

Internal Fighting Arts

Tai Chi Workshop Looks at Mechanics, Self-Defense



A variety of martial artists attended Sifu Ken Gullette's workshop on the self-defense applications of the Chen 38 form on Saturday, May 16. Students ranged from white belts to high-ranking black belts in karate, Shaolin, and taekwondo. The 3-hour workshop was videotaped for an upcoming DVD on the Chen 38 form. The workshop is also being broken down into video lessons for the online school at <http://www.internalfightingarts.com>.

Sifu Gullette guided the group through body mechanics and self-defense applications from several movements in the form.

"As they learned how to relax and take their partners to the ground even easier than before, I could see their faces light up as they realized the relaxed power of tai chi," he said. "It was a beautiful thing to see."

In the top photo at left, Sifu Gullette demonstrates an arm break during "Buddha's Warrior Attendant Pounds Mortar," the second movement in the Chen 38 form. In the bottom photo at left, he shows a student why it's not a good idea to over-commit yourself and lose your centered stance when pushing your opponent.

The workshop drew 17 attendees with less than two weeks advanced notice. More workshops will be scheduled throughout the year.

New Chen 38 DVD Provides In-Depth Instruction

In early June, Sifu Ken Gullette will release his 17th DVD, an in-depth instructional video on the Chen 38 form. The DVD will include nearly 3 hours of instruction covering multiple angles of the complete form, detailed instruction in each individual movement with an emphasis on body mechanics, and self-defense applications for each movement in the form. This will be the most complete DVD on the Chen 38 form ever made.

The Chen 38 is a relatively new form, designed by Chen Xiaowang with elements of Laojia and Xinjia. Sifu Gullette studied the form with Grandmaster Chen and his students, including Master Ren Guangyi and disciples



such as Jim and Angela Criscimagna. The DVD will be available on Sifu Gullette's blog and websites: Blog - <http://www.internalarts.typepad.com> -- Website - <http://www.kungfu4u.com> -- Online School - <http://www.internalfightingarts.com>.

Like the Chen 19 form, the Chen 38 was designed after tai chi enthusiasts around the world requested a form shorter than Laojia or Xinjia that would fit in with their busy lifestyles and could be learned faster.

My Favorite Techniques

Insights into techniques and body mechanics for more powerful self-defense with Tai Chi - Hsing-I - Bagua

Hsing-I's Pi Chuan - Splitting Palm - Is More than a Palm Strike



Everyone knows that Pi Chuan is a powerful Hsing-I palm strike -- the fist posture that relates to the element metal. But there are many other applications for Splitting Palm besides striking.

In photo 1 on the left, an opponent punches and Sifu Gullette splits the technique with Pi Chuan, cutting across his opponent's arm and robbing it of its power while deflecting it away. This sets Sifu Gullette up for a counter-strike with his left hand.



In the second photo, the opponent tries to deliver a low punch to the stomach, but Sifu Gullette splits the incoming force with a double-palm block. This particular block is delivered with the body more than the arms. With the dan t'ien rolling forward and dropping, the shock delivered through the arms bounces the punch downward and away. The mistake beginners make is in doing the block with localized arm and shoulder muscle.



The next four photos shows the use of Pi Chuan against a cross grab. If you follow the Pi Chuan form, you raise the arms in a blocking action that turns the opponent's arm. Turn the blocking hand over to grab the opponent's wrist while the other hand delivers the Splitting Palm to the triceps, becoming a powerful armbar in the final photo.

The key thing to remember about Pi Chuan and the other fist postures is to capture the essence of Splitting, or Drilling, Crushing, Pounding, and Crossing. From there, your creativity will unlock many applications.

In the DVD, *Hsing-I Class Volume 2, the Fighting Applications of the Five Fist Postures*, you'll find 2 1/2 hours of instruction with dozens of applications for all five fist postures. The DVD can be found on Sifu Gullette's websites or blog.





The Philosopher's Corner by Sifu Ken Gullette

When the Worst Happens, Will Your Beliefs Hold Up?

