FOREWORD
By Dr. Yang, Jwing-Ming

Dear Friends

Time goes by so fast. It seems like only yesterday that I said the same thing, yet here we are once again standing on the threshold of a new year. The month of December is a very nostalgic and special time, special because we are commemorating YMAA’s 23rd anniversary. Over the years, I have met so many wonderful people, people who have helped to make our worldwide martial arts organization into something that we can all be proud of. In the past we have ushered in each YMAA anniversary with a Kung Fu / Taiji demonstration. But just like the changing of the seasons, faces change and new faces step up to take their place. Those few who remain have put forth a strong effort and have been instrumental in helping me to keep YMAA as functional as those who have moved on. It gives me great pleasure to say that because after I return from a long, tiring trip, I can actually see the results in the students. I don’t know if their instructors tell them as often as I do to practice, but they must be doing something right. It’s a satisfying feeling to walk into one of our training rooms and see YMAA instructors taking the responsibility to see that students “get it right.” In turn, the instructors can take pride in watching their students test and hopefully be awarded their next qualifying stripe. That’s a great accomplishment. Another thing that I’ve noticed is a more relaxed instructor/student question and answer period, especially during the Push Hands classes. I would like to see more of that same type of atmosphere in all classes. Students learn faster if they ask meaningful questions and are provided with beneficial answers. We must all remember that we were once students ourselves.

We will be faced with many new challenges in the New Year, both at the instructor and student level. Just like those in the medical profession; instructors must stay abreast of all new Kung Fu/Taiji information that is made available to them. This will eliminate problems when it comes to disseminating that information to students and/or colleagues. In turn, students must cooperate with one another. Practice with each other to learn whatever you are being taught. And if someone does make a mistake, go back to the beginning and practice (ponder) until he or she “gets it right.” If you question goes unanswered, I expect every instructor to discuss it with me. We will do whatever we can to resolve the problem. One last note; treat your fellow students with the utmost respect and remember the YMAA Code of Honor. If you leave each day without it, whatever your instructor teaches you becomes somewhat meaningless.

Thank you for your cooperation and a very Happy New year to all.
When I wrote my first and then my second book on T'ai Chi, my publisher was all over my case. He felt that my books would have a more predictable appeal if they narrowed their focus to target a specific audience, i.e., beginners or intermediates/advanced students. As I look back, having now authored three books on the subject of T'ai Chi, I agree that yielding to my publisher’s advice might actually have been quite sensible—write a book for beginners and then continue on to write progressively more advanced sequels for intermediate and advanced practitioners. The truth is, though, that writing in a more linear fashion would not have been in keeping with the manner in which I teach T'ai Chi Ch'uan.

The essential concepts of T'ai Chi—the essences of rooting, of structure, of energy, of living congruently—are all introduced from the get-go in my entry level classes. Students who are brand new to T'ai Chi may hear all about centerlines, or the importance of not bouncing, or how to open their kua, or fa jin power, right from the very onset of their training. Even my more experienced students know better than to skip these entry-level classes, for there is very little I deem imprudent to address in them.

I believe that people “get” things when they are ready for them. If some idea or concept is beyond the grasp of certain members of my class, they may only comprehend a very small part of it during their initial exposure. But the next time they are presented with the same or some similar lesson, they will be better prepared to absorb what they weren’t ready for earlier. With each subsequent exposure, progressively more pieces of the T'ai Chi puzzle fall into place. Over time, as more and more pieces fall into place; each piece serves as a reference point for the other pieces, regardless of when they appeared on the students’ learning curves. In this way the “whole” of T’ai Chi begins to take shape, but only as the students, themselves, become ready for the lessons before them.

Just prior to completing the manuscript for this book [Tai Chi Connections], I had the pleasure of reading Barbara Davis’s just released book, The Taijiquan Classics: An Annotated Translation. (Barbara is also editor of Taijiquan Journal.) In her book (Davis 2004, 53), Barbara notes some of the difficulties inherent in compiling credible data for a scholarly text such as hers. In particular, she notes that the Taijiquan Classics, which are an inventory of early and significant literary works on T’ai Chi Ch’uan espousing its most vital principles, were all written in the classical Chinese tradition. Classical Chinese, according to Barbara, “makes great use of rhythm, rhyme, poetry, alliteration, parallel prose, visual puns of written characters, aural puns based on like-sounding words, as well as allusions to or quotes from canonical works . . . (with) a tendency towards ambiguity, obliqueness, and terseness.” From this she construes that “the works were not primarily intended for a popular audience.” In other words, a great deal of what was written about T’ai Chi early on, and which has since come to be regarded as gospel, was intended to be comprehensible only to those already privy to T’ai Chi’s secrets, or to those of a social class that could comprehend the subtleties of the written classical Chinese language.

