

Tai Chi Chuan...the Tao of Tranquility.

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The fluid, sinuous movements of Tai Chi Chuan are almost hypnotic...like the swaying of the king cobra in the sunlight...the hands and arms moving evenly, as though drawing silk thread from a cocoon, forming graceful curving lines in space. The legs shift body weight back and forth evenly, in the alternating rhythm of surf pounding on the beach. But hidden within the flowing movement is a series of individual forms that make up a sophisticated art of self defense, strike, parry, punch, and kick...but Tai Chi Chuan leads one beyond defense, along the path of

Self-Knowledge, into the peaceful tranquility of Pure Consciousness.

Sitting in the shade of old pine trees, in one of the Franklin Murphy Sculpture Gardens' benched rest areas with Tai Chi Master Lawrence Karol and 4th Generation Grand Master Tung Chen-Wei, we all hear the sound of water, of the Gardens' Fountain/Pond. The silent sounds of rushing water seems to cleanse and clear away the unsettledness of our modern lifestyles, if only momentarily...a soothing of our spirits.

When asked to explain more about Tai Chi Chuan, Master Karol's response is, "Tai Chi Chuan has come across both time and space from the ancient land of China. Tai Chi means Supreme Ultimate, and Chuan when translated from the Chinese ideographs, means Fist, symbolic of struggle. And in the case of human life, it is the struggle for the attainment of an inner and outer balance. Tai Chi Chuan's objectives are to teach one to know oneself through a complete system of psycho-physical development. Tai Chi Chuan, the dance of life, exercise of longevity, martial art and sport is composed of 108 movements (dance/exercise), practiced in slow motion, the movements take approximately 45 minutes of sustained effort. Performed as a moving meditation, the exercise/dance develops increased concentration of mind and control of body movement, while relaxing tenseness and useless stress. Practiced with deep diaphragmic breathing, the movements develop an internal and external flow of auric energy, called "Chi" and promotes excellent circulation of blood and lymph, thus purifying organ tissues, while toning the entire nervous system. After the movements are mastered in slow motion, the approx. same movements can be speeded up to become lightning fast martial arts techniques. In advanced stages of practice, Tai Chi is practiced by two persons together as a martial art sport. As a martial art, it is one of the inner, or soft schools based on yielding and cultivating inner power.

Remember, Tai Chi as a Taoist discipline teaches to know oneself by being Conscious of Consciousness, moment by moment, and breath by breath, to be practicing Taoism. Additionally, all the movements as performed in the slow motion exercise/dance are each charged with symbolic meanings, relating to the great struggle of life itself. Tai Chi Chuan therefore means the Supreme Ultimate Struggle (Fist).”

When asked what makes Tai Chi Chuan unique among the martial arts? Master Karol continues saying, “Well, an interesting point to note is that most all martial arts identify with the Chinese symbol referred to as the yin/yang symbol, but don’t realize that the circle containing the yin/yang is the supreme ultimate, or the Tai Chi Principle. Therefore it is classically know as the Tai Chi symbol. Having been trained in the direct lineage from the authentic founders of Tai Chi Chuan, a student of 3rd Generation Grand Master Tung Kai-Ying,



whose name means “carrying on in the eminence and fame of one’s grandfather”, I happened upon my own teacher’s son, over 30 – years later, the 4th Generation Grand Master Tung Chen-Wei, whose name means “sturdy, or solid”, and he accepted my invitation to co-instruct a program at U.C.L.A. as the Tai Chi Chuan Club, a registered independent student organization with Center for Student Programming.”

Grand Master Tung Chen-Wei takes over the conversation saying, “Unique among all the martial arts is Tai Chi’s use of stillness to contain movement. You wait for the other person to move and use the other person’s force. So you are using stillness to contain movement. Maybe the word, waiting, is misleading. You don’t wait for attack and then react. The idea is to anticipate the opponent. When they move you sense it and move faster, as though you hear their movement and move first.” Tung continues, saying “This is a simple description to sum up the goal of Tai Chi Chuan self-defense. But it also calls for an extraordinary combination of sensitivity and speed, and the ability to act decisively. This is the goal of all martial arts systems and this state of awareness is not found only though Tai Chi Chuan. In the feudal society of old Japan the bushi who trained for the life of the warrior made zazen meditation an integral part of his practice. The reason? He sought a state called mushin no shin, no mind attitude, which permitted one to act spontaneously when confronting attack. And advanced stages of kung-fu and karate systems also deal with perception and stillness. What makes Tai Chi Chuan unique is that it is a very direct and simple way towards stillness and its use in containing movement. Tai Chi Chuan is called a moving meditation because it begins by stressing tranquility in the midst of movement. The Tai Chi Classics say: “If he does not move, I do not move. At his slightest stir, I have anticipated it and move first.” Grand Master continues...”How does Tai Chi make this

