demonstration of this form non-stop at the end of the tape/VCD.

MTG232:

The Formal Day to Day training of the Montaigne Children: V. 6

Carries on from Volume 5 below. Including YLC form up to "Tripping Repulse Monkey" \$30.00 (USA) or £20.00 (Europe)

MTG231

Advanced Broadsword Volume Two

In the second volume, Erle carries on to the end of the advanced broadsword form and also includes some excellent training methods to teach you how to use the sword and to exercise the correct muscles for its use. He also includes some applications not included in the form tapes.

MTG230

Advanced Broadsword Volume One

In this series, Erle Montaigne teaches the Broadsword form with its deadly applications at its most advanced level. Moves that weren't included traditionally in the basic beginner's form are now included in this series.

Learning Forms

Ron Beier (Germany)

Recently, as I was browsing through various lists of books and videos on the internal arts available in the internet, I was again somewhat overwhelmed by the wealth of knowledge just waiting to be tapped. So many things to learn, and every time I feel I've learned a form or made a concept my own, I turn to the list and realise how vast my ignorance is. And, like my wife's "Honey-Do List", the one which lists all of the things still to be done in and around the house, the vast sea of ignorance I call my own just seems to grow with every task accomplished. These two phenomena, the Honey-do list and learning taiji, are surely the great exasperating paradoxes of life: the more tasks I finish, the more tasks my wife finds and the more I learn, the more ignorant I become.

The question inevitably arises: why learn a new form then, especially as it only seems to increase my lack of knowledge? I have students now and again who, after having learned the Yang Cheng-Fu form, decide that they have learned enough new stuff. Some of the older students feel this way even after learning the first third and are pleased to have learnt that much, returning to the basic course again and again. My daily experience of the form often tells me the same thing: there's so much to grasp in this form that my life is likely not go-

ing to be long enough to finish with this one, let alone all the others calling to me like sirens: "learn me, I'll make your qi flow", "learn me, I'll make as strong as water", "learn me, I'll make you the envy of the martial arts neighbourhood" "learn me, I'll make you healthy", "learn me, I'll give you long life", "learn me, I'll turn you into a fa-jingling in no time flat". It's a good thing my wife ties me to the mast regularly, like once poor Jason on his search for the golden woolies.

When first learning the first form, we spend nearly all of our time learning and little really practicing; but does this actually change?

How much of our attention should we devote to learning new things and how much to practicing what we feel we already know? When first learning the first form, we spend nearly all of our time learning and little really practicing; but does this actually change? Isn't each day of practice also a day of learning, or at least, shouldn't it be? Why practice a form if you don't learn something from it? Surely the same spirit that allows us to learn also allows us to benefit from practice: the beginner's mind. If we don't approach our daily training with the mind of the beginner, if we assume that we can already do this or have already mastered

that, then there's no point in practicing, no point in doing the form. Whenever we approach the form (or any activity in life!) as routine, we forfeit our chance to learn, to receive, to grow.

This brings us to the most important ingredient for learning and, as far as I can tell at this point in my life, the most important ingredient of fully human life. There are many qualities which contribute to the pace at which we learn: talent, aptitude, diligence, intelligence, competent instruction, motivation to name just a few. But if one ingredient is missing, learning is hollow, it misses its point. This ingredient is humility. Without humility, the activity of learning is in vain. Without humility, we are closed, we lock out the ten thousand whispering voices trying so desperately to bring us home. Without humility we gain, at best, only knowledge and nothing closer to the core of life.

Before we go on, we'd better get the meaning of this word in this context straight. The etymology points to the Latin, where interestingly enough we have "humanitas" meaning kindness, culture, refinement, gentleness, "humanus" pertaining to man, humane, "humilis" meaning lowly or humble, and "humus" for ground, earth, soil. If we are to follow the lead of the ancient Latin roots of the word, we come to humility as an expression of inherent humanity, earth-bound, void of all haughtiness or coarseness. A very "yin"

state, to use the Chinese view of it. This makes sense though, for to learn, to be the recipient of knowledge, to be able to absorb, we must first be yin. Like the earth (yin) soaking up the warming rays (yang) of the sun. The earth doesn't assume anything of the sun, nor does it try to grasp or fetch or presume; it simply absorbs by being ready, open, willing, if you'll excuse the tendency toward anthropomorphism.

During my very first taiji lesson someone solemnly intoned a catchphrase which I have since heard many times: "Invest in loss". OK, I thought, I've already begun. I lost a couple hundred dollars on this course and I don't seem to be learning anything. I keep losing my patience with myself. I've lost the thread of what the teacher is saying. I think I'm losing my wits, but that's mostly the doing of my two boys who confound every attempt to lead a quiet, scholarly life.

Over the years this phrase has returned to haunt me. Invest in loss. Be prepared to lose? Lose the fight, the game, or just all sense of proportion? The idea of losing stuff is not very attractive really. We spend a lot of time and effort preventing loss, we insure our homes and property and our cars and even our lives (perverse idea really) against loss, and now some Chinese guy who's been dead for some time now wants us to turn the whole deal around and invest in loss? Who, me?

