

Taoist Arts Organisation



Li Family Style

As taught by Prof. Li Kam Chan and Prof. Chee Soo

The Taoist Arts Organisation is dedicated to promoting and preserving the purity, quality, and completeness of the Li Family System of Health and Martial Arts



TAO NEWSLETTER APRIL 2024

FORWARD

Over the last two years the TAO has started to go through change, not in the content of what we teach but in its organisation.

The committee has changed to give equality to the input from Germany, France and the UK on the future of the organisation, in an ever-changing world where online classes are as popular as face to face classes.

The need for a greater media presence and the direction that we need to go being the main goal. The need for our more experienced practitioners and instructors to work together to preserve the purity of the art is paramount.

Continued input to populate the archive will help to preserve the uniqueness of the system. The committee are working towards these goals. With help from many other members they will achieve them.

Tony Swanson,

Technical Director, Taoist Arts Organisation

IN THIS ISSUE:

We have a variety of articles by TAO members ranging from technical to personal journeys in the Arts. You will also find lots of information on a range of great courses for you to book on to further your journey. Thank you to all for your contributions and adding to the richness of the TAO. Happy reading!

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MEMBER ARTICLES

[Partner Work](#)

BY DAVID CLYANT

Where to start with this train of thought? Training with Renée one Twyford a few months ago we got talking about the topic of Authenticity and also how this effects our Tai Chi practice as well as our everyday lives. When we start our Tai Chi journey I often observe how we start with the extremities of movement and then over the years and decades it becomes more and more refined and subtle as the understanding and experience moves closer to the Centre of our Being, both physically and energetically.

As beginners we're encouraged to have correct hand and feet positions, weight distribution etc. Then over time and practice we come to understand that the position of the extremities relies on the positions of the arms and legs. Over more time, we realise that these are controlled by the shoulders and hips. More time again these are affected by the amount of total body awareness that we've developed, the amount of tension our muscles are holding, how the body works together in executing movement. The

execution of technique then becoming an expression of Yi, Intent, acting through whatever part of the body, or tan tien, we happen to be working with. And so the form of Tai Chi Chuan becomes a place to practice the principles of Tai Chi - the 8 energies etc. as do the martial forms within the Feng Shou. With a relaxed muscular system then our intent is cleanly transmitted from maybe our lower tan tien to our hands and feet, like a wave rippling out. With tension in our muscular system then that wave is distorted or in extreme cases stops at that tension and the technique 'fails'.

One aspect that is often missed is the place of Mind. With a relaxed body moving with full awareness through a sequence of movements Tai Chi becomes something sublime, energising and insightful. The practitioner adapting to the external environment without thought being needed eg training outside and the foot steps on a small stone and the adaptation that takes place through awareness and then the release of tension that may have occurred through the unexpected change in direction.

However, problems can start when we're working with a partner. Expectations start to form in our mind as to what we're going to be doing. Let's take as a simple example of the practice of 2 hands against 1. The first thing we need to do is find a partner - and watch how the mind filters who you're going to train with! Already the process of limiting may have begun. And so we partner off and we have as a mental map who we think the partner is and what they can do, depending on if we've trained with them before. More limitation. The exercise starts, both people adopt the relevant stances and raise their arms into position. So the mind has said to our body 'Right, your arm needs to be there, your feet there etc. etc.' and our body responds. However, what often happens is that the act of assuming the position has already meant we have lost body awareness and so have lost our connection to authentic self and the result is that our arms are up usually with unneeded muscular tension, usually in the shoulders. So even before the 'exercise' has started we've already weakened our posture. By thinking about where we're going we've forgotten to return to our bodily experience. If we stay aware then we arrive at the destination with the minimum amount of tone required to maintain that position maybe utilising Peng to raise our arms, or having Peng also as we step forward to Dragon. So we try again and with a bit more bodily awareness we arrive at the seeming starting position and connect physically with our partner. (However, the exercise on many levels started when you selected your partner in the first place, even when you decided to attend the course in the first place. Do we attend the course or the class as a student or instructor and leave the rest of who we are at home? Have we already made ourselves smaller than who we really are to fit into what we think the course is about?

