

WHY BOXING

The ideals of the Tai Chi philosophy are to help oneself and other people, and to create and maintain harmony in the world. And yet the boxing is one of the traditional aspects of T'ai Chi Ch'uan. It is for defense, but for many people this appears to be a contradiction. They feel uncomfortable about learning self-defense because they abhor violence, and because it can bring out their latent aggression. Never the less, one must acknowledge that there is conflict and danger in the world, and that it is not correct to allow oneself and other people who cannot defend themselves to be overtaken by it. "It is not the Tao to let other people hit me". To be defenseless is to live in fear. The study of the boxing teaches one how to relate to power, and how to restore harmonious relationship. Yet, it is not correct to use these skills as an aggressor to harm others. "T'ai Chi is for gentle people".

If one wants to learn the martial arts for the basics of defense and attack only, one does not have to study for a long time. One continues to train to learn the art. Before the advent of modern weapons, training in fighting skills was essential to self-preservation. Guns have made this obsolete. The Chinese refer to the study of martial arts as playing. Practicing T'ai Chi self-defense enhances ones understanding of the principles of T'ai Chi Ch'uan, enhances ones knowledge of the art as a whole, and – it's fun. It is good to practice with people who do the same style, and with people who do other martial arts. In this way, one learns to adapt ones technique to varying situations.

In practicing boxing applications and push-hands, it is important to make some striking contact on ones partner's body in order to determine the effectiveness of our technique. The contact should be light so that no injuries occur. If you can touch, you can hit. To think of touching rather than hitting not only reduces the possibility of injury, but also improves ones delivery. It is softer, faster, it does not telegraph the mind intent, and it reinforces the body dynamics that are more in keeping with T'ai Chi principles. It is best to train at the speed that does not exceed ones ability in order to to control the force of the blows. Your training partners lend you their skills and their bodies to practice with, and it is important that you respect and take care of them. There are various training methods and apparatus that can be used to develop and test ones striking power. Since there is always a possibility of accidents, it is essential that any T'ai Chi school that teaches the martial aspect should have some knowledge of the hit-fall medicine. If these injuries are not attended to promptly (especially internal injuries), they can become debilitating problems that interfere with ones training, and life in general.

One should avoid conflict unless confronted by physical violence. A non-aggressive response will often defuse tense situations. Slander, name calling and ridicule reflect the ignorance of the other person, and they are best ignored. It is not worth the trouble. If you fight you may be injured, or you may hurt the other person and then feel uneasy about seeing them again. There is always the possibility of revenge. It is best to "do the never mind". If one is attacked physically, one should try to dissuade the person by using evasive walking techniques and asking them to stop. If they don't desist, one may counter-attack on the third attempt – "the third time can come back". This approach is appropriate to someone with a high degree of skill, and not for the novice who would be well advised to respond more promptly. Mr. Lee said that in pre-revolutionary China, there were three situations in

which one could kill (“can for the other people to die”); to protect ones country, to protect or avenge the family; and to save from, or avenge rape.

Martial knowledge and skills should not be displayed (“not for the other people to see”); neither to gain recognition for oneself, nor to threaten others. People do not like braggarts or bullies. This type of behavior encourages others to challenge us, and then there is no end to trouble. If you do not push your face forward, you are less likely to lose it. Concealing ones knowledge is also advantageous in the boxing because the opponent “cannot know me” (my technique).

Traditionally, T’ai Chi schools did not have belts, degrees or uniforms, and to participate in competitions was considered to be unrefined. To compete is to try to prove oneself to be the best to other people. This creates bad feeling. It also draws a light around oneself, which invokes envy and challenge. T’ai Chi competitions are quite popular at this time. They cater to more common forms of the T’ai Chi exercise, and limited aspects of the martial training. Many practitioners now train almost exclusively for push-hands competitions, which allow very few actions and techniques. This can lead to the loss of many of the techniques and training regimes that comprise this art.

The highest ideal of T’ai Chi boxing is “not win – not lose”. In this way, one saves oneself without hurting others. If we think that we have to harm people to defend ourselves we are in trouble, because we would always be “armed” and defensive, and therefore more prone to provoking violence. When one looks at the world one sees so much pain, conflict, isolation and destruction due to separateness and self-interest. If we do not take the world into our hearts, how can it heal and be harmonious? If we do not achieve this we can never be safe, for all our knowledge of war.

* All quotes are from Mr. Lee Shiu Pak.

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