For a long time I gave lip service to this idea, even playing the parrot when I began teaching, telling my students to "invest in loss", thinking that it sounded suitably Taoist. Then, somewhere between fixing my son's skateboard and hopping around the lawn with a broadsword in my hand dodging mosquitoes, I had one of those rare lucid moments when things coalesce and drift within my grasp, and this idea suddenly began to take root inside of me. Maybe that Chinese guy just hadn't finished his sentence, because some smartass student had cut him off. What he had wanted to say before being so rudely interrupted was "Invest in loss *of ego*". This may be obvious to most people, but it was certainly not obvious to me from the beginning, probably because my own ego got in the way of realisation. In order to learn we have to sacrifice, and the biggest sacrifice which we will ever make, and the one which clears the way for everything else, is sacrifice of the ego. All of the forms we learn are tools which help us achieve this end. And the more we achieve this end, the more effective the tools.

Ego is, though, very tenacious and like a bad meal keeps surfacing to catch your attention and the attention of those near you.

Ego is, though, very tenacious and like a bad meal keeps surfacing to catch your attention

and the attention of those near you. You have to keep gently reminding your consciousness that there is something vastly more real, so that ego can be put in its place. Or hope that your environment does this for you. And when this is done, you are left in a state of humility, of open, innocent awareness. The beginner's mind. Pure consciousness, if you will. Ready to listen, to learn, to absorb and to experience without prejudice, without narrowing and debilitating attachment to either the task or its results.

I remember reading a short account of a student who came to a rabbi and asked: "In the olden days there were men who saw the face of God. Why don't they anymore?"

The rabbi replied, "Because no one can stoop so low."

After many years of struggle, even I, the dunce of the class, have begun to understand that this doesn't refer literally to the posture "Snake Creeps Down" and "Invest in loss" is not a comment on how lucrative teaching taiji can be.

Ron Beier has trained with Erle Montaigue and Mike Babin. He is the representative for the WTBA in Germany.

Is *Taiji* a Religion?

By Kieren Nanasi (Adelaide, Australia).

In this essay I will be discussing the issue of whether *taiji* is a religion. To accomplish this task I will argue that it is important for us to analyze the concept of a religion and then see to what degree *taiji* fits this analysis. The literature on the subject of defining religion makes it quite clear that achieving a single definition is no easy task. So after giving a basic characterization of what *taiji* is, I will proceed to discuss the difficulties of defining religion. Here I will conclude that finding a set of necessary and sufficient conditions under which to define religion will likely fail. As such, I will proceed onto alternative ways of characterizing religion, one is given by Ninian Smart whom lists seven dimensions or qualities that religions seem to exemplify.

After briefly describing them I will test *taiji* against the seven dimensions to see how many it meets. As we shall see it does not do so well and as such testifies to *taiji*'s non-religious character. There is however, another and perhaps more thorough method by which we can examine *taiji*'s alleged religiousness. This method involves treating religion as a family resemblance term. Here I will show that a system of beliefs does not need to have some particular property to be labeled as a religion but rather that religion is an umbrella term or category that we tend to group a set of beliefs under that seem to have certain traits. Again we shall see that *taiji* satisfies very few of these traits, testifying again to its apparent non religious nature. I will conclude that *taiji* in its ordinary sense is not a religion but that it requires an extra set of beliefs to be properly included in that category.

Taiji or *Tai Chi Chuan* means “supreme ultimate fist” and is a slow moving *qigong* or a type of exercise. *Qigong* simply means internal work and involves standing in certain postures using certain breathing techniques

What is *Taiji*?

Taiji or *Tai Chi Chuan* means “supreme ultimate fist” and is a slow moving *qigong* or a type of exercise. *Qigong* simply means internal work and involves standing in certain postures using certain breathing techniques. (Montaigne P.17) Using these techniques the practitioner is able to gather *qi* (breath - life force) and make it flow through energy channels called meridians by using the *Tai Chi Chuan* form. (ibid.) There are many different systems of *Taiji* and for the most part they all involve these slow dance like movements that sometimes resemble martial art postures.

The question we have to consider is whether this slow moving form or practice constitutes a religion. And if so, what is it that makes it a religion? To accomplish this we will examine some ways of characterizing or defining religion.

Problems with Defining Religion

Achieving a universally accepted definition for religion is notoriously difficult if not unlikely. The reason being is that such definitions are usually expected to supply a set of

necessary and sufficient conditions that are indicative of all religions. That is, such attempts suggest that there is an essential property that is common to all religions. Such attempts at defining religion tend to be too narrow, vague or culturally relative and more often than not reveal more about the bias of the author than the nature of religion. So, rather than advance a set of necessary and sufficient conditions from the outset, or advance a bias, there are advantages to demarcating “religions” by simply giving a few examples of what people most commonly recognize as religions. Such a demarcation might go as follows:

Religions include Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, and those traditions that resemble one or more of them. (Taliaferro, p. 21)

This type of definition is sometimes referred to as an extensional definition or a definition by example. The problem with this type of definition is that it does not give us the detail as to what a religion *is*. So when we have examples of belief systems such as *taiji* or *Falun Gong*, we are in no better position on whether to include them under this heading.

Perhaps then, religion needs to be defined in terms of the worship of God or gods? This, however, has the unfortunate consequence of excluding atheistic versions of Buddhism. Alternatively, we could try and get a little more general and define religion in terms of reverence or awe toward something that is believed to be sacred. But, again, this would prohibit those religions who hold their relation to the sacred as one of self interest rather than awe and reverence. In *Reason and Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of*

Religion Mr. Peterson (p.4) puts forth the following tentative definition:

Religion is constituted by a set of beliefs, actions, and emotions, both personal and corporate, organized around the concept of an Ultimate Reality.

Religion is constituted by a set of beliefs, actions, and emotions, both personal and corporate, organized around the concept of an Ultimate Reality.