possible? When you are relaxed you can move faster, and you can tell what your opponent is going to do more easily. It's also important to be relaxed because you feel better! Many movements in Tai Chi Chuan help the student loosen up. The pushing movements help limber up the wrist. When you do Tai Chi you should be relaxed but not limp. It is relaxed with energy. This is softness on the outside but energy or hardness within. Like an iron bar wrapped in cotton. Grand Master Tung Chen-Wei continues...To cultivate relaxed energy when facing an opponent, Tai Chi Chuan uses the exercise called tuo shou, pushing hands. In pushing hands practice, students pair up in lines or rows and circle their hands in a pattern, each sensing the partner's balance, energy, and movement. At first glance, pushing hands practice doesn't look like practical training for self-defense. Some people don't know the value of pushing hands, and they think that if you're sparring with someone from another school in self-defense, that the opponent does not use the push hands form. But that is not the point. If the opponent does not make contact with you, there is no real danger. If there is contact, then it is the same as pushing hands." But many students try to rush their progress in this part of Tai Chi Chuan training. The way to practice correctly is not to try and push too soon, although most people do. It's better to spend six months just circling the hands until there is real smoothness in your movements. Pushing too early also makes the student too tight, rather than relaxing him and loosening him up. The same is true with sparring too early. When you spar you get away from the forms and just fight. When you do that, you don't use the forms and learn the principles behind the movements. It's better to wait longer and understand Tai Chi and the forms in more depth. Students need more patience along the lines of what Tai Chi Chuan often calls investing in loss. In pushing hands, most people want to win, but you shouldn't worry about that in practice. If they push you, you learn more. If you don't look at it that way, it will be hard for you to be good in Tai Chi later. Additionally pushing hands practice requires a foundation in posture, because you can't do pushing hands if you're off balance when you move. Balance is what Tai Chi Chuan is all about and its approach, makes it a uniquely Taoist art, integrating the alternating of yang and yin, as substantial and insubstantial. This shifting of weight smoothly is learned gradually, through the slow and careful repetition of 108 movements slow Yang system form. The various postures strengthen the legs, build balance and circulate the chi through the body. According to Tai Chi Chuan tradition, the energy is "rooted in the feet, develops in the legs, is directed by the waist and moves up in the fingers."

Master Karol adds, "These individual forms of the slow set serve as a foundation for pushing hands practice another way. The original movements of Tai Chi were 13 in number, corresponding to the eight directions and eight trigrams of the I Ching, plus the Five Elements. These basic postures are woven into the continuous patterns of pushing hands. And just as in the slow set, in movement, double-weighting is always avoided. Grand Master Tung joins in and continues, "You're able to move faster with your weight on one leg rather than two. All movements in Tai Chi Chuan are partially solid and partially empty. This alternation of solid and empty, soft and hard, is part of the Taoist tradition in which the art came into being. The story is well known of the sage Chang San Feng observing the battle of a snake and a bird, the snake's elusive movement illustrating the Taoist principle of yielding to force. In the Tai Chi Classics, "deflect a thousand pounds with four ounces", the idea of four ounces of strength refers only to deflecting the attack, to warding off the opponent. Otherwise, you use as much force as possible." Grand Master Tung continues, "Tai Chi Chuan cultivates more than one kind of force. There is a long power, where the movements extends outward for a long way. There is short

power, like an explosive burst. There is attaching power, lifting power...all based on chi. As the student develops in their training, they find freedom in the forms. In the beginning you have to think about doing the form...is it correct. Later, you don't have to do that, it's just chi! Then you can extend the chi outward, beyond the movement. This is similar in a way to weapons training, because weapons are essentially an extension of the hand. We teach the Tai Chi Knife, Sword, Double-sticks, and Lance/Staff, each being a different length and requiring different focus."

Master Karol continues, "the stress on use of the chi is also found in kung fu systems, but rarely is it dealt with as the heart of training, as in the internal systems, and it was this fact that made Tai Chi Chuan a departure from existing martial arts at it's founding. The focus on tonifying the inner organ systems for balanced energy and basic health and vitality was an intrinsic part of Taoist yoga tradition, and Chang San Feng, the founder, was known for his knowledge of this tradition. According to accounts, the art was preserved by Chang San Feng's students and then by the Chen family of Honan, who kept the techniques a secret within the family for generations. Eventually a man named Yang Lu-Chan heard rumors of the art and worked his way into the Chen household to learn it. He was discovered but his skill was so great that the Chen family taught him willingly. Yang Lu-Chan then went to Peking, where he was called Yang the Unsurpassed for his fighting skill, and taught Tai Chi Chuan. Yang's two sons continued to teach and their sons in turn continued the system, now known as Yang style. Among Yang's grandson's pupils was Tung Ying Chieh, who came to be known for his writing on Tai Chi and for developing a fast set complementing the Yang style. This was Tung Kai-Ying's grandfather, and the fast set is taught as part of the Tung family tradition. Of course Tung Chen-Wei, the son on my teacher Tung Kai-Ying, embodies this historical direct lineage as Dean of Kai-Ying Tung's Academy of Tai Chi Chuan, assisting his father to conduct Tai Chi training programs globally in Asia, Europe, and the United States.

U.C.L.A. students, staff, faculty and surrounding community members are invited to call for more information. All Tai Chi Club members receive personalized training in a traditional group format." Grand Master Tung closes by reminding us, "the purpose of Tai Chi Chuan is not the display of power or strength, but for the development of an inner and outer serenity and the discovery of one's Self."