The approach of, apparently, confining T’ai Chi knowledge to members of the same “club” or social class as ascribed to by the classics is in direct contradiction to what I hope to accomplish as a T’ai Chi author. It is my intention to reveal what I can of the magic that T’ai Chi has to offer so that all readers can come away from this book both more knowledgeable about T’ai Chi and better equipped to improve their actual level of skill when practicing T’ai Chi.

Books by John Loupos.

**TAI CHI CONNECTIONS**
*Advancing Your Tai Chi Experience*
$20.95, 240 pages, 250 Illustrations
Code: B073/0320

**EXPLORING TAI CHI**
*Contemporary Views on an Ancient Art*
$20.95, 228 pages, 135 Illustrations
Code: B065/424

**INSIDE TAI CHI**
*Hints, Tips, Training, and Process for Students and Teachers*
$20.95, 220 pages, 143 Illustrations
Code: B056/108
Even as a novice, I was well aware of the shortcomings of karate as a complete fighting system (recently this has become painfully illustrated in the Ultimate Fight Challenges). I dabbled in judo and eventually studied Qin Na (Chin Na) and Shuai Jiao with Master Liang. So strongly did I feel about being personally unable to address the missing portions of the fighting spectrum, I felt incumbent to bring judoka into the various karate dojo in which I trained. I did this in order to broaden the minds of fellow students and instructors who were open-minded and secure enough in their own art forms to allow such a different kind of training to take place.

Over the last 22 years as a street policeman in the mean streets of Vancouver, (British Columbia) I have come to realize the acute deficiencies of karate as a defensive art, or more practically as a controlling art, as my chosen vocation demands. For me, Qin Na was like a ‘Snap-On’ tool: it allowed me to adapt my martial arts ability to suit the highly balanced needs of personal self-protection with controlling those I was empowered to arrest. I was entrusted to use only as much force as necessary, as prescribed by law. And so, I have mentally wrestled with the solutions to resolving problems that I encountered, or are reasonably expected to encounter, on the street. I had to select and apply force options from the entire use of force spectrum: from mere presence, appearance and reputation, to dialogue, empty hand control, impact weapons and even deadly force.

When struggling with this book’s basic concept, I began to look at the relationship between Qin Na and ground fighting in the Police Judo classes that I continue to train in. From an intellectual stand point I used this knowledge of the biomechanical principles of Qin Na in order to understand the techniques that were being shown to me. But from the stand point of survival on the mat, I was forced to fight back with Qin Na in order to strengthen whatever hold I could muster or to weaken my opponent’s resolve with what feels like just plain old ‘dirty fighting’. I came to realize that I couldn’t use too many Qin Na techniques, because attacking joints like those of the fingers and wrists for example are illegal in judo, with overt cranial and cervical pressure point attacks being forbidden as well. Many of these potentially harmful techniques, including leg locks, were taken out of the sporting forum so that healthy and safe competitions could take place.

I did examine judo techniques through the filter of Qin Na and realized that I could hold some of the principles of judo within the conceptual framework of Qin Na. I also realized that the reverse should be true because we are dealing with only a limited number of biomechanical principles relating to the bending and twisting of the various body parts, mainly those of the extremities. It really does not matter if you are working the finger, arm, leg or even the entire body as a jointed and segmented unit; bend and/or twist the segment in an unnatural or extreme way and you can defeat your opponent. The resultant pain you create will give you the ability to control your opponent to some degree and if necessary break down his desire to fight.

Certainly it takes a lot more strength to manipulate the torso than the pinkie finger, nor will bending this same little finger guarantee that your opponent submit, but both these kinds of techniques have their place in your ground fighting arsenal. Rather than just putting out yet another collection of interesting holds, we felt that we could make this book more useful and original by concentrating on the following three martial aspects:

1) The selection and preference of holding techniques which are capable of immobilizing or incapacitating an opponent with a limited danger to counterattack (that is to say you are not confined by, nor protected by, the rules of sport).

2) The relationship of these holds to the biomechanical principals used in Qin Na and the augmentation of these holds using Qin Na techniques.

3) The identification and use of pressure points for offensive and defensive purpose.
Practice Tai Chi and Qi Gong regularly to keep your body and mind balanced. When a person is not happy, there are two things that need to be addressed: your mind is troubled, tangled, disturbed by negativities; or your energy flow in the body is blocked, stagnated, or not flowing the way it is supposed to flow. When a person is happy, his mind is clear and healthy, his body’s energy is harmonized and flows smoothly. Tai Chi practice includes special body movement and correct patterns of breathing to balance the energy flow in your body, and balance the energy between your mind and your body.