Now this definition would seem to be adequate for the religions so far considered, that is, it does not seem to be too narrow and restrict belief systems that we might otherwise consider as religious. However, it does seem to be too broad, for if the given definition is put forth as a necessary condition for a belief system to be religious then it will include those belief systems that ought not to be considered religious. For example, it may be argued that the scientific community is constituted by a set of beliefs, actions and emotions. Namely, discovery, truth and inquiry, and organized around the concept of an ultimate reality (the universe). (Taliaferro, p.23) Furthermore, we might also argue that the given definition is also applicable to the mathematical community. Some of whom believe in the platonic realm of universals (ultimate reality) to which numbers and other mathematical objects exist and are waiting to be discovered by suitably gifted mathematicians. Neither the disciplines of science or mathematics would normally be considered religious. So, the problem then faced by one who wishes to give a precise definition of religion is that it may include elements one does not wish to be included or exclude elements that one does not wish excluded. It is for this reason

that I include the following alternative ways of characterizing religion, neither of which suggests that there is some common essence belonging to all religions. Moreover, these methods allow the reader to assess for him or herself if my own bias regarding *taiji* has affected my analysis of its alleged religious nature.

The Seven Dimensions of Religion

Ninian Smart (p.3) thinks that it is far more feasible for us to consider what a religion is, rather than what religion is in general. What he proposes is that we find some scheme of ideas which help one to think about and appreciate the nature of religions. This way of looking at, or treating a theory of religion is especially useful when we consider how many religions and sub-traditions of those religions there are in conjunction with their own specific cultural flavor. To complicate matters further, it may also happen that someone who is, say, a Christian of some type or denomination might also be drawn towards Buddhist thinking. So there is also the issue of religious pluralism that further complicates things. Despite these complexities, Smart thinks that it is possible to make sense of the rich and diverse nature of the worlds various religions and sub-traditions. (p. 4.) Smart's approach to the problem of religion is to examine the different aspects or dimensions of religion.

The Practical and Ritual Dimension

Every religion has some set of formal practices such as regular worship, prayers preaching and rituals to which it adheres. This practice is especially important for religions of a sacramental kind such as Eastern Orthodox Christianity and sacrificial practices are also popular among the Brahmin forms of the

Hindu tradition. (Smart, p. 4) Moreover, we must also consider the patterns of behavior, for whilst they might not be strictly ritualistic they cultivate an air of spiritual awareness. Practices such as Yoga in the Hindu traditions and seeking stillness of the self or *no-mind* in Eastern mystic traditions are amongst these patterns of behavior. Such practices can be combined with rituals of worship where meditation is sometimes used to get into contact with God or gods. (ibid.) In a way these are all forms of prayer and are important elements in any religion.

The Experiential and Emotional Dimension

The feelings and sense of awe that religions inspire is also another important element. One of the main reasons why music is so revered is because of the feelings it generates and its powers to engender emotions. Such examples are quite common like the dances of the Native American Indians and the hymns that are sung in most Churches. Different writers have signaled out different experiences as being central to the various religions. (Smart, p.5) For example, Rudolph Otto coined the word "numinous." In the case of the ancient Romans, they believed that there were *numina* or spirits all around them, they were present in the trees, mountains and rivers. From this word, Otto built up an adjective that describes a feeling aroused by "mysterious something that draws you to it but at the same time brings an awe-permeated fear."(ibid.) So it is the emotive element that is important and is often used to capture those feelings of oneness with God or the Absolute.

The Narrative or Mythic Dimension

Experience can also be channeled or transmitted not only by ritual but also by sacred narrative or myth. (Smart, p.5) It is a typical trait of most faiths to hand down stories, some mythical and others historical, that tell the epic tales of the hero's and saints. Some of these stories describe the creation of the world while others describe how death and suffering came into the world. Others again, are about historical events, some chronicle the life of the prophet Muhammad or the execution of Jesus or perhaps the enlightenment of the Buddha. (ibid.) These stories are also sometimes tightly integrated into the ritualistic dimension of a given religion. The Christian mass or communion service for example, which demonstrates the story of the last supper. Ritual and story are often bound closely together.

The Doctrinal and Philosophical Dimension

Underpinning the narrative tradition is the doctrinal dimension. (Smart p.6) In the Christian tradition, the story of Jesus and the communion service has led to the attempts to analyze the nature of the divine being which would preserve both the idea of the incarnation and the belief that Jesus and God are one. The result was the doctrine of the Trinity. (ibid.) Christianity also has a rich philosophical tradition arising from the need of many philosophers to try and explain the ideas behind the nature of God's existence and the intellectual problems associated with it. In the Buddhist traditions, doctrinal ideas were crucial right from the start. For the Buddha himself presented a philosophical vision of the world which would assist one in achieving salvation.

The Ethical and Legal Dimension

The narrative and the doctrinal also affect the ethical and legal dimension of religions. It shapes the world view of the particular religion and addresses the questions of ultimate liberation or salvation. (Smart, p.6) The particular laws that a religion embodies or incorporates into its traditions can be seen as the ethical dimension of that religion. In Buddhism for example, there are a set of universally binding precepts known as the five virtues. (ibid.) These with other regulations control the lives of monks and nuns in the monastic community. And in Judaism there are not only the ten commandments but a system of over six hundred rules imposed upon the community by the Divine Being. (ibid.) The ethical and legal traditions also tend to give many religions and societies their character or particular traits.