So with the physical connection established we then 'start' the exercise, often without realising that the exercise has already started. So one person hopefully provides a static non-adapting dragon for the other person to practice, lets say a Peng energy expression. Now comes the next fun bit. Unless we've experienced the effect of Peng in our own body, and then in our partner, we need some type of mental analogy to be able to do anything. We might use a wheel type analogy, or a bubble for example to help arrive at the upwards and outwards expression of energy.

Even if we have experienced the energy and no longer use an analogy where is our intent? Is our intent to uproot our partners stance? Or is our intent to perform a Peng the side effect of which is the uprooting of your partners stance? Yi, intent, is important here. Yi leads the Qi. So if our intent is to move our partner then in many ways we have already over extended our Yi, the Qi follows and effectively it becomes a 'push'. If we manage to withdraw our intent from our partner and bring it back to our lower tan tien for example then as we execute a Peng energy we might feel our partner uprooting and then maybe once again our intent becomes to push our partner instead. If they are not off balance enough then this switch of Yi becomes a push once more and gives them something to root against. So having

an awareness of our partner but having the centre of attention in our own structures gives us the ability to adapt to our external environment, but without compromising our energetic balance.

If we have managed to perform a Peng that has maintained a centred attention, not invoked tension and has started to uproot our partner then we can play with our Yi. We could carry on with the expression of Peng and see how our partner responds - best here in this state of play to have no expected outcomes but to just see what happens when you express different energies. What happens if I switch the energy expression to a different part of my body? What happens if I switch to a different energy expression? This playfulness is where the partner practice flowers. If ever you see people looking bored or looking around at a class or course then they have hit a mental block - usually along the lines of Is This It? Here the mind has limited itself to what the exercise has appeared to be teaching. To fully unlock the gift that is partner work there needs to be an exploration around the topic in hand - bringing all of ourself to bear, your fully authentic self. This then becomes priceless.

My Tai Chi Journey

BY GILLIAN SOUTTER

My sister asked if I wanted to pass the driech dark Scottish highland winter months in 1998 by going to Tai Chi classes in Plockton!...I'd never heard of Tai Chi, so I happily went along, anything to get a bit of freedom from a young family and some me time.

The wonderful Gordon Leek was the instructor and everyone was so welcoming. We learned the beginning of the form with some applications and partner work. I was nervous at first with people putting hands on me. I am claustrophobic, and at that time suffered panic attacks, so even being in a room with people was a challenge for me. I was soon put to ease though as respect of boundaries were met. I was introduced to dear friends whom over the years have selflessly helped me gain a little bit of confidence.

When Gordon moved to France, Francis and I decided we had better go on a regional course to Newcastle to keep up our education. Ferris took us under his wing, kindly putting us up in his home. We loved every Newcastle course, from the friendly people, to all of our wonderful hosts - Alice, Anne and Martin, Abe and Alison...we were made to feel like we were part of a family. Writing our notes up on the train journey home was always funny. Fran and I would wave hands in the air... write notes, stand up, sit down, do a stance, write more notes... have a giggle... lord knows what people thought of us.

We decided to go to summer school in Repton in 2006. As always full of excitement and some trepidation. My first impression of some people was when I saw them carrying weapons on their back and walking so confidently... I thought ... "here's me, just a wee lassy coming doon fae the Isle of Skye"...but I held my own...enjoyed every aspect of the course, the weapons especially. By the end of the week I felt centred and calm ... no TV, no news, no demands on me...just something for myself I came away with a good sense of attachment... in fact I didn't want to go home. But obviously I did and couldn't wait for the next course....

Fran and I went to many courses, she is a wonderful friend... just wanted to say that. Recently I went on the Welsh course... the first course I had been to in 4 years..... Janet kindly organised for me to stay with the fabulous Rhiannon....people are just so kind....it was great to see old friends and meet new ones. To train under Tony with his expert eye, and to know all the zoom classes that came about because of Covid have kept my education up.

By nature I am shy, but Tai Chi has helped me gain even just a wee bit of confidence. Enough to be an instructor. If Tony sees my potential then I need to respect that and honor that. Tai Chi is a gift to treasure.

First Residential Course Experience- Easter School 2024

BY KEVIN PERCIVAL

I've just returned from the residential Tai Chi course in the lovely setting of Stowe School in Buckingham.

I have only been attending classes in Harrogate with Paul Kenny for the last 18 months so being a relative newbie I wasn't sure what to expect on a residential course. I wondered if I might feel out of my depth and that the classes might be made up of more experienced students. However, from the moment I arrived, I was made to feel very welcome and both the school staff and the organising ladies from the Taoist Arts Organisation were really friendly and helpful.

