

Newsletter Summer 2003

Letter from Malaysia

After some upheavals we are now settled in our new home and well into a routine which involves a great deal of training and study. Thanks to the close relationship we now enjoy with the Dongfang Wushu Institute Fong, myself and the children are all able to train on a daily basis under the ever watchful eye of Master Zhao Wei Dong (See biography and photos on the website).

I spent a very enjoyable and productive three weeks teaching in the UK and was gratified to see the level of commitment being shown by students and instructors alike around the country.

At the time of writing Bob France, Senior Instructor from York and his student Neill Bothwell are enjoying a three week training experience at Dongfang Wushu Institute. Their daily training schedule runs something like this. In the mornings they train from 8.30 to 11.00 then a few hours rest followed by an afternoon training session with myself and finally an evening session from 8.00 to 11.30. In addition they also pursue their own revision training in between bouts of eating and sleeping. It is not all hard work, though, they have also found time to go sightseeing and shopping and on occasion have been seen in local coffee shops sampling the local brew!

There are many exciting events coming up over the next few months. In June on the night of the 20th/21st we are having a night of Midsummer Madness on Cissbury Rings outside Worthing. Anyone is welcome to join us for a night of taijiquan practice. We will rest at dawn before the Saturday Xing Yi sword course. For more details contact Phil or Glen in Sussex.

In July I shall be teaching at Jasnières after an absence of a decade. Then in August I shall be doing a joint course with Baguazhang Master Frank Allen in Frankfurt.

In September there is our 15th Anniversary celebration here in Penang which promises to be an event not to be missed. Then in October is our annual camp an event at which Master Liang He Qing will be the guest instructor.

In this issue of the newsletter I am including a number of contributions from Zhong Ding instructors in answer to the simple question: Why do you train?

Their contributions inspired me and I hope they will do the same for you.

Why I Train : Colin Hoddes Senior Instructor Manchester

"Why do I train?" The short answer is that Taiji is an ongoing process rather than a finite end point. My training is my Taiji!

Taiji provides many benefits. Their relative importance to me has altered over the years and no doubt will continue to do so. It is not only a practical martial art but also gives us a greater understanding of how we operate, both physically and mentally. Self awareness allows us to more effectively manage body and mind and so to interact more harmoniously with others.

I have found that Taiji has made me much more aware of my posture, where I carry muscular tension and the sensations of my joints. This has enabled me to identify potential back pain and other such problems before they become established. I am also able to identify my emotional responses at an earlier stage and

so often I do not need to respond with irritation or anger in difficult situations. Fear is something I have yet to master!

Regardless of whether we believe all the claims made for the health benefits of the art, surely any activity which promotes muscular strength, joint mobility and mental flexibility must be of considerable value, especially as we become older?

In our frenetic time-pressured society Taiji provides us with a personal oasis of space and time. Within this oasis we can research and develop our understanding of the art. Taiji is a patient but uncompromising teacher. Lessons which we believe we have "learned" are represented to us in new forms and if we are to progress in our practice we must develop qualities of self-honesty and humility.

I have previously investigated various paths including meditation, other martial arts and psychological systems. They may all ultimately lead to the same goal but with Taiji I actually enjoy the process of getting there!

Reasons for training?

Don Harradine Senior Instructor East Midlands

"Why do we train?"

I remember discussing this question, at Nigel's instigation, with a group of instructors at a grading event in London about six year ago and remember thinking at the time that this was a strange thing to ask. We came-up between us with various answers: all seemed reasonable, sensible and appropriate. I don't know if it was ever Nigel's intention but over the years since then, either when I ache from training, during training or talking about training over a beer, as you do, this question was to inevitably come-up again. Some of the answers stay the same but some get a greater or less emphasis.

Here are a few of the reasons that have floated-up as answers over the years; in no particular order:

- " To improve skill for my own satisfaction;
- " Become healthier and fitter;
- " For a competition or demonstration;
- " So that my teaching is better;
- " So that the effort of my teachers has not been wasted:
- " So that I can defend myself;
- " Spiritual growth.

There have been others from time to time. The more I look at this list, however, I'm not sure these really make sense to me: I could satisfy some of these needs in lots of other ways. Do the above really motivate me to train every day? Is there something else? The answer must be yes.

Training gives me the opportunity to be with some of the best friends I've ever had. If I did not train then those relationships would change: we would not have so many great shared experiences. I have friendships from other aspects of my life but they are rarely the same depth as the ones forged through a shared love of the martial arts. In fact I consider these more as family members than just friends. This would be just too much to give-up.

What about the love of the art? I do not think many of us could stop training because of the passion we have for what we do. Over time does the art become part of us or we become part of the art? Do we become so entangled that it is what we are so we cannot do anything else but train.