The Social and Institutional Dimension

Religious movements are normally embodied in a group of people, and more often than not this group is formally organized as a church or a *sangha*, amongst others. This aspect represents the social dimension of religion. (Smart, p.7) This dimension includes not only the collection of persons that worship under it but also the outstanding persons in the given religion. (ibid.) These may not only be the officials and heads of the religion, but also the various saints, guru's, mystics or prophets. It is these people that also lend a sense of depth and meaning to the various rituals and values of a tradition. In many ways, to understand a particular faith is to understand the people that comprise it.

The Material Dimension

The social and institutional values of a religion will tend to be manifested into a physical or material form. These will be the various buildings and works of art etc. that are identified with the given religion. (Smart p.8) The material expressions of a religion are often highly important for believers in that it brings them closer to the Divine, like images of Jesus on the cross, or the reverence paid by some monks to the statues of Buddha. But it not only the human made structures that are materially important but also the natural features that can be important for some believers, such as the river Ganges or the sacred mountains of China. And of course, sometimes these natural sites are also combined with temples or maybe have whole cities built upon them.

Taiji and the Seven Dimensions

So now our task is to see how many of the seven dimensions *Taiji* fits. And upon the result decide if, or to what extent *Taiji* is religious. However, the reader must not just accept my interpretation or bias regarding *taiji*, it is important that you decide for yourself the degree to which *taiji* fits these dimensions. Perhaps your practice of *taiji* is religious...

First of all we have the *Practical and Ritual Dimension*. Is there anything in the practice of *Taiji* that is ritualistic or any sort of behavior that seems to be indicative of worship. Well it is not clear that there is any type of worship involved, however practitioners do seek to get into a state of *no-mind*. By itself a meditative state does not fit this criterion unless it is combined with some sort of ritual. It could be interpreted that the slow form of *Taiji* is a type of ritual but we must be care-

ful to not read too much into it. The slow form may just be a form of exercise to the practitioner, just as the stretching in yoga could be to the yoga practitioner. The state of mind associated with this exercise is not by itself indicative of a religious trait. So I believe that *Taiji* rates poorly regarding to this first dimension.

Next we have the *Experiential and Emotional Dimension*. Does *Taiji* invoke feelings of awe-like fear in its practitioners? Does it engender emotions or a sense of oneness with God? This one is difficult to answer because such a large part of these feelings are subjective. Indeed, with the dances of the native American Indians such "spiritual" experiences are common, and perhaps the same can be said for most mainstream religions. But we must ask if this is true of the practice of *Taiji*. I have my doubts that the feelings that are described in this dimension are as strong in *Taiji*. But then again sometimes I think that it does, I guess it very much depends on the individual. So I would suggest tentatively that *Tai Chi* satisfies this criterion.

The *Narrative or Mythic Dimension* includes stories of heroes or saints handed down throughout the generations and are often used to inspire believers. These stories are also often integrated into the ritualistic dimension. And *Taiji* does have these when some histories refer to a mythical/historical character named *Chang san-feng* who created *Taiji* after observing a battle between a stork and a snake. (Montague, Pg.12) However, stories such as these are not always indicative of some religious qualities, many martial arts boast such stories and even science has some stories to tell. So while *Taiji* does in some sense satisfy this criterion the stories are not tied into a ritualistic ceremony, as such *Taiji* rates poorly in this regard.

The *Doctrinal and Philosophical Dimension* presents the world view

or philosophical outlook of the particular religion. It is not clear that *Taiji* presents such a world view, traditionally it is tied in with *Taoism* but this seems debatable. But one way that *Taiji* does present a world view is its acceptance of the principles inherent in traditional Chinese Medicine. In this regard *Tai Chi* rates reasonably well in this dimension.

In the *Ethical and Legal Dimension*, *Taiji* does not do so well, to become a practitioner of *Taiji* one is not required to behave in any prescribed manner. There are no commandments nor rules that one has to obey outside the normal behavior that is expected in polite society. In this dimension *Taiji* fares poorly.

In the *Social and Institutional Dimension*, we must be careful, for a community of scientists or an institution dedicated to science may also fit this criterion. *Taiji* would fit this criterion if having a group of people with a common interest was merely enough. What is also needed is some ritualistic feature, and this is lacking. So while *Taiji* may fit this dimension, it only does so trivially.

Finally, we have the *Material Dimension*. This includes sacred objects, buildings or works of art. Now certainly there may be sites or artifacts that some *Taiji* practitioners consider sacred such as graves of famous masters or ancient texts. But as a practice there does not seem to be any worship or reverence held toward any such site or artifact, and if so this is an individual predisposition. *Taiji* does not seem to rate highly in this regard.

Taiji, on the whole has rated fairly poorly in regards to most of seven dimensions, as such it does not seem to be strongly indicative of a religion. It does however have a mythic (stories of masters), experiential (no-mind type feelings) and philosophical (*Taoist* concepts) dimension but are these enough to

consider its practitioners religious? I think not, practitioners may disregard the stories, and the philosophical concepts but maybe not the meditative state and still call themselves *Taiji* practitioners. However, if a group or a society feels strongly enough about this particular form of exercise they may certainly bring more to it. For it is entirely possible that one may even make beer drinking a religion. On the whole I think *Taiji* in its purer (martial art) forms seems to be non-religious. I will now test it under the family resemblance analysis to see if our results differ.

Religion as a Family Resemblance Term

Ludwig Wittgenstein, the influential 20th century philosopher argued that there are many perfectly meaningful English words that have no common essence of connotation. (Edwards, Pg.21) These words do not name some common characteristic or set of characteristics that are indicative of a given object that we would normally apply to such words. Wittgenstein argued that the assumption that there had to be a common essence where there is a common name is exceedingly naive.(ibid.) He believed that we would not always find a common essence for many words such as *game*, *language* and *knowledge*. Even though it is probably not the case that this trait is true of all words, it would be useful to examine whether it is true of religion.

