

Dance with the bear

Someone asked Professor Cheng Man-ch'ing (郑曼青) while he was in Taiwan for his insights on 'Constant Bear' (熊经 xiong jing). James Chan translated that section of the discourse from the original Chinese into English

Question: You say that constant bear is the simplest and easiest ingenious exercise of ancient China. It wards off illness, makes a weak body strong, helps with self-defence, and promotes longevity. Please tell us what do you mean by "help with self-defence"?

Cheng Man-ch'ing: Constant bear strengthens the body and wards off ailments. It is a yin move of taijiquan. 'Brush knee' is a yang move. Years ago, when I was director of the Martial Arts Academy of Hunan Province in Changsha City, I walked to visit a friend at his house. Before I got to the door, the family's dog attacked me abruptly from behind. I had no idea what was going on. Before I could fully initiate a brush knee move, I brushed off the dog reflexively with my hand. Instantly, the dog stopped barking, went silent, and went away. The next day, when I went to my friend's house again, he said to me: "The dog can't open its mouth to eat." This is an example of using constant bear for self-defence.

Daily practice

Question: You say that if we persevere in practising constant bear daily for 100 days, we'll be able to channel our qi (运气) and turn a sickly body back to health. In so doing, we need not worry about ailments and illnesses. What do you mean by channeling qi for 100 days?

Cheng Man-ch'ing: The whole point of channeling or guiding your qi in constant bear is to achieve the key skill of connecting the five centres (五心相通 wu xin xiang tong). It means channeling (transporting) qi to flow through the body and connect to all five acupoints in the body. These five acupoints include the two bubbling well acupoints of your feet (涌泉 yong quan); the two acupoints in the centers of your palms (劳宫 lao gong); and the acupoint at the top of your head called bai hui (百会) or ding xin (顶心). Doing this assures good health. Additional point #1. As you turn your waist and torso from left to right, relax the instep of your foot. Your foot, light as cotton, gently touches the ground. It draws the qi from the earth and transports it to the center of your right



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palm. When you guide your qi to flow this way, you'll get a soothing sensation with varying degrees of heat, expansion, numbness, pain and even itching in the center of your palm.

Mental image

Additional point #2. When you make left-right or right-left turns, you need to have a mental picture of what your turns look and feel like. You are not turning your waists and torsos mindlessly. Rather, you should turn as if you were rotating around the axis of an imaginary root that comes in from above the top of your head and which traverses through the center of your body and into the earth. This imaginary root may feel like it suddenly appears and then, just as suddenly, disappears. You must channel the qi that travels down this imaginary root to connect to the five centres mentioned in the above. Pay attention to channeling the insubstantial qi to the apex of your head (虚灵顶劲 xu ling ding jing). Simultaneously, keep your sacrum and coccyx vertical and in alignment with the spine. As your qi rises to the top of your head, you achieve perfect connectedness and qi flow (尾闾中正神贯顶 wei lu zhong shen guan ding).

“ Breathing helps you guide the flow of qi in your body ”

The illustrations right show the location of the acupoints



Question: You've not mentioned breathing. How should we breathe?

Cheng Man-ch'ing: Breathing helps you guide the flow of qi in your body. Remember: you are transporting your qi. You are not creating or refining qi. For beginners in constant bear, breathe normally and naturally just as you do in practicing tai chi. Breathe in a quiet, slow, fine, and long manner (静慢细长 jing man xi chang). After you gain experience in doing constant bear, breathe in when you shift your weight and breathe out as you turn your hips.

How a bear walks

Question: You say that constant bear is thus named because that is how a bear constantly walks. You have not mentioned what to do with our hands and arms? Would you please elaborate on this?

Cheng Man-ch'ing: The movement of your arms in constant bear should conform to the basic principles of tai chi. In constant bear as in taijiquan, one does not move one's hands and arms (太极拳不动手 tai ji quan bu dong shou). Let your arms embrace the insubstantial, primordial energy (yuan qi 元气). You know, the word yuan 元 (primordial energy or chi block) was the old pronunciation of the word yuan (圆 circle or sphere). Embrace qi as if it were a ball of intangible vitality. The key is to keep both your mind and qi centered in your dan tian.

“ The key is to keep both your mind and qi centered in your dan tian ”

Translation and interpretation by James Chan Ph.D., Asia Marketing and Management (AMM) www.asiamarketingmanagement.com



Below is the Chinese original. Google any paragraph below and you will see this section of the interview with Professor Cheng Man-ch'ing on many web postings

问：「熊经为至简至易之上古妙法，岂止却病延年，反弱为强而已，进而求自卫，与臻上寿之方垂手可得。」。「进而求自卫」请再示其详。
 答：熊经除强身却病之外，亦为太极拳之阴，搂膝拗步是太极拳之阳手。余昔年在长沙，任湖南国术馆长时，曾一日行至挚友处，未至门口，忽有家犬突击背后，当时不知何物，未及走化，只顺势一掌，狗未吠而自去，次日登门，友说：「该犬已难张口食物」，此即熊经之自卫也。
 问：师说：熊经倘能持之以恒，得能运气百日自其病体与羸躯，必有显著之进步，一切疑难之症无足虑也，其中「运气百日」未悉如何？
 答：熊经之运气，乃是练五心相通。五心者，涌泉「脚心」，劳宫「掌心」，与百会「顶心」之合称，相通即气机相通而连贯。
 (1) 腰臂左右振转时，脚附放松如绵，脚心贴地，得地气(按地之力)，导引向右掌心，使右掌心在振转时，有一种气机通顺之感觉。这种感觉，有热、胀、麻、痛，甚至痒。
 (2) 左右振转时，振转之意境，非凭空旋转，而是指上下有根的旋转。故振转时，顶心有似有似无的根，必须与掌心脚心相吻合。故须注意虚灵顶劲，尾闾中正神贯顶。
 问：熊经师说要领，未提呼吸，应否注意。
 答：呼吸为帮助行气，非炼气。初习时，应以自然呼吸，以太极之理，静慢细长，熟练之后，重心移动时，宜吸气，振转时为呼气。
 问：师说熊经仅提为熊之经常之动作，未提手该如何？未悉其然，请再示其详。
 答：妙手之动作，亦为太极拳之理也，太极拳不动手，熊经亦是，习熊经双手不动，宜虚抱元而守一。元「圆」之古音，守一，乃心与气相守於丹田。