

Traditional Chinese Martial Arts, Medicine, Qi Gong, and Daoism

Spirit Dragon Journal

Winter 2006

Volume 1, Issue 1



**Happy Chinese New Year
2006 Year of the Fire Dog**

Tai Ji Quan

sometimes written

Tai Chi Chuan

and translated as

Supreme Ultimate Boxing

Practiced by thousands of people
throughout the world.

What is it?

Inside This Issue

**The Winter Season and
How to Keep Healthy**

Overview of Taiji Quan

**Kung Fu Conditioning:
Fingertip Pushups**

Spirit Dragon Journal

A Quarterly Journal

Published by Shen Long Publishing

Website: www.shenlongpub.com

E-Mail: shenlongpub@hotmail.com

Editor: Franklin Fick

About the Spirit Dragon Journal

The Spirit Dragon Journal is a quarterly publication that features informative articles and interviews on topics related to Traditional Chinese Martial Arts, Traditional Chinese Medicine, Qi Gong, and Taoism. The goal of this publication is to promote and inform. It is hoped that this effort will further the development, growth, and depth of these arts. It is also hoped that readers will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation.

Chinese terms and names will be romanized using the standard pinyin system of romanization. When a term or name is well known in another system of romanization this alternate romanization will be included in parenthesis.

The ideas, opinions, and views expressed in the articles are those of the authors or the people being interviewed and not necessarily those of the publisher or editor.

The publisher, authors, and editor decline any liability, loss, or risk, personal or otherwise, which is incurred as a consequence, directly or indirectly, of the use and application of any of the contents of this publication.

Please consult your medical, health, or other competent professional before adopting any suggestions or starting any physical exercise program. In no way is any information contained in this publication a substitution of professional medical care and treatment.

Copyright © Shen Long Publishing

All Rights Reserved

From the Editor

Welcome to the first installment of the Spirit Dragon Journal. This journal is free to download. Please share it with your friends.

This journal will be published quarterly. This first issue is a little bit skinny, but hopefully this will be remedied by the time the next issue comes out.

Two sections will be ongoing.

The first will discuss topics related to Traditional Chinese Medicine. The current topic of this section is the seasons, how they relate to our internal body, and how to stay healthy by following natural laws.

The second ongoing section will be about Kung Fu Conditioning. This section will offer tips and instructions for common exercises and some not so common exercises that are related to conditioning for the martial artist.

Any suggestions please e-mail: shenlongpub@hotmail.com

On the Cover

Yang style Taiji Quan Posture

White Crane Spreads Wings

Franklin Fick

Happy Chinese New Year

The Fire Dog Year starts January 29th 2006.

Why January 29th? The Chinese calendar is based on lunar months, and this year the first day of the first lunar month falls on January 29, 2006 of the western calendar.

Dogs are loyal, honest, and have a strong moral sense. The fire year brings more of this element to the year. Fire is more outgoing than the other elements and it also attracts the attentions of other more. Fire is hot and sometimes can be intense. It is also not as grounded as the other elements and has the ability to change quickly.

Where the western calendar is a linear representation of time, the Chinese calendar is a cyclical representation. The most common aspect of the Chinese calendar is the 12 Chinese Zodiac Animals. Each year is assigned an animal and they follow the same pattern and repeat every 12 years. The cycle is: Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit,

Dragon, Snake, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, and Pig.

What most people are not aware of is that this 12 year cycle is a smaller cycle within a larger cycle. The 12 animals of the zodiac are related to the 12 earthly branches. But there are also 10 heavenly stems. These heavenly stems give us the elemental aspect of the year. As stated previously this year is a Fire Dog year. This larger cycle takes 60 years to complete and then starts over.

The heavenly stems and earthly branches are also used in more specific and advanced calculations in Chinese Astrology and Medicine such as The Eight Methods of the Miraculous Turtle. This method calculates the open acupuncture points for the hours of each day.



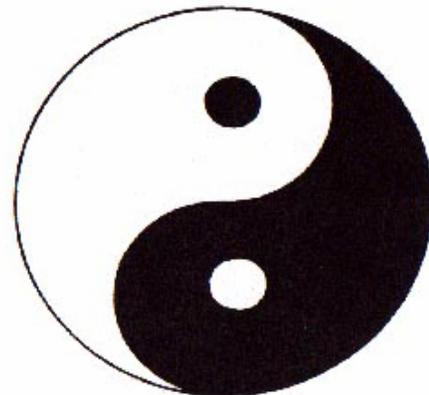
The Winter Season

The winter season belongs to the element of water and is related to the Kidney organ. Winter is a time for storage. The climate is colder and many of the plants and animals have gone into hibernation. This is the most Yin time of the year, but if we study the Taiji diagram we understand that this time also holds the seed of Yang. If the Yang was not contained within the Yin there could be no change. The winter season also corresponds to midnight as this is the most Yin part of the night but at the same time it holds within it the potential for the dawn or the birth of Yang. In this way the changes of the day directly correspond to the changes of the seasons.