So what exactly do we mean when we search for family resemblances? As we have already touched upon, not all words that have a common connotation or a common essence but they are frequently related to each other by a complex web of similarities. Wittgenstein compared this web to

the similarities that we might find in a human family. (ibid.) Suppose, for example, that there are five brothers and sisters who are easily recognizable as members of the same family but among them there is not a single trait that each shares with the other members of the family.

So this families resemblance is not indicated by a common essence but rather by a complex web of similarities, none of which is possessed by all. The weakness of such a system lies in the notion that we may keep adding traits until we find one that they all possess, namely having the same parents. However this trait is not *necessary* to all and as such does not represent an *essential property*. Suppose, for example, that Enid resembles all her brothers and sisters in every respect but is in fact an adopted child. Even then we may still look for traits to add to our list and may find one eventually, this will in turn reveal an essential property by which to define our word. This need not conflict with the family resemblance approach but rather complement the meaning of a given word. And this may indeed turn out to be the case with religion.

Our task now is to adapt the above table so it includes some or the world religions and pseudo-religions, which will hopefully be representative of a healthy cross section.

FAMILY MEMBERS

Family Traits	Alex	Bill	Cathy	Dave	Enid
greater than 6 feet tall	P	P	P	P	A
Blue eyes	P	P	P	A	P
Blond hair	P	P	A	P	P
Pug Nose	P	A	P	P	P
Irritability	A	P	P	P	P

Plus we will include some of the traits the given religions exemplify. The list is not seen to be exclusive or exhaustive of the worlds religions or its traits, but rather will present those most commonly instantiated by the various belief systems that are said to be religious.

P = Trait Present

A Trait Absent

? = Trait Unclear

FAMILY MEMBERS

<u>FAMILY TRAIT</u>	Christianity Judaism Islam	Vedanta, Hinduism Pantheism	Early Buddhism Hinayana Buddhism	Early Greek Olympian Polytheism	communism	Moral Naturalistic Humanism	Tai Chi chuan
Belief supernatural being(s)	P	A?	A	P	A	A	A?
Belief superior being(s)	P	P	A	P	A	A	A?
acknowledges significance of Humans	P	P	P	P	P	P	A
Belief in experience after death	P	P	P	P	A	A	A
Moral Code	P	P	P	A	P	P	A

Chang Yiu-chun & How He Taught

By Erle Montaigue

Most of what I now teach can in some way be attributed to Chang Yiu-chun, my main teacher.

Although the physical parts of what I have learnt are obviously very important, it is the 'way' I which Chang taught me that is the most important.

Chang believed that everything that anyone needed to know was already in that person's mind somewhere and only had to be 'unlocked'. And it is the job of a teacher to simply unlock that knowledge.

When I first began 'learning' with Chang, I was like most other westerners in that I wanted a set and 'seeable' set of things that I must learn in chronological order. I did not know why Chang would teach me one thing one day and then go onto a completely different thing the next. And in many ways, this is how I now teach and is the reason why many of my long distant students always want a curriculum so that they can learn in some 'human' set manner.

Change knew that we learnt internally or sub-consciously and that the brain was in ordered chaos at all times. So a set way of learning and teaching would not teach the student much in the way of internal stuff. In the same way, if we try to use a logical fighting art in real self de-

fence, we lose because self defence is not logical. So Chang believed that the way we learn will also represent the way in which we will ultimately defend ourselves. SO if we learn in a logical chronological manner, then we will lose in a real self defence situation. However, if we learn in an illogical manner, we have a much better chance of saving ourselves in a real fighting situation. The reverse applies to tournament fighting. If one wishes to win in tournaments and get trophies, then you must learn for instance, some karate style which is logical in its teaching with logical movements. If however, we try to use a tournament system in the street, we lose! And it is impossible to mix the two saying that you use the tournament stuff for the ring and the real stuff for self defence! Self defence is sub-conscious and if you learn and study so hard to win in the ring, then the sub-conscious brain will use that type of 'fighting' when attacked for real.

This is the reason that I do not teach a 'martial art', preferring to teach a self defence system. I am not interested in teaching tournament fighting so that men can show how good they are at 'fighting' to satisfy their own egos.

Chang would often simply push me all of a sudden so note how I reacted and how ti moved my body. In the beginning, he would do this pushing for in-stance on my shoulder. He

would not to it again for several days or even weeks and I often wondered why. The reason was that he was waiting until I moved correctly and used my body in the correct manner before doing it again. His reasoning was that it takes some time for the sub-conscious brain to take something new in. And to keep doing wrong movements to his pushes would cause the wrong information to go sub-conscious. It is the training itself that teaches us how to move and to react to any types of attacks. So if you have not done the training of form, and in particular push hands and power push hands, all of the 'fighting training' in the world will not help when you get into a realistic situation!

Much of my training with Chang was spent watching him do things. He thought that this was the most important part of my training and nowadays is the reason that I put out my video tapes, so that students are able to see me doing it all. Of course you have to be taught the physical movements in the beginning. However, once learnt and more importantly, corrected, it is important to see your teacher doing it so that your sub-conscious mind can take it all in and adjust your own body automatically. During these 'watching' times, it is important to NOT try to physically look for things that you may be doing incorrectly, but rather just watch!

