



## Newsletter December 2008

It has been quite a long time since the last newsletter and for that I apologise. 2008 has been an eventful year for both myself and the Association. As well as celebrating Zhong Ding's twentieth anniversary we also officially opened the training centre. During the year we had a number of visitors culminating in the 20th Anniversary bash which was thoroughly enjoyed by all.

As far as training goes, 2008 was for me, a time to consolidate and explore the legacy of Master Liang and I hope in 2009 to share the fruits of this process with you all. In particular I shall be focussing on Master Liang's Yang style long form as I feel that this has many insights to offer. Initially I will be teaching this to Association seniors but I hope that this practice will eventually filter through to all levels.

Here in Penang the Association continues to grow, albeit in a modest manner. Fong is now teaching a number of classes and some of her students have already participated in their first martial arts competition at which they acquitted themselves well and gained valuable experience.

In 2009 we hope for this expansion to continue and I will be teaching public classes on the neijiaquan for fighting as well as opening Eskrima and Lian Padukan training groups.

In addition we are expecting a number of students for extended periods of stay at the training centre, including one determined and dedicated soul who is committing himself to a year's stay. We hope that more of you will take advantage of the opportunity for growth that this facility offers. If you are interested, and it can be for any length of time from a couple of weeks to years, then ask your instructor or contact me directly through the website.

Also in 2009 we will be holding the second Master Liang He Qing Memorial Championships. This event will take place in the East Midlands in July and I hope that we will have an even better turnout than last time.

## Use the Martial to Cultivate the Way

I recently came across this Chinese adage and it struck a chord because this is most definitely the standpoint from which I view my practice of the martial arts. A succinct explanation of this saying is that through our training in the martial arts we strive to cultivate ourselves; that is to become better people.

At this stage it is important to note, as many of you may have already done that I am far from being a cultivated human being; indeed the pursuit of this goal of self-cultivation is a very personal one and not one that is, or should be the subject of outside scrutiny or judgement. This is a deeply personal quest by which the individual strives, day by day, to live up to a code which hopefully enables them step by step to overcome some of their weaknesses and foibles. This is the way of life in which the opponent is no longer external but rather is one's own flaws and defects.

In his book *The Martial Spirit* (Overlook Press 1988), Herman Kauz discusses the martial arts as a path to self-realisation:

Those who have had contact with someone who has studied one of the martial arts may disagree with the idea that such training can make one a "better" person. The person they know may not, in their estimation, exhibit exemplary traits... Depending upon the observer's moral convictions, the person being judged may seem to have a somewhat low standard of conduct in his relationships... If we are to make a valid assessment of the effect of martial arts training on a particular person's character or mental state, we must first know what kind of person he is. More to the point, we must have knowledge of the kind of person he was before

he began his training. Only with this information can we attempt to determine how his training has affected him." (ibid p105)

As well as being a student and teacher of Judo and Karate, Mr. Kauz was also a student of Cheng Man Ching's with a particular interest in how taijiquan could be used as a martial art.

He goes on to explain that many misunderstand what the "end results of such a search for self-realisation will be:

"A related point concerns the average person's misconceptions about the outcome of training for self-realisation. Such training does not appear to confer god-like qualities upon anyone. The term "enlightenment", sometimes used to describe the result of certain kinds of training is fairly nebulous. Not all cultures define the term in the same way. In my experience it has come to mean the growth of insight, of the ability to see oneself and others and the world more clearly. This process appears to be endless. Moreover, we should not expect to know everything in some final and ultimate way. Achieving such complete knowledge is probably not possible for us, given our imperfect and fallible understanding. We must also remember that human beings are human beings, with a wide range of characteristics, from those that we would associate with animals to those thought to be possessed by saints. We must learn to accept this range of qualities within ourselves." (ibid p.106)

As Mr. Kauz observes this process is endless and it has to be daily renewed with each training session.

One of my favourite passages in Miyamoto Musashi's Book of Five Rings (William Scott Wilson translation p.90 published by Kodansha) describes the process thus:

"The journey of a thousand ri proceeds step by step, so think without rushing. Understanding that this is the duty of a warrior, put these practices into action, surpass today what you were yesterday, go beyond those of poor skill tomorrow and exceed those who are skilful later."

For those of you with different editions this is in the last section of the Book of Water.

For many of you this approach to the martial arts in general and taijiquan in particular, may be very far from your own personal motivation. More than a decade ago, however, at a special training weekend for Zhong Ding instructors I was surprised to find, during the course of a discussion, that every one of the participants regarded their practice of taijiquan as being a "spiritual path". Perhaps the longer you practise the art the more your interest turns in this direction.

Exactly how you use the Martial to cultivate the Way is a deeply personal thing, but for me it consists of confronting daily my own laziness, flightiness and fear. The latter can range from fear of doing too much or too little, fear of an actual physical opponent to fear of pain or injury. Furthermore in my relations with my classmates, my students and my teachers I am forced to confront my own pride, ego and selfishness.

One lesson that is currently a very important one for me, and one which I find I am constantly revisiting and relearning, is that of the essential nature of the teacher student relationship; at the heart of this, lies that moment of the "initiation ceremony" when we bow down before the ancestors, touching our forehead to the floor and expose our vulnerable neck in the "kowtow". This moment symbolises our debt to our teacher as, at that point in time, we do not have the skills or knowledge to defend ourselves against him and this serves as a physical reminder that, when we have reached a level of skill higher than that of the teacher, we must remember his mercy in sparing us. This point in time also serves to remind us that without the teacher's generosity we would not have the chance to attain any of these skills.

Over the years I have become an "indoor student" of several teachers both inside and outside our lineage and although sometimes my relationship with one or other of these teachers has been less than smooth, I still try to remember, at the end of the day, that without them I would not be at the same place on the martial path that I am today.

As a teacher I also have to remind myself to respect and honour the students without whom I would have nobody to teach; it's always a two-way process. I remember how Master Koh Ah Tee once said to me that

his students were his greatest teachers for every time that he sees one of them make a mistake he has to ask himself whether they learnt that from him. A good thing to remember indeed.

### New Website

Check out the new Zhong Ding East Midlands website at <http://em.zhong-ding.com>

It is well worth a look and there is a promise of more goodies to come such as a discussion forum. Congrats to Sam Casey for her hard work and to all the East Midlands Team. Well done

Until the next time train hard, train smart but most of all, enjoy your training!

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