

A Discussion on Wu Chi

By Vincent Chu

What is Wu Chi?

In Taoist alchemy, Wu Chi is described as "that which precedes Yin and Yang". If we understand that Yin and Yang represent all that is dynamic in life, all movement and change, then Wu Chi is that which exists before and independent of change, something constant and eternal. This is one of the most difficult of Taoist principles to address because it's an attempt to define something that exists outside of the realm of concept or logic.

In a practical sense, Wu Chi represents a sense of stillness within movement. There is an actual experience of being able to move utilizing qualities of ease, timing, and balance in which the experience is very dynamic, and yet essentially, at one's core, there is a feeling of stillness. In the Classics there is a teaching that states, "Be still like the mountain". Lao Tzu taught the principle of "Wu Wei" which is the essence of the state of Wu Chi. Wu Wei is described as the "action that comes from non-doing". Once again a difficult idea to discuss, but possibly one that each of us can identify with in some past experience of being in just the right place, at just the right time, with just the right action. In such a situation there is the sense of doing very little but accomplishing a lot. This would be a touch of Wu Chi. For many of us raised in Western culture the philosophy and life strategy of T'ai Chi is very different than our upbringing. In fact I feel that one of the primary benefits of T'ai Chi is on the level of challenging attitudes and past conditioning. These old conditionings cause us to view life in a very limited way. For example, one of the basic tenets of Western culture is that of work ethic. We are taught to work hard, placing the emphasis on what one does, one's actions. How very different than the Taoist emphasis which is placed on who one is, one's state of being. The feeling is that when that state of inner being is balanced and calm, then one is productive without a great deal of doing or effort. This hints at the master level of accomplishment known as Wu Chi.

The Tai Chi Chuan Classics say, "Tai Chi came from Wu Chi, the mother of Yin and Yang." This highlights the important relationship between Tai Chi Chuan and Wu Chi and yet today's Tai Chi Chuan practitioners do not concentrate and talk about this Wu Chi. In the past, Tai Chi Chuan students generally had a complete physical and spiritual training by working on the Wu Chi Posture or static component and Tai Chi Chuan or the dynamic component.

The Tai Chi Chuan Classics say, "Wu Chi gives birth to Tai Chi. Tai Chi gives birth to Two Elements. Two Elements give birth to Four Phenomena and Four Phenomena give birth to Pa Kua." Wu Chi refers to the state before the universe was formed; it is the world that has no shape and mass and it is infinite or void. Tai Chi refers to the time the universe was about to be formed. Therefore, Tai Chi refers to initiation. Two Elements refers to Yin and Yang Components. Four Phenomena refers to Metal, Wood, Water, and Fire or Four Seasons as Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter. Pa Kua refers to Heaven, Earth, Thunder, Wind, Water, Fire, Mountain and Lake.

In Tai Chi Chuan training, Wu Chi refers to the condition when the body and spirit are not divided into Yin and Yang Components. In other words, the body is tranquil and is not affected by any contact with the outside world. The whole body, physical as well as spiritual, is united into oneness. When we talk about Wu Chi training, we are talking about the ability to remove all the body's tensions and other emotions guided by intent so that the practitioner can return to the stable and natural stage that is full of potential and innate ability.

Wu Chi Posture

To form a Wu Chi Posture, one begins with the feet parallel to the shoulders and the knees bent. The two arms on the side of the body are suspended without any tension. The fingers are relaxed and pointing forward. The two elbows are slightly bent. Therefore, the palms have a sense of pushing down and the arms are warding off outward. The head is upright. The lips and teeth are close together. The tongue touches the roof of the hard palate. The eyes are looking forward.

Relaxation

In order for the whole body to relax, all the joints must be loose and the bones stacked lightly. This is especially true with the spinal column: One should not apply strength to make it straight. It should be natural and not rely on muscle contraction or tension for balance. One can picture the body's skeleton as a cloth hanger, with the skins,

muscles, tendons and ligaments as clothes. Placing clothes evenly on the hanger will provide proper balance. Correct body alignment and weight distribution on the feet will provide the same result.

To have a relaxed body, the key is to remove tension from the chest. The tension on the chest is generally the result of a pull by the abdominal and the shoulders. Therefore, to remove the tension in the chest, one should remove the tension in the abdomen and shoulders so that all the internal organs would be hanging down in a natural position.

The head should be upright. When it is leaning either to the left or right side, it is easy to correct. When it is leaning backward, it is not. When the head is leaning backward, it can cause the body imbalance, the jawbone will tilt upward and expose the throat and this can cause the throat to dry. All these can cause tension on the neck.

Protruding the buttocks are another cause of tension in the body. The buttocks should be relaxed so that they will tuck under or downward naturally. If the buttocks are sticking out, extra muscles are required to work on the hip and waist areas because the chest will go forward to maintain this new balance. This will cause the chest to be tense again.

When the buttocks are tucked under, the skeleton assumes a correct alignment and it becomes stable. It no longer needs additional work from the muscles and ligaments for balance. The muscles, ligaments and joints will loosely fit together to form a relaxing and comfortable postures.

The only part that has tension in the Wu Chi Posture is the wrist. The wrist has to bend so that the fingers will be pointing forward. This serves two functions.

- a. When the body is relaxed, falling asleep is easy. The tension on the wrist will provided a small amount of stimuli to keep the practitioner awake.
- b. The tension on the wrist alerts the practitioner physically as well as mentally. When there is tension, one can focus and the arms have the warding off intent and the chi is there. This is why many practitioners feel all kinds of chi sensation on the hands when they practice this exercise even only for a few minutes. From this, one can sees that a small tension on the wrist, which does not affect the whole body's relaxation, has so many meanings.