The Secret of the Internal Arts

By Morne Swanepoel (South Africa)

Hidden within the Internal Arts are some of the most violent self-defence methods ever invented.

Street self-defence has to be understood in order to survive street attacks. If you try to 'yield' to an attack in the manner that most teachers tell us to, then you invite defeat and possible injury and death in street attacks. Teachers who tell their students all they have to do is to yield to an attack just to show the attacker that they know what they are doing, have never themselves been in a serious, life-threatening situation.

The answer to these hidden secrets in the Internal Martial Arts, is in the movements themselves and how the practitioner executes those movements. How the body moves is singularly the most important area of one's training. So-called karate Masters who should not be any more than Green belt because of the way they move. Though they may know all the movements of the Kata, they cannot DO them! You can easily see that they do not have any real power, power that comes from fa-jing, because their body is so stiff!!

Fa-Jing is the motor of how to use the internal Martial Arts effectively. Not many know what fa-jing is or how to use it, even Taijiquan masters and people who call themselves Grandmasters, perform Fa-Jing, or what they call Fa-Jing and they would not harm a fly let alone a raging maniac in the street. Fa-Jing has to be explosively physical and explosively internal for any kind of result.

Street self-defence has to be understood in order to survive street attacks. If you try to 'yield' to an attack in the manner that most teachers tell us to, then you invite defeat and possible injury and death

Fa-Jing has 2 levels: * the physical/external

* the 'internal way'.

A simple test for Fa-jing: Have someone hold a hard punching mitt on one hand. You touch the mitt with the tips of your fingers. Without drawing your hand back any more than the distance from your fingers to your palm, punch the mitt to cause it to repulse back violently. This is external Fa-Jing. Internal Fa-Jing is when the holder of the mitt receives a sore palm from that punch!

All Chinese Martial Arts have 3 categories of Techniques:

- 1 – Striking, punching, pushing, pressing, kicking etc. The contact time between you and your opponent is very short, explosive and harmful.
- 2 – 'Shuai Jiao' or Wrestling – contains skills of destroying opponent's roots and balance i.e. leg sweeps or trips, body swings or throws etc.
- 3 – Chin Na – grabbing techniques specializing in controlling or locking the opponent's joints, muscles or tendons.

In a combat situation the above 3 categories are often applied together and cannot really be separated e.g.: while one hand is grabbing and controlling your opponent, the other is used to strike a vital cavity.

Re Chin Na:

As long as techniques are able to immobilize an opponent, whether it is a joint-lock, numbness or unconsciousness – these are all classified as Chin Na. In short: Grabbing Chin Na techniques control and lock the opponent's joints or muscle/tendon so he cannot move, neutralizing his fighting ability. Pressing Chin Na techniques are used to numb the opponent's

limbs, causing him to lose consciousness or even to kill him. Chin Na striking techniques are applied to vital points and can be very deadly. Remember when you practice with your partner, do not apply a great deal of power, you are both there to learn and tomorrow you both want to train together again.

‘A truly wise man will not doubt himself and will not be confused by others’. Build up your confidence and remain humble. Someday you will realize that you have left those others far, far behind you.

Morne Swanepoel
President World Taiji Boxing
Association South Africa.
President Jeet Kune Do Unlim-
ited South Africa.
Email:morne@jkdu.co.za
Website : www.jkdu.co.za

Where is the Art in the Martial Arts?

By Bob Orbano (USA)

Before answering the question, “where is the art in the martial arts?”, we must first answer the question, “what is art?”. The following is a simple definition of art: Art is the creative application of practiced techniques. Using the art of painting as an example, to learn how to paint, the would-be painter first practices a variety of brush strokes (technique). As the strokes become natural and free-flowing, the painter can use the brush strokes to express his or her creativity onto canvas.

Leonardo DaVinci was one of the world’s greatest painters. One of his best known masterpieces is the *Mona Lisa*. But, what if DaVinci had also painted an exact copy of his *Mona Lisa*, would it also be art? Gone would be the creativity of the original, and so too the art. The copy would be a simple repetition, regardless of how complex the techniques necessary to produce it. The copy would be all technique without art.

As with painting and all other art, the techniques of the martial arts are first studied and practiced, and then put to creative use, not just copied or “performed.” By themselves, the techniques contained in the forms and katas are useless in a fight unless used creatively. For each fight is unique. You never face the same opponent twice, just as a painter never stands before the same blank canvas twice.

THE HEALING POWER OF TAI CHI CHUAN

*By John Scott Petty
Chief Instructor and Founder
-Vital Arts School UK*

In 1993 I contracted a particularly potent strain of salmonella poisoning from a apparently wholesome and fresh super market sandwich { I cant mention the name for legal reasons - oh yes I can- Tesco's. Having thrown away the packaging the authorities were unable to prove the salmonella came from their sandwich so were only able to advise Tesco's of a possible 'problem' with their products. No million dollar law suit for me then.} while on a break from my particularly dull day job as van driver and old jobs man for a local Estate Agents in Blackheath London .I was also fortunately training as a Tai Chi Instructor with my teacher at the time Master Rupert Shonaike, previously a long term student of Chu King Hung { my first teacher in the 1980's} and Professor Chee Soo { from whom he received his Master qualification} My Tai Chi was going to prove its worth far exceeded the years of study and expense. It was going to save my life.

Within 12 hours I was bent over double in my 1 bedroom flat writhing around like a bad break dancer, from the excruciatingly painful spasms gripping

my bowels. I wondered in my increasingly unclued state what strange giant clawed insect I was attempting to give birth to.