Keep a positive attitude. If you have a positive attitude, and take positive action, you most likely will be successful in whatever you do. If you fail, you can always get up and start over again. What is the big deal in failing? When you have a positive attitude, people like to be with you, they feel cheerful, and they feel good. Not many people like to be with someone who is negative; you lose friends that way. When you have no friends, the depression becomes more pronounced. It is like a negative circle, everything becomes worse and worse. Without a change of attitude, or a change in thinking, antidepressants are less likely to be helpful. A friend of mine has depression. His main issue is the negativities in his mind. He cannot see the positive side of things and we know that everything has two sides. He lost friends one after the other and he lost girl friends one after the other. He continues to feel lonely and frustrated, continues to feel powerless, has no energy for work, and is unable to work. He continues to sink into the darkness with many different kinds of medication. This type of person is very difficult to treat because they don’t have a positive mental attitude and they aren’t willing to change their way of thinking.

Don’t be afraid of hard work. Hard work can be a good learning experience: the more you do, the more you learn. People complain that they work too hard. I believe if you enjoy the work you do, even if it is hard work, it can still be rewarding. If you don’t enjoy the work you do, perhaps you did not find the right occupation. If you complain about everything you do, you are in trouble, and you need to get help. Complaining creates negative energy that not only disturbs other people but also sends negative energy to yourself and makes you unhappy. Sometimes, you can get joy at work from being with different people, from being exposed to different knowledge, and from getting paid for what you did. Sometimes, you can even enjoy it because you are away from housework. If you are a positive minded person, you can always find positive ways to enjoy anything.

Be honest with yourself, and with others. Honesty is a very important way of living in harmony. It would make the world different if we were all honest with each other. If people lose trust in family, friends, business associates, politicians, etc., it creates problems in their daily lives and in society. Some people play mind games and try very hard to figure out what to say or what to do and they modify their behavior because they are so afraid of being criticized. They don’t understand that if you are honest, you are natural and happy, you have nothing to worry, to fear, and you have nothing to lose. If you play mind games, you cannot be happy. The constant tension creates stress and blockages in your energy system and also makes your life too tiring and stressful. You cannot be happy when you carry a lot of tension and stress.

Help other people. Human beings have a long history of helping each other in order to survive and live. In China, families help each other, friends help each other, and co-workers help each other. This made the Chinese a “happy culture” even with a much lower average income than in the United States. In the United States, the living standard is much higher than in China. The average income is much higher and there are many more wealthy communities. But why do we still have so much unhappiness and depression? A friend of mine accidentally cut a dead tree in her neighbor’s yard, and the neighbor filed a lawsuit for $2000. Is a dead tree more important than friendship with a neighbor? From many years’ observation and experience, generally speaking people who tend to give are happier, people who tend to take are less happy. When you help other people, you get psychological rewards from being able to give and from being helpful. The positive action makes you feel good and happy. You are free of worry. If you think you lose something by helping others, if you are worried that you are giving out too much and not getting back, or if you try to calculate if it is fair or not fair, you create tension and stress that causes the blockages in your body and mind.
Tai Chi and Chinese food have a lot in common. Both have yin and yang properties and both provide the body with a good jolt of energy. Many people who talk about energy don’t really pay that much attention to how it originates in the body. That’s something they all seem to take for granted, that is unless they happen to be a martial artist or health food specialists, or how about a very talented group of dedicated culinary experts.

For example take Sonny Wong, Pandora Law, S.M. Jou and Ming Chen, co-owners of the Green Tea restaurant in Newton (Mass.). Not only are they dedicated to their art but also know how to satisfy their customer’s needs. Wong is not only a tai chi/qigong practitioner, but a master chef as well. He and his partners believe in the Asian philosophy of food as health-giving.

The more than 200 dishes listed on the Green Tea restaurant’s menu are delicious. Many of them like the Steam Sesame Bean Curd have specific healing properties according to the management’s accumulated knowledge of traditional Chinese medicine.

“If a person really wants to increase their energy, I suggest that they begin their meal with herbal tea and herbal soup, both of which have good yin and yang properties,” says Wong. “But if they really want a taste treat then they should try the mince shrimp and bean curry.”

However, Wong likes Green Tea customers to know that some dishes, like the aforementioned, have more yin than yang properties. Is that bad?

“No really,” he smiled. “It’s primarily a question of balancing: eating in harmony with the seasons: countering yin, or cooling foods such as spinach, asparagus, or lettuce with yang or hot food (ginger, garlic, hot peppers and beef). But if they don’t eat meat, fish (protein) will suffice.”

