

Why practice Tai Chi Chuan slowly?

BY VINCENT CHU | ISSUE 8, SPRING/SUMMER 1997

Almost from the beginning, the Journal had an international feel. Tai chi practitioners from around the world were invited to submit articles for publication. In issue number eight from the spring/summer, 1997 we have an article by Vincent Chu, 6th generation lineage holder of Yang style. Master Chu started studying with his father at the Gin Soon Tai Chi Chuan Club in Boston, Massachusetts, where he continues to teach. This article offers a description of why practicing slow is important and one of the unique features of Tai Chi Chuan.

There have been many answers to the question of why Tai Chi Chuan is practiced slowly. One answer says that because all tied to each one movements are circular, it takes a longer path and therefore more time to travel from point A to point B. Another answer says that when slow, the practitioner can pay more attention to the movement. These answers are like the four blind men who wanted to find out what is an elephant.

Tai Chi Chuan is the physical interpretation of the philosophy of Tai Chi. It has Yin and Yang components. Tai Chi Chuan is composed of Gong - martial training, and Chee – technique training. Gong refers to internal power and Chee refers to martial art.

When one is training in internal power, one practices intent and chi both. Therefore, there is concentration directed on individual movements. When one practices technique one focuses on the Eight Postures (ward off, roll back, press, push, pull down, split, elbow strike and shoulder strike) and the Five Elements (left, right, forward, retreat and center) and the importance of their power, direction and technique.

Although each of the individual Eight Postures is slightly different, they all refer to a strike. Each utilizes the hands, elbows, knees, feet, hips and head. Generally, because the power of these strikes is issued outward by the movement of the body, the Eight Postures actually refer to eight types of body movement. Advance and retreat refers to the movement of the feet or body. Left and right refers to the eye movement. Centre refers to the body technique

Tai Chi Chuan is a martial art and very efficient as such because it applies internal power to each technique. Therefore, when one is practicing Tai Chi Chuan, one is practicing the development of internal power, or what is commonly called Qigong. It is a special kind of Qigong that utilizes

all its movements for martial arts. The skill and power of this Qigong is different from most Qigong practice today. This is why the practice of Tai Chi Chuan yields so many benefits - from both martial arts and Qigong. Like hard Qigong, it can develop the facility for taking a powerful punch to the body. But Tai Chi Chuan practitioners can also take punches, while they are in motion, not only from a stationary posture.

Tai Chi Chuan can also develop the facility of issuing power outside the body to affect other people or to bounce people off with a strike. This power is the result of a combination of yielding jing and fa jing (discharging power). Therefore, it can be said that if one doesn't have this yielding jing and fa jing skill, one doesn't really practice Tai Chi Chuan correctly.

Intent is what is necessary. It is the commander of all movement. It is said in the Six Harmony Theory that when intent is present, Chi is present and power is present. A movement without intent is nothing. Intent without movement is nothing too. Intent combined with movement that is not applied to an opponent is nothing. When intent combined with movement is applied to an opponent, then something is achieved. A beginner who moves from movement to movement without paying attention to each movement's function is not considered to be practicing Tai Chi Chuan.

Tai Chi Chuan is not exclusively slow - other martial arts also have slow forms and Tai Chi Chuan can be practiced fast. The fact is that when one practices Tai Chi Chuan solo form concentrating on intent and power, the speed will be slow - one focuses on the yin or gong component. When one practices Tai Chi Chuan fast, one focuses on the yang or chee component. The Tai Chi Chuan classics state that a practitioner can only master the art when they have mastered both yin and yang.