

Bonsai Tai Chi



The Blog

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Where has all the chum gone? (That's 'um' as in oompa by the way) I only ask because my training group seems to have 'lost' it recently.

With Doosyant, our senior instructor, the basic principles are paramount. Yi (intention) is the big ticket thing. Soong or sinking another. But chum, heaviness, is what gets you into another person and is critical if you are trying to make things 'work'.

Training with Alan Ding we were working on the punch-up-punch-down sequence. Testing punch-down Alan would hold our elbow and wrist and nobody could move an inch. We tested each other and some of us made it work more or less but it was getting physical and Alan was not satisfied. We did lots of exercises to help us get it but I had the feeling we were missing something.

Then, training with Doosyant again and this time working on 'punch the phoenix's ears', a double punch round and up towards a centre about head height, Doosyant, testing us asked "What's missing?" "Yi" comes the group answer. "Chum" says Doosyant.

Chum is a quality of heaviness. If you put your hand onto your partner and relax, the chances are that if your partner moves away your hand will still be supported by your arm. Chum requires letting everything go. Being completely soft, opening your joints and connecting. Learn to do this as soon as you touch someone, add soong and yi at the same time and the chi will send them flying.

Talking about testing, testing form positions is a very important part of our tai chi. It makes sure that students are doing the form correctly and are able to remain stable while moving from one position to another.

A lot of people misunderstand what testing is about. There is a tendency, especially with new students, to think that they are 'testing' tai chi itself. I have worked with people who, when asked to test a position, will attack it with all of the strength they can muster. "I need to prove to myself that it 'works'," they will tell you. This entirely misses the point.

Testing form positions is a two-way street. Both people can learn from it. The tester pushing or holding the person performing the position or move needs to be sensitive to what the other person is doing. To feel the dynamic, to provide enough pressure for the other person to work with but not so much that they can't hold the position or make the move. That way they both learn. ☯