The classes were suitable for students of all abilities - both for beginners and those who had been studying for years, and there were people of all ages and levels of experience (and nationalities!). There were always experienced instructors available to ask for guidance at any time during the sessions who were happy to help, (I asked a few times) - with overall direction from TD Tony.

The sessions covered lots of aspects, including breathing and stances, but also looked at the form in greater detail than you may be able to cover in a weekly class - often relating it to the martial arts. There was ample time to practice with fellow students which was very enjoyable.

Three days was just long enough for a newbie, as there was a lot of information to take in. But it was great to be immersed in the art with other enthusiasts, and be able to meet and chat to people of other abilities and backgrounds who were all there for the same reason.

I very much enjoyed the weekend and would definitely recommend the experience to anyone who has been learning Tai Chi for a while but feel they would like to take it further.

Thanks to all involved and hope to do it again.



Spindrift

BY RENÉE PRYCE

Whisps of snow spindrift
Spin, drift,
Morph, swirl, whorl
Over high mountain

Swirling whispers of grace
Undulate
Momentary, breath
Inhale, exhale

We sync, you change
You move, we blend
Connected together
We are one

Ebbing flowing
Swirling whorling
Patterns forming and reforming
Time suspended

Still
Tranquil stillness
Your whisper calls my name

Whispering messages
In signs and symbols

Of truth eternal
Ancient friend and messenger

Dancing so near
So close
Ever changing
Still
We become one

Presence your essence
I in you, you in me
We

I am you
I am me
I am movement
I am now
I am no more

We sync
We dance
In flow
Once more
A Moment
Forever
Spindrift



FROM THE ARCHIVE

In the January 2024 issue, we revisited an article written by Tony Swanson, our Technical Director, in September 2009 after the 2009 Summer School Residential course. It explored the connections between Tai Chi and the Taoist philosophy that underpins our system.

The article pointed us in the direction of an understanding that we, everything goes through perpetual change and creation, and helped lead us to an understanding of Wu Wei, unified action without intention.

At the following year's Summer School 2010, Tony explored how the intricate multidimensional patterns in nature, the patterns of Li, show us the way to our deep interconnectedness and interdependency with nature, and all things; how this resonates deeply flowing through the core of Taoism and Tai Chi and is relevant to martial arts and our every day life. Below is the article Tony wrote following that course.

Patterns of Li

BY TONY SWANSON, TAO TECHNICAL DIRECTOR
September 2010

This year, during the Summer Course, I tried another evening along the lines of the session exploring *Wu Wei* that I ran last year [*see write up in Newsletter Sept 2009*]. The themes of these sessions are concepts within Taoist philosophy which I have been asked about many times over the years. You can find explanations in books fairly easily but it is more difficult to understand how the concepts might relate not only to martial arts but to the entirety of our life. So my aim in these sessions is not to give explanations and answers but to give students the opportunity to explore a concept within the practical context of their martial arts practice.

Of course, in writing up the session it is not possible to offer readers the practical demonstrations and experience. The article is more of an explanation and, since I now know which parts some students found harder to grasp I can try and give a little more detail.

The topic I chose this year is Patterns of *Li*. *Li*, in this sense, originally meant the markings in jade and came to refer to all organic patterns. We see examples of these dynamically in ripples in still water, the wind in the trees, the waves breaking on the shore. The result of organic processes is recorded in a static form in, for example, the grain of wood or stone such as jade.

Taoist thinkers frequently study these patterns and derive great inspiration from them. The question I tried to answer is why they do this and in what way are they relevant to martial arts and to every day life? Writing this article gives me the opportunity to talk about this concept at greater length than during the session but I would still like to encourage anyone reading it to explore the ideas in practice rather than stopping at the theory.

Think of throwing a pebble into a pool. The pattern of ripples that results is the unique result of a pebble of that size and weight being thrown along that particular trajectory into a pool. The ripples are affected by the temperature and depth of the water, the wind over the pool surface will make a difference, so will the nature of the ground in which the pool is formed and the size and position of any plants growing in the pool. Even if you fished the pebble out and dropped it again 2 minutes later, the ripples would not be exactly the same. The ripples you see depend on the position of your eye and the sun relative to the surface of the water and the quality of your eyesight.