This is an expression of one of many concepts often observed throughout Tai Chi Chuan training- concentrating on one thing and forgetting 1000 things so that the body can be restored and refreshed.

Concentration

In Wu Chi training, relaxation is the external requirement and tranquility is the internal requirement. Tai Chi Chuan is considered an internal art because it highly emphasizes the intent throughout every movement so that every small movement has purpose and objective. In Wu Chi training, one slowly tries to remove all unnecessary thoughts and sometime remove oneself from any disturbing environment or location so relaxation and tranquility are possible. When the body is truly relaxed and tranquil, the intent is like a second being living inside the body to monitor the body's relaxation and tranquility beginning with the head, throat, shoulders, hands, chest, abdominal, hip, legs, feet, internal organs and then returning upward from the bottom to the top of the head.

When detect that a certain area of the body is not correct and relaxed, make correction immediately. For bad habits die hard. Many bad habits still occur after several corrections. Therefore, one must repeats this process of checking over and over until the body becomes relaxed, tranquil and natural. The better one can concentrate, the better one can removes the stress from the external environment and the easier one can enter a tranquil condition. When one is able to concentrate, the body is relaxed, the intent is able to check everywhere inside the body for any internal conflict. All components exist independent inside the body without any interference, pressure and tension so that one will feel very comfortable.

What is Wu Chi training?

It is the training to develop the skill to apply the intent to monitor the body and the ability to calm certain organs so that when focusing or concentrating, there will be a biological response. After this kind of training, the functions of all involunting organs will be better and the functions of the voluntary organs will be improved as well. Therefore, when one has Wu Chi skill, the body can quickly be restored in a short time, the feet are mobile and the body is nimble and energetic.

In order to have intent as a guide, one must have high spirit. High spirit is the result of concentration. Some people conclude that high spirit relates to body tension based on whether one does physical work. According to them, when one is resting or inactive, the spirit is low and the body is tired. But there is a basic difference between high spirit and tension. When one has tension, it is the result of external influence that is natural, unconscious response and can not be controlled. When this influence happens, the nervous system also has tension and feels the pressure and expresses it externally as physical tension. High spirit on the other hand is a man made excitement. It can be controlled. This is often expressed as a form of confidence, courage and endurance. It can make the tense body to relax, restore and refresh itself or it can tense up the body to do physical work. Therefore, high spirit and tension appear together due to work relationship. Low spirit and internal concentration are not the same. Low spirit refers to the brain being tired that causes the function to deteriorate. When one works with low spirit, it is not a normal life, unnecessary tension will accumulate to harm the body.

Unification of chi and intent

In Wu Chi training, the primary duty of intent is to monitor the body internally to have the body relaxed and tranquil; the secondary duty is to regulate the breathing so that it can be deep, slow, soft and even. When breathing is rhythmic, the intent applies the same speed to patrol the body from top to bottom and bottom to top, a continuous process. This exercise is called the unification of chi and intent among the stationary qigong exercises. As described above, when the intent monitors the body, it is able to tell the condition of certain areas or have biological responses from these areas. This kind of sensation or response will become more obvious when the practitioner has more experience.

Functions

When the physical and spiritual body achieves all the requirements, it enters the Wu Chi condition. When one can get there at any time of the day, this means one has the Wu Chi skill. The more one is able to relax, the better one can concentrate internally and the application and benefits are wider spread. From a physiological perspective, Wu Chi is the best technique for restoration. From a spiritual perspective, it is alert and has high spirit and concentration. From a dynamic perspective, it is tranquil and internally comfortable. From the physical perspective, it is full with energy and is alive. Therefore, in a Wu Chi condition, the whole body, physical as well as spiritual, is in a very beneficial restoration process and it is alert. It emphasizes oneness, and so some people defined Wu Chi as before the separation of Yin and Yang, but the carrier of Yin and Yang.

Wu Chi training contribute a lot to improving health. It serves a very special function for the nervous system by balancing the excitation and inhibition of the brain. Today, we know that emotions play a very important role in one's health. Muscles contraction, blood circulation, the function of the internal organs and the endocrine system change according to the change in emotion and environment.

Bad emotions such as anger, sadness, fear, worry can cause tension and pressure on the nervous system. When the nervous system is over stimulated, the organs will affect one's health. There are many symptoms such as muscle pain, ulcer, headache, that are affected by long term unstable emotion. Therefore, negative emotion injures one's health and positive emotion improves one's health. Although a positive emotion such as happiness can improve one's health, one can not be in this condition constantly and there is reason to be happy so positive emotion requires an external stimulus. A better technique than positive emotion is to have a Wu Chi condition, it can neutralize the bad emotion that affects the body. Therefore, Wu Chi condition is the best method to maintain good health.

Although Tai Chi Chuan training does not recommend any extreme emotion, it is difficult not to encounter any in life; when it occurs, one will apply the Wu Chi condition to neutralize it so that the body will be relaxed, peaceful and tranquil. This process does not require any external support. It depends only on the intent. Besides improving one's health, Wu Chi condition also improves the nervous system's sensitivity so that there is better communication and coordination between the brain and the physical body. Therefore, Wu Chi is a good maintenance exercise for the physical body as well as spiritual body. In Wu Chi condition, the body is relaxed and there is no tension or stiffness. It is very comfortable and natural. When one has the Wu Chi skill, one can asleep quickly, perform at peak condition, focus and concentrate better.

Since Wu Chi condition provides so many functions and benefits, one should practice this exercise often so that more benefit will be attained. Wu Chi exercise can be done when one is in situation such as waiting, sitting in the airplane, riding the car, laying down to sleep and before getting up. It can be practiced anytime when the practitioner needs to.