Somebody once said to me: "how do you describe yourself?"

I have a feeling that the answer to that question may be the answer to the question at the top of the page.

Why do you train?

Steve Burns Senior Instructor Sussex

I'm not a big one for writing articles on martial arts or training. This is not because I can't or don't have some knowledge on martial arts (although there are many others who are far more knowledgeable than me), but more because the more I train the more I find my opinions changing. This isn't to say that what I was practising five years ago wasn't correct but that as I discover more and journey through my training my opinion, or perhaps my particular focus, in training and martial arts changes. This means that in the past when asked to write articles I have been non-committal to the task mostly because I may not agree with what I once put down on paper. The problem can be that when you write something down people can see it set in stone and so that becomes your opinion forever even though your view may have changed or developed regarding that issue. On the plus side writing for yourself can help you to focus your own views on martial arts - anyone who has read Bruce Lee's Tao of Jeet Kun Do would appreciate this.

To get back to the point then, I received an email from my teacher Nigel Sutton via my training partner in Sussex, Phil Longhurst, asking if I could pen (or type) a few lines in response to the question "Why do you train?" I felt I could try and answer this question as at least it asked my opinion on something I did rather than asked my view on the actual performance of martial arts themselves. I have to say though that as with my actual training itself when I considered this question I found that the reasons why I train have changed over the years and so themselves are not set in stone.

When I first started training with Nigel about thirteen years ago (yes Sifu you have been unlucky enough to know me that long) I was a practising Shotokan karate-ka. I came to Tai Chi as I had seen some articles on it in the martial arts press at the time and how some famous karate masters (for example Kanazawa Sensei) were involved in the art and how it had been beneficial to their karate. I of course wanted to be a great fighter and a world champion and was going to take the world of karate by storm and so anything beneficial to my training was good for me.

As luck would have it a Tai Chi class was being advertised at the local sports centre where I did karate. Someone had written a small poster advert full of bits about how Tai Chi had developed from Chang San Feng in the legends and then the history from Chenjiakou. It aroused my interest. It was only a short poster but it was fascinating - so I went to take a look at the class. A smiling Chinese lady invited me in to watch and have a seat - you didn't sit in a dojo! There were only three students in the class all doing some sort of wrestling in trainers - in a dojo! A large, grey haired old man was taking the class. When he'd finished explaining a point to the students he came over. "Hi I'm Nigel," he said offering his hand. I shook it. This was all strange. No Sensei or customary "Oss!" I'm not sure why I joined the class at the next lesson. I figured the big, grey haired guy must know what he was doing as he had "Great Britain Tai Chi Chuan" slapped on his tracksuit at the back. Also the poster had been interesting and I kept wanting to know more about this so called martial art.

I not sure entirely how the last thirteen years since that first class has passed. I've been drunk for some of the time so that accounts for some of the missing bits but somehow I seem to have developed in my martial arts - or at least I'd like to think I've developed. I've certainly changed my opinion of Tai Chi and what should be done in a martial arts class. I don't want to be a world champion any more, nor do I need to be a great fighter. If I look at the reasons though why I've continued training not just in Tai Chi but also in martial arts full stop I've probably fulfilled just about every criteria there is. I've made some of the best friends I ever will (including the big grey haired old guy who turned out to be not so old!). I took part in competitions to fulfil my esteem needs at the time. Martial arts have given me direction and focus and confidence and belief in myself. They helped me to feel good about myself when I've been down. They've provided me with an interest that I can't solve - a continuing enigma that I won't ever get to the bottom of if I train my whole life.

And they have allowed me a few moments of peace and contentment when I train. When I train alone and lose myself in the middle of some form that I can't get right that's when I'm most content and at my best.

I remember sitting getting drunk one day with some of my martial arts friends and somewhere in the clarity that alcohol gives you (until you wake up the next day) coming to the conclusion that it doesn't really matter if you get to the bottom of martial arts. It's the journey itself which is important. It's about the only bit of the conversation I really remember - the rest was wiped out with the hangover - but to me it was important as I bothered to remember it. For some people who come to martial arts the journey may only last a few years as their needs at the time are fulfilled and then they move on. For some of us, including me, I expect it will be a lifetime fulfilment. The only thing I know is that you can't figure out or master martial arts. A good friend of mine who is a karate teacher said something once along these lines that I wish I'd thought of. You never get to the bottom of and master martial arts until the last moment on your deathbed when you'll suddenly have the answers - or the lights shine brightest when the lights go out!

Good training.

The role of the soft in taijiquan

In the next issue of the newsletter there will be contributions from other senior instructors in answer to this question.

As always the contributions of all the members are greatly valued and appreciated so please send those articles in.

Till the next time train hard!