In 1979, when my mother found out that I no longer believed in the almost fundamentalist Christian religion I was raised in, she predicted, "If something happens to one of his children, he'll be back on his knees." She had no way of knowing what was about to happen a few months later.

My second daughter, Shara, was born on September 12, 1980. Six weeks later, I put her to bed for the night. She didn't wake up the next morning, a victim of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. Naturally, I was devastated with a grief so deep, I didn't know how anyone could recover from it.

At the funeral home, I took her little body out of her tiny white casket and held her in my arms as distressed relatives tried to comfort me. I'm sure they thought I had lost my mind, but I hadn't. As I sat there with my little girl in my arms, an occasional pink drop of embalming fluid coming from her nose, a little voice in the back of my mind told me that I was going to make it through.

"Death is a part of life," I was telling myself silently. "If you're going to accept life, you must accept the fact that occasionally, the unnatural occurs. It isn't natural for a child to die before the parent, but it does happen. And you'll get through it."

The day after the funeral I was driving in my car. The sun was out, the sky was blue, with beautiful white clouds highlighted against the blue background. I looked at the sky and was enveloped by a feeling -- the love of life. "Throw anything at me," I thought. "I'll do my best to ride it out. I love this amazing journey."

The death of my daughter affected me for years. In a way, I was walking wounded. But I was able to center myself through it all. Rather than fall back on my knees and embrace an invisible being that I no longer believed in, I was comforted by my Taoist philosophies, and I managed to survive the storm.

Last December 19th, I underwent my third heart surgery of 2008. I had developed an erratic heartbeat called "atrial fibrillation." Too much electrical activity caused my heart to flutter rather than beat properly. There was a danger of stroke. Rather than take blood thinners for the rest of my life like many people do, I wanted it fixed so I could dive fully back into the martial arts.

During this third surgery, a week before Christmas, my heart was fixed, but while I was on the table, I aspirated something from my stomach into my lungs, developing pneumonia that I've been working to overcome for more than five months now.

In February, the constant coughing for more than a month caused me to start coughing up blood. I had torn something in my throat or lungs. A couple of weeks later, a pulmonologist ran a scope down my throat to take a look. When I came to, he said words that I absolutely didn't expect:

"I saw a small tumor in your left lung."

It took a few moments to hit me. This was not good news. There was a very real chance that I wouldn't live long. Emotions started flowing, but one very real thought came to the surface.

I was not afraid to die. I just didn't want to leave early. Nancy and I met just 7 years ago, and we have three grandchildren, and I expected to be around to be their best pal as they grew up. Now, there was a chance that might not happen.

It took one day for the shock to subside, and I centered myself. I did standing stake, calming my mind and body, and recapturing the feeling that I've had so many times during the past 35 years -- a feeling of connection to life, to nature, to the universal energy that gave birth to everything. When I was born, I had just been through an eternity of peace and I had no complaints. There is nothing wrong with returning there. We all will return there eventually -- some sooner, some later, but in the end, the timeline won't matter at all.

The doctor was wrong. There was no tumor. I felt relief, and at the same time, contentment in knowing that once again, I was able to use the peaceful philosophy of American Tao to remain balanced during a storm.

Guest Editorial by Sifu Phillip Starr

The First Discipline

In any endeavor, particularly that of striving to learn and acquire skill in the martial arts, there's a lot of noise made about discipline. For all the talking about it and understanding that it's the first ingredient in the making of a real martial arts practitioner, it's worthless if action isn't taken. It remains little more than an intellectual curiosity...

The other day as I walked out onto my patio to bond with my favorite piece of training equipment – the striking post (known in Chinese as “da zhuang” or “hit post” and in Japanese as “makiwara” which means, “rolled straw”) – I reflected on the meaning of discipline. Now, I work an overnight shift (which, as many of you know all too well, is something I loathe) and getting out of bed after only 5 hours of sleep, getting cleaned up and dressed, and heading out to the back patio is something I usually do every day. And there she is; my striking post, beckoning me to caress her. And caress her I do, several hundred times with each hand.

I thought about how one must concentrate and strike the post just right every time...otherwise, it can be a very painful experience. And I considered how one must discipline oneself when practicing form; the stance