If you’re feeling slightly fatigued, Chen, will recommend that you add a little bit ginger to your chicken with mushroom soup. Feel a cold coming on he’ll recommend a tofu dish (to sweat out the cold) with black bean sauce (healing to the lungs and digestive system).

When you visit their restaurant, it might be a good idea to give them some idea what you’re looking for in a meal. You can also find Wong behind the sushi bar preparing a delectable array of fresh fish for Green Tea customers.

If you don’t see Law or Wong when you first enter the Green Tea, don’t worry, they’ll find you. You won’t be overwhelmed by their courtesy but you will be swept away by their warm friendly smiles and the type and quality of Chinese food you don’t often find in the suburbs.

The Green Tea Restaurant is located at 24 Elliot Street, Newton Massachusetts

DAN HOOD
YMAA AROUND THE GLOBE

THE TAO OF KNITTING

Not only is Angela Laughingheart the YMAA Milwaukee instructor, she’s also a very talented knitter. She knits felted shapes that cause light to be viewed in a sculptural way. Laughingheart says that in Chinese Taoism there’s a belief that life originated from a state of neutrality or no extremities (Wuji). At the point of creation there was a dramatic outward expansion (Big Bang) when all matter manifested itself from anti-matter. Now there were two extremes, known as Yin and Yang. Her knitting starts in the center from a single stitch with outward increases that create a multitude of circular and twisting shapes that merge with the surrounding light.

STRENGTHENING THE BODY

According to Mandla Nkosi, YMAA Kettlebell Instructor, Russian Special Forces personnel owe much of their wiry strength, explosive agility, and never-quitting stamina to kettlebells. Soldier, Be Strong!, the official Soviet armed forces strength training manual pronounced kettlebell drills to be “one of the most effective means of strength development” representing “a new era in the development of human strength-potential.”

TAI CHI INSPIRATIONS CALENDAR 2006 EDITION


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ANOTHER REASON TO EAT FISH

According to a recent study of 3,000 people in Greece, fish reduces chronic inflammation in the body, which has been increasingly implicated in heart disease. Those who ate at least 10 ounces of fish a week averaged 33% lower levels of C-reactive protein and had similar reductions in other markers for inflammation. But even smaller intakes were beneficial. Fish (presumable because of its omega-3 fats) also lowers cardiovascular risk by reducing blood clotting, arrhythmia, high blood pressure, and blood triglycerides.

MEDICAL NEWS

Make your own frozen gel pack for icing injuries by partially filling a heavy-duty plastic freezer bag with a mixture of one-quarter rubbing alcohol and three-quarters water. Seal the bag, and then seal it inside a second plastic bag. Place it in the freezer. The gel will remain soft (the more alcohol you use, the softer it will be), making it gentler on injuries than hard ice packs.

MASTER PLAN

What could be a better way to end the year than with this story? It’s all about Roger Whidden, a dedicated YMAA Tai Chi instructor. Dr. Yang, Jwing-Ming recently conferred the highly respected title of “master” on Whidden who is the President of Whidden’s School of Fitness, Inc., Marshfield, Mass. Whidden becomes the first YMAA instructor to ever reach that goal. With Whidden’s confirmation, Dr. Yang becomes a grand master, a very difficult title to achieve among Tai Chi practitioners. We hope to have more extensive coverage in the March 2006 newsletter.

Roger and Mary Whidden with their children, Karrie, Jocelyn, and Jian Mei
EDITORIAL

Elisabeth Muys, (www.delotusbloem.be) a YMAA Taiji practitioner writes excellent poetry, so I thought it only fitting to dedicate this month’s Editor’s Corner to her so she could showcase her talents. Enjoy!

DAN HOOD

Life in a Taiji-suit
(Ode to Life, ode to Taiji, Ode to all Taiji teachers)

Life has given us a suit
A suit for growing
To stretch and strengthen
A Taiji-suit

Loose in his smoothness
Mild and inviting
A generous coat
For our soul to stretch out

Like the life
That says:
You can be big
You have more space than you think
No limits, no obstructions,
Except your own obstacles

A suit smooth but not concealing
Like in life
The smallest of our movements
Can have consequences reaching far
Exciting ripples
Kilometres away

A suit
To move carefully in life
But also
With power
A suit that can absorb
Punches and kicks

And that is exactly the suit
That life has given to us
The life itself
That gives itself
At every instant
Again and again

And the dance, we can choose freely
Wholeheartedly
As it suits our soul
Who likes to stretch out
Happily
As far as it can
Always further
And further

EDITOIRAL