The patterns that nature makes are multi-dimensional, they take into account all the factors in the eco-system in which they occur. But what is the relevant eco-system? Modern science has shown that the weather here is affected in some way by something as small as the flap of a butterfly's wings in South America or as large as the eruption of a volcano in Asia. It has shown that the climate on earth is also product of its position in the solar system, that the sun's position in the galaxy is the result of gravitational forces between it and other stars and also that the position of the galaxies relative to one another is a function of the momentum from the Big Bang and the gravitational effect of the matter in space.

In this way science is beginning to discover a truth that the Taoists have always instinctively understood - that the "things" we perceive and name with language are actually features of a seamlessly interconnected system that includes everything in the universe throughout time. Our "things" have no independent existence. The human use of language creates the illusion that "things" are independent, and tends to make us focus on detail at the expense of seeing the whole picture. We mistakenly see ourselves as disconnected from nature, independent observers with the power to change things, and this has had significant consequences for the natural world and ourselves in it. The Taoist ideal is that we need to be able to see both the whole and the detail - in balance. I touched on this idea in the introduction to last year's session. It is such a key concept that I thought it might be helpful to explain it again in a different way.

Returning to the patterns of *Li*, nature's organic patterns infinitely more complex than the two dimensional, geometric patterns that people make. Because they are so complex not two are the same and so we cannot predict them intellectually but we instinctively recognise their perfection: nature never makes a mistake. Their perfect appropriateness to the unique situation is a quality we are seeking to develop in our practice. Although we cannot predict them precisely we can identify the principles and processes governing how *Li* patterns are generated. Although the patterns are infinitely variable, the processes and principles are constant. The parallels between this and our martial arts practice are clear, the processes are not identical but comparable.

In our partner work we face an infinite range of slightly varied situations. Just as you can never drop a pebble into the pool exactly the same way twice, no two strikes are identical and so the precise response cannot be defined. However the principles which govern the type of response we are trying to learn are definable but their application depends on the precise moment. In the *Li* style we teach principles that could be applied to any given situation, as against set responses and these should enable you to be strong enough to maintain your structure, enable you to yield enough to get behind the force whilst maintaining harmony of movement to control the situation.

These relative definitions (strong enough, flexible enough etc) depend on a sense of the moment, which is why we spend so long developing our listening and sensitivity skills. The ability to respond in accordance with the principles is trained and ultimately the goal is that the interruptions to that response, created by the habits of the conscious mind, should be lost and the instinct for natural movement rediscovered. Once this happens we move without conscious consideration, just as a pool responds to a pebble.

As you can see from this ever more wordy explanation - these things we can recognise instinctively as perfect and simple become very clumsy when you try to put them into words. They are to do with seeing and feeling the whole and so language with its divisions is really not the appropriate medium.

This is why the great Taoist writings are not precise, logical explanations. The Taoist thinkers use poetry and metaphor to get to a level of communication directly with the imagination that transcends language.

The patterns of Li are used in the same way - as complex metaphors. Watching the willow bend in the wind is a metaphor for how to be both strong enough and flexible enough from moment to moment. Watching the movement of water in a stream shows us how to flow around and behind an obstacle. Watching the sink empty shows us how a spiral can draw things in and down.

These examples are not the same patterns of movement made by the human body but they have a natural unforced quality, which is precisely what we aim to cultivate, leaving behind habits of tension and forcing. This is why the Taoist studies the patterns of Li.

At summer school I gave a much briefer explanation of this and moved to partner work designed to experiment with these ideas. The exercise was to make a simple circle with our partners, as we would start sticky hands but with no radial movement or hand techniques. The partners were to take it in turns to change that shape and see what the effect was.

This was not a technical exercise. I know that a lot of our training involves concentrating hard on the minute details of the movements we make. In this session I hoped people would relax their focusing mindset and engage the imagination and instinct to see what would happen when they did a simple exercise in a different state of mind. Rather than a new technique, it is a different way of thinking about what we already do. The rightness of a movement can be instinctively recognised even though it is unique. Imagining yourself moving like, for instance, water, may help you stay in touch with your instinctive, sensitive mind and stop your conscious and controlling mind from interrupting the flow. In this way you may be able to tap into the natural movement we aim to develop in the Arts.