Eventually realising after attempting some Tai Chi, Chi Kung and Yogic breathing that this wasn't going to pass { and as everything not nailed down in my body had begun to } I stumbled out of the flat, staggered ineptly down 2 flights of stairs into a beautiful night and a battered old blue transit van.

Eventually realising after attempting some Tai Chi, Chi Kung and Yogic breathing that this wasn't going to pass { and as everything not nailed down in my body had begun to } I stumbled out of the flat, staggered ineptly down 2 flights of stairs into a beautiful night and a battered old blue transit van. I somehow succeeded, I don't know how, in driving the precarious 10 minutes to my Dad's house { he's fortunately a Doctor } while crumpled up like a human bean bag just managing to peer over or through the steering wheel at the spinning lights of the on coming traffic. From the van I literally crawled up the garden path to the front door, but heaved myself upright to let myself in { I desperately wanted to retain some dignity,

and not to freak out my parents too much with their son doing an impression of a drive by victim.} A bad move.

Well the door obligingly unlocked and smoothly opened but I launched cinematically forward, falling ungracefully flat on my face to enjoy the charms of a new bout of stomach agony and the cool dry wooden floor slammed against my nose. This was not my idea of dignity. My old man appeared nonchalantly over me and calmly inquired "You alright son?" After a brief explanation he hauled me up, sat me down and we waited to see how bad it got. Within an hour, spent worshipping the porcelain altar too many times to mention and now unable to even move off the floor we called in the cavalry. A visit from the concerned family GP for a second opinion had me tucked up like a little old man on a stretcher being wheeled out to a waiting ambulance as I waved my fingers feebly at my folks like a dying Queen. They couldn't understand why I was smiling. "See you soon?" I squeaked. I was E.T's human half brother and out of it.

By now I was so dehydrated I was hallucinating from this and the pain so I thought being strapped to a giant red roller blade was the most excellent and comfortable way to travel. The paramedics were attentive fluorescent smiling angels. The ambulance a strange ball of welcoming lights. Inside it as

we sped off and it wailed like a screaming banshee as we careered through Blackheath's narrow streets I stared on in horror. This was a moment of pure terror, and that's when I promptly passed out.

During the next three days in an isolation room at Greenwich district Hospital, I lay in bed feeding from drip in my arm. At one point they tried to get my consent to open me up and have a quick rummage around and possibly whip out an appendix or two. As they were having trouble finding a decent vein to get a blood sample { when they did they spilt it all over the consent form- not a good omen I thought } and from and the fact the surgeon looked like Jack the Ripper in a white gown I refused, and my Dads subsequent refusal added the necessary weight { I just knew it wasn't my appendix but Im no Doc } I had a battery of Tests since I'd arrived including an X ray the first night where upon being asked to get on the table I not so kindly informed the impatient radiologist that I couldn't because I couldn't ³f...king move² {This incapacity would last for two days- by the third I regained some movement } My stool test wouldn't come back until a week after I left hospital to confirm salmonella poisoning. Due to this I couldn't receive any medication during my stay including pain killers, as they didn't know what they were dealing with. They ran out of spare blankets the first night as I kept on demanding more layers as I was so cold. I looked like a giant multi layer sand-

wich. which is ironic if you think about it. I wouldn't have been able to move if I Od wanted to. That night member of staff stayed by my bed and talked me through the worst of the pain with stories of his holiday, what I enjoyed doing, and what I could do when I got better.

But as I performed the opening moves of the Yang Cheng Fu set working the lungs, then the colon with Grasp Sparrows Tail my energy shifted, lifted and slightly rebalanced to the grumbling sound of my indignant bowels.

I didn't realise it at the time but he was getting me to stay with it , remain positive and fight back. I accused him of hitting upon me and being gay, something I now deeply regret. He was doing his job and doing it well. I was a crazed human bread snack unable to defend myself and scared of being molested.

On the second night I managed to move my arms so managed some Chi Kung and Six Organ Sounds in bed, doing it until I feel asleep. This brought a little stability to my condition and also abated the strange waking dreams or visions I been experiencing virtually back to back ever since Id arrived. Even to this day I remember three of them, as then as now they

seemed personally quite profound.

On the third day I got out of bed unassisted and did the feeblest Tai Chi ever; it was all I could manage. I lasted about for 5 minutes. I was an old man with a decrepid mans energy. Hunched and withered { I lost 20 pounds in three days. Im a tall lean bloke so I don't have a lot to spare } But as I performed the opening moves of the Yang Cheng Fu set working the lungs, then the colon with Grasp Sparrows Tail my energy shifted, lifted and slightly rebalanced to the grumbling sound of my indignant bowels.

They started doing some new improved bad gymnastics which sent me hobbling back to the rooms toilet clutching my guts, but when I returned to bed I slept soundly and without pain for the first time. That evening I ate for the first time some broth kindly made by my step mother and brought in. No hospital food for me thanks. After a pretty uneventful night the fourth day I was assessed in the morning by a surprised Staff Nurse and Doctor at my sudden turn around and lifted spirits, and allowed home under the supervision of my Dad.

Its not until the heath visitor called round a week later with the results did I realise how bad it had been. The salmonella they had found in my sample had been so virulent, and of an unknown strain that they were seriously considering naming it

after me. Fortunately this never came to pass and people don't go around saying today I 've had a bout of the Petty's. I don't want that to be my legacy.