The Kidneys are very important in Chinese Medicine. They store the Jing which is the most important vital substance for a person's well being and health. Jing is the material basis for the body's Energy (Qi) and Spirit (Shen). The strength of the Kidneys also affects the strength of the bones and the bone marrow. The Kidneys also control the functioning of the reproductive organs.

The Yellow Emperor's Cannon of Internal Medicine refers to the months of winter as "the season of 'shutting and storing'". To preserve the health in this season one must guard against the cold. One should go to bed early and get up late after the sun has risen. Exhausting exercise that causes profuse perspiration should be avoided.

Sitting meditation is a good practice to focus on in this season. During the small cycle of change during the day the midnight hour holds a special place for Daoist cultivators because it corresponds to the true birth of Yang energy that is contained within the greatest Yin (winter). Exercises that focus on the Kidneys are also appropriate for this season. An example would be the Bear Frolics Qi Gong.



Taiji Diagram

Overview of Taiji Quan

Taiji Quan is an art with Daoist origins. Like the Dao, Taiji Quan is hard to talk about because it encompasses so many different aspects. Taiji Quan can be described as a physical exercise, Qi Gong, a martial art, and a spiritual practice. The origin of Taiji Quan is very obscure but the benefits gained from practice are not. Taiji Quan is just one of many ways to experience Daoism.



**Yang style Taiji Quan Posture:
Part the Horse's Mane**

Like most Daoist exercises Taiji Quan works with energy or Qi. The form and the principles of Taiji Quan are in accord with Daoist philosophy. The beginning posture of the form is called the Wuji posture. Wuji is the state of nothingness before Taiji (the two energies of yin and yang). While in the beginning posture (Wuji) the practitioner calms his mind and a state of tranquility is achieved throughout the body. From this posture the practitioner then moves into the form. When movement starts the body as entered into the state of Taiji (yin and yang are differentiated). This appears in the body as insubstantial or empty and substantial or full. At the end of the form the practitioner once again returns to the Wuji posture and the state of nothingness. This process of beginning in nothing and returning to nothing mimics all creation in the universe. Everything begins from nothing and returns to nothing. This is in direct correlation to the Dao De Jing when it states in chapter forty two "the Dao begot one / One begot two." The Dao begot nothingness or Wuji and the nothingness (Wuji) begot the two (Yin and Yang). This differentiation of Yin and Yang is Taiji Quan.

When practicing the form the whole body must be relaxed and the tongue must touch the roof of the mouth. This will connect the Du and the Ren meridians. If the body is tense the Qi will not be able to flow and the mind will not be able to direct the movements. The form is practiced in a relaxed manner very slowly and it should appear rounded and have no breaks. The Taiji classics

state: be still as a mountain, move like a great river. This means that when standing still you should have the same intention as a mountain, unmovable, and when moving you should look like a great river, ever flowing. By practicing in this way, relaxed and slow, the Qi will naturally start to flow.

The differentiation of Yin and Yang on a basic level means that the weight is clearly divided between the legs. The leg with the weight on it is considered Yang or full and the leg without the weight on it is considered Yin or empty. Also, like the Taiji Diagram shows, extreme Yang changes into Yin and vice versa. In the form this is demonstrated when the weight is fully shifted on to one leg it is then shifted to the opposite leg.

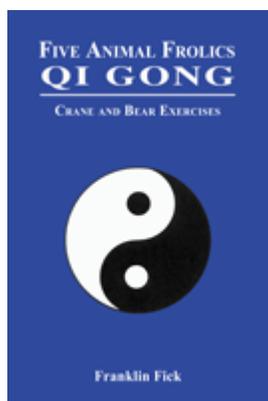
The slow movements of the form and the constant weight shifting give Taiji Quan many of its health benefits. The muscles of the legs get an aerobic workout from practicing the form. This is important because the legs contain the largest muscles in the body. Because of the slowness of the movements the practitioner should never get out of breath. This makes the practice of Taiji Quan adequate for the weak or old as well as the young and healthy.

On the physical level the movements of the form help to loosen the joints and strengthen the body. This is done through what is traditionally called silk reeling. What this means is that the movements of the form twist the joint in one direction, then the other. Moving the body in this way strengthens the tendons and ligaments of the body. This twisting motion also works to generate and store internal energy. The form done slowly with this silk reeling energy helps to realign the body so that it can move as a whole unit. Moving as a whole unit is what gives Taiji Quan its effectiveness as a martial art.



**Chen style Taiji Quan Posture:
Pull Back**

New Book Now Available



Five Animal Frolics Qi Gong: Crane and Bear Exercises

By: Franklin Fick

120 Pages 130 Illustrations

\$14.99 Order at www.shenlongpub.com

The Five Animal Frolics are an ancient set of exercises used for strengthening the body, harmonizing the flow of internal energy, and tonifying the internal organs. This book offers easy to follow detailed instructions on the Crane and the Bear exercises.

The Crane Frolics Qi Gong Exercises strengthen the heart, Lungs, and circulation. The Bear Frolics Qi Gong Exercises strengthen the kidneys, urogenital, and digestive systems.



**Yang style Taiji Quan Posture:
Brush Knee Twist Step**

The other thing that gives Taiji Quan its effectiveness as a martial art and as a health exercise is its use of the mind and the cultivation of the spirit. First the mind must sink the Qi to the lower Dan Tien, which is located about 3 inches below the navel. Once this is achieved the mind can direct the Qi to move the body. The principle is that the mind leads the Qi and the Qi moves the body. The classics said, 'first in the mind, then in the body'. This means that before the body can move, the mind or the spirit must direct it. The movements are practiced slowly so that the spirit and the mind can harmonize with the body. The practitioner should seek stillness in motion. At the basic level the mind is not concentrated on anything but the form. This means that when you finish the form you should not remember doing the form because the mind is completely in the present. At the higher level of practice the form becomes a meditation.

Along with being a moving meditation, Taiji Quan is also a method of Daoist Alchemy. By keeping the Qi in the lower Dan Tien the form works as a Qi Gong exercise to store and generate Qi. One of the main things to observe and practice is that the spine has to be straight. The straightness is ensured by relaxing the hip joints and sacrum downward. This will tip the pelvis slightly forward, which straightens the lower part of the spine. To straighten the upper part of the spine you should have the sensation that the crown of the head is suspended from above. Practicing this way strengthens the spine and also allows the spirit to travel up to the brain.

When practicing keep the mind and the breath concentrated into the lower abdomen (Dan Tien). This means the inhalation causes expansion of abdomen and the expiration causes the contraction of the abdomen. This stimulates the internal organs and gives them what can be considered a massage.

In Daoist Internal Alchemy, putting the mind in to the lower Dan Tien is called putting the fire underneath the water. Once enough Qi is in the lower Dan Tien the Small Heavenly Cycle will start to open. This happens naturally during the form. As you inhale the breath and the Qi collect in the lower Dan Tien. As you exhale, the pelvis tips slightly forward and the energy travels up the Du Meridian to the brain. Further development opens the large heavenly cycle and condenses Qi into the bone marrow. This has health benefits for all the body's system and makes Taiji Quan a very powerful martial art.

The final stages deal with training the spirit and returning to the void, Wuji.

Kung Fu Conditioning: Fingertip Pushups

One of the important aspects of training in the martial arts is the training for strength. The strength of the wrists, hands, and fingers is very important. One exercise that helps build this strength is fingertip pushups. Although this exercise is very common many people are not performing it correctly. Hopefully this short article will help correct this.



Correct Hand Position



Incorrect Hand Position

The proper hand position of fingertip pushups is to have the body supported by the finger tips and not the finger pads. This is very difficult but with proper training it becomes achievable. The traditional pushup position where you are supporting your body with your hands and feet might be too difficult if you are just beginning this exercise. If this is the case you can start with your knees on the ground. Another variation is to stand a little distance from a wall (about arms length), place your fingertips on the wall, and perform pushups as you would normally only now you are pushing yourself away from the wall.

It is important to keep in mind that in the beginning your finger strength will have to catch up to your arm and chest strength. Do not overdue it and progress slowly to avoid injury. Remember that

over time you will get stronger so do not get discouraged. It is not a race or a competition.

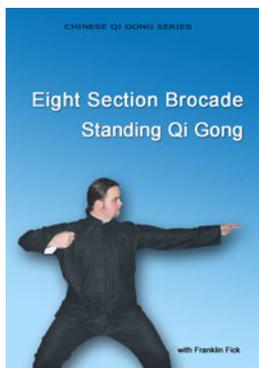
When you are able to perform the fingertip pushups fully you can make the exercise harder by removing one finger at a time starting with your pinky finger. With the pinky finger removed you will be only supported by the thumb, index, middle, and ring finger of each hand. As you continue to get stronger you can remove the ring finger as well. Continue until you are able to do push ups supported by your thumb and index finger only. Another interesting variation is to remove the thumb and only support yourself on the four finger of each hand as you do pushups.

After you finish doing your fingertip pushups it is good to clench your hands into tight fists to help to counterbalance the strain on your tendons caused by this exercise. This is very important to avoid injury and keep yourself healthy.



**Clench the fist
after performing
fingertip pushups
to avoid injury.**

New DVD Available Soon



Eight Section Brocade Standing Qi Gong

By: Franklin Fick

Will be available at www.shenlongpub.com

These exercises are non strenuous and simple to learn but they hold great benefit for people who can find the time to practice them on a regular basis including: reducing stress and tension, promote the free flow of qi and blood in the body, and strengthening the body and the internal organs.

The Eight Section Brocade Qi Gong is a very old and extremely popular Qi Gong set. Qi Gong literally means exercises to work with the body's energy or Qi. There are two versions of this set. This DVD teaches in detail the standing version of this set.

New DVD Series Available Soon

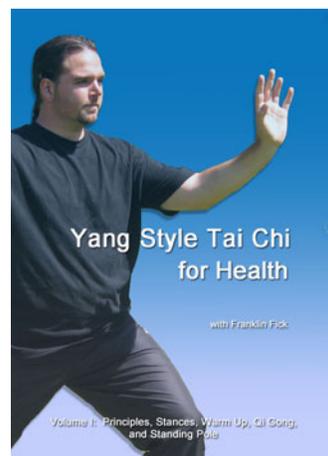
Yang Style Tai Chi for Health

By: Franklin Fick

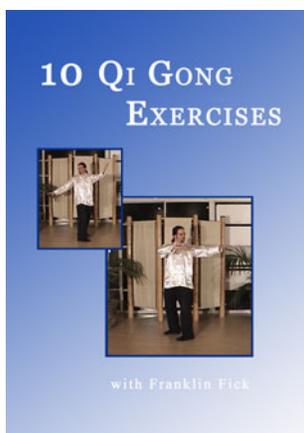
This **5 Volume series** will be available at www.shenlongpub.com

This series covers a complete training program including Concepts and Basic Principles, A Set of Warm-up Exercises that stretch and strengthen the entire body, The Practice of Single Postures, Standing Meditation, Qi Gong, The Yang style 24 Movement Short Form, and the Yang style Long Form.

This series is structured and presented in a systematic way to maximize the ease of learning. This is not just a demonstration but a detailed instructional series designed so that you can understand the concepts and principles and apply them to your own practice for continuous self correction and learning.



New DVD Now Available



10 Qi Gong Exercises

By: Franklin Fick

DVD-R format Approximate Running Time: 50 min.

\$39.99

Order at www.shenlongpub.com

This DVD teaches a set of ten non strenuous exercises that are easy to learn.

The core of this Qi Gong set is a simple standing meditation which gathers and stores energy in the body.

Each exercise starts from this standing position and at the end returns to it.

These ten exercises stretch and strengthen every joint in the body with a special emphasis on opening and regaining movement in the spine. This allows the Qi and Blood to circulate more freely which in turn provides the nourishment that the body needs.

Bringing Traditional Chinese
Kung Fu and Qi Gong to You.

Upcoming Events

Shen Long Publishing

www.shenlongpub.com

E-mail: shenlongpub@hotmail.com

Instructional Books, Videos, Clothing,,
Training Tools, and Courses

Please check our website

Ongoing Classes - Tainan, Taiwan - please check www.internalkungfu.org

The Next Issue of the Spirit Dragon Journal

Will Feature

The Importance of the Spine
Kung Fu Conditioning: The Tide Exercise

Related Links of Interest

www.franklinfick.com

www.internalkungfu.org

www.shenlongpub.com



Changes and Things to Look For

Lots of things have changed and lots of things are planned for the future.

We relocated to Taiwan in the beautiful city of Tainan. Tainan is the oldest city in Taiwan and is filled with beautiful sites and many wonderful temples. The pictures to the left were taken at the largest park in Tainan City.

Right now we are starting to offer **classes both ongoing and private in Tainan, Taiwan**. For more information on what we offer please visit www.internalkungfu.org.



Shen Long Publishing will introduce many new titles this year. The **5 Volume Instructional DVD series “Yang Style Tai Chi for Health”** is almost out of the editing stage and should be available around the time of the next installment of the Journal. Several new Book titles are being worked on right now. Some will be out very soon and others because of the depth that they will cover will not be out for about a year. Please check www.shenlongpub.com for all the latest information.