TAO NEWS

UK Courses

SUMMER SCHOOL RESIDENTIAL COURSE 2024

Sunday 21st July - Thursday 25th July 2024 (arrive Saturday p.m.)

BOOKING HAS OPENED! Secure your place!

[Please CLICK HERE to book](#) Booking deposit fee required by 5th June 2024

Stowe School, Stowe, Buckinghamshire, MK18 5EH, UK





The highlight of the TAO training calendar! This longstanding residential course is not to be missed!

Immerse yourself in top quality TAO training from our Technical Director Tony Swanson, whilst residing at magnificent historic Stowe.

Nestled in stunning grounds with beautiful architecture and long breath-taking views, you can truly relax, connect with nature, yourself, new and old TAO friends.

Our Summer School course is enjoyable, enriching and comprehensive, covering a variety of skills and disciplines of our system in depth, in a friendly and welcoming environment. Here you can further develop technically and personally, taking your training experience to the next level. This is a great opportunity to come together with fellow TAO members from clubs all over the UK and from France and Germany.

Daily training takes place in the sports hall set in the peaceful grounds. Accommodation is a short stroll from here and the state dining hall where we take our meals. The course is fully catered with three cooked meals a day and catering for those with special dietary requirements. Refreshments are served at tea breaks. We have access to all state rooms and hold our Summer social evening in one of them!



International Courses

Weekend Course, **Bonn, Germany** - 19th -21st April 2024

This is a very popular course taught by the Technical Director Tony Swanson. This course is usually very well attended with a large range of students. Many students traveling to Germany for this course stay with local TAO members.

[Please click here](#) for more information, to book, and for accommodation information.

19th April evening training for instructors, invitees and long distance members.

Spring School, **Rüsselsheim, Germany** - 8th - 12th May 2024

Welcome to the most beautiful hall in our area, to train under Tony's guidance together with our local German TAO friends, and last but not least to our legendary joint lunch and dinner buffet. If you wish you are welcome to stay for B&B with local people. They are all very nice and friendly and happy to show you around.

In addition, as it was last year, there will be an opportunity to:

Present the Li Arts and TAO all together:

Saturday 11th May evening at the 4-day Bel-R arts festival in the city's central square!

The opportunity:

For individual refinement of technique, timing and personal expression, and to strengthen the sense of community.

Kai Men, Tao Yin, brocade exercises, hand and weapon forms, as well as applications in the martial arts are presented; as solos, in pairs, mostly in small groups, everyone as they want and can. A highlight for everyone, just like last year: the form all together in the whole group.

Everyone can take part, from children to the very grown-ups, from light red to dark black!

The Technical Director and the TAO Committee expressly welcome our joint presentation at this year's Bel-R! Art Festival!

German TAO secretary info@li-stil.de, local organisation tao-ruesselsheim@li-stil.de.

[Please click here](#) for more information, to book on the course and for accommodation information.

8th May evening training for instructors, invitees and long distance members.

Summer course, **Tours, France** - 17th - 20th May 2024

Visit the beautiful historic city of Tours where you can enjoy a long-weekend of training with fellow TAO members. This course is open to everybody and is taught by the Technical Director, Tony Swanson. This enjoyable course is usually well attended with varied content. With lots of friendly students and instructors attending there are lots of opportunities to learn and develop further. An evening meal in a local restaurant is usually organised which you can sign up for.

[Please click here](#) for more information, to book and for accommodation information.

17th May evening training for instructors, invitees and long distance members.

Save the Date:

Fri 21st (evening), Sat 22nd & Sun 23rd **March 2025**
Scotland Regional Course - Achmore & Kyle



Lochcarron

Enjoy an amazing TAO training weekend, together with fellow TAO members from Scotland and further afield, taught by the Technical Director, Tony Swanson, in this this stunning and magnificent part of the world! Make it a long weekend or mini break!

For expressions of interest, information on travel (including group travel from Inverness airport), and accommodation, please contact Renée @ moonwillow75@gmail.com



COURSE CALANDER 2024: Please visit the [TAO Website](http://www.taoistarts.org) for all up-to-date course information.

Thank-you to everyone for your contributions to this Newsletter!

For the next Newsletter, please send in your articles, news, poems, art, stories and other contributions to the Editor, Renée Pryce, at moonwillow75@gmail.com

We would love to hear from you.

Taoist Arts Organisation