Hopefully the little buggers ended their gruesome existence with me. Cheers! For me the Tai Chi got the process quickly moving at the initial onset, enabled me to stay with it and control myself long enough to drive to get help and then to start to build up my strength and rebalance my organ system once I could move. All my training before hand had made me strong enough to possibly see it through. Since that time if i ever get ill { which is rare } it always involves my stomach as I was warned at the time. If I ever get diarrhoea now I can control it and even stop it dead, even while setting on the loo by just performing the beginning of the Tai Chi form.

I started Martial Arts in My youth to learn how to fight. So far my worst adversary was a bastard microbe and his mates. That's the battle to be won. The adversary. Life and everything it can chuck at you, not Jet Lee or Bruce Lee, for that matter, fantasies flying through the air on a mission to entertain. To me now in my late thirties that's far more important. Oh and thinking twice before I eat a sandwich.

*

John teaches classes and seminars in SE London and Kent, and produces a full colour bi-annual publication

The *Vital Arts Journal* on aspects of the Internal Arts. This is available from:

His *Vital Arts System* CD-Roms, Animations, Videos and Guides for home learning are also available from this address:
vitalarts@hotmail.com

A Dedication to Edgar Wallace

By Peter Jones, WTBA Wales

Died 10th June aged 64 from asbestosis.

One of the Welsh lads. A friend and student of Peter Jones. He was dedicated to his training and a fine person to boot!

MARTIAL ARTIST STATEMENT OF UNITY

Gregory T. Lawton, D.N., D.C.

TO ALL OTHER MARTIAL ARTISTS I SAY THIS:

You are my brother and sister in the martial arts. Although, we may come from different paths to this sacred art of combat, the martial arts, I welcome

you to both this art and profession. I recognize the power within you. I celebrate the unity within our diversity. I see richness and reward in our sharing of knowledge and experience.

As you are my brother and sister in the martial arts I will uplift you. If you are alone I will be your friend. If you need assistance, without hesitation I will support you, if you are broken I will mend you, to those that speak against you I will arise to defend you.

If you need my good counsel or teaching it is yours, if you are unable to pay for my succor, you will not need to for I will stand by your side regardless. I will reach out to uplift you regardless. I will open my arms to you regardless.

May we never forget that we are more alike than different. May we always recognize our most vital bond through these martial arts. May we always realize that if there is a time for peace it is now, and it is always. For if the warriors are not reconciled among themselves, from where will peace come?

September, 2001

THE LAW OF 4

By John Humphries, WTBA
South Australia

When you do excellent work it is money in the bank. The experience and feeling of having done well, better than your best, stays with you. It is a memory and enhances your self-image and quality of life. Handling difficult people and difficult situations with aplomb is especially nice. Add to that the Jewish, Christian, and Moslem belief that what you do is recorded by an Angel for future judgement, and the Hindu and Buddhist belief that acting honourably creates "good karma" and dishonourably causes "bad karma", thus affecting later life. Hooray hooray. Isn't that simple? Do good stuff and you get bonuses.

But in every person's life there are times, and in some lives this is most of the time, when you are very much under par.

- You are sick.
- You are tired.
- You are totally stressed out by too much work, not enough sleep, an unending series of trials and injuries and sickness.
- And you just can't cope.

You are not a bad person, but suddenly you explode.

A final straw seems to break the camel's back and you go ape shit. Who has not experienced this?

Remember Jesus in the temple kicking over the desks of the moneychangers? While it was a valid point, I am sure he was a trifle hostile at that moment.

And that brings us to the Law of Four.

There is no way you can avoid these down times, the black days.

But the results and merit you achieve in those unequal struggles are worth 4 times what you can gain on your better and best days.

We choose our heroes by their deeds in unequal struggles, and in the face of death. The dying heroine, brave to the end, always thinking of others, provokes tears, and not just from the ladies.

These deeds change the lives of those who see or even hear of them.

So know, when you go into action depleted, sick, tired, surrounded, that what you do that day is the stuff of epic legends.

By steadying your feelings, coordinating your current energy and strength, and going forward with mindful alertness, you are

going to do the very best you can do at the moment.

And it can be your finest hour.

At these times concentrate on the important, pivotal stuff, not peripherals.

And realize that you will probably have a short fuse, so guard against exploding with anger this day.

You can bolster courage and inner peace by breathing slow, deep, calm and serene, whenever you have a moment to yourself (everyone goes to the toilet).

Probably the greatest challenge to most people's inner calm is the road rage we feel when inconsiderate drivers cut us off, or we face unexpected delays when we need to hurry.

The best way to handle this one is to smoothly adjust to the current event, acknowledge it is a tough test, accept and honour your feelings, then choose to focus on how best to proceed. It might be a good time for some slow breathing.

Do welcome your down times. They are a chance to prove your worth, your quality, and just how tough you are.

Not fun at the time, nevertheless they can become treasured landmarks in your life.

Remember that Law. Questions on a dud day carry 4 times the marks.

I can remember when learning the Yang Cheng Fu from Erle's video, getting into the second third, with hitting all those tigers, and kicking every which way, my total inability to make meaningful progress.

Things that I could do one week would be lost the next. Just total stalemate.

But just coming back to it day after day, doing what I could and fiddling with what was confusing me, finally bore fruit. It became possible, then natural. That lesson in persistence, having been learnt, could be applied to every form in turn. And always resulted in final achievement.

So when you hit that wall and don't know whether you are Arthur or Martha, take comfort that just working with the skill and knowledge and energy that you have today is all you need to do.

That reapplying that strategy daily, or every few days, will achieve final success.

And that really, skilful application on your worst days will be an endless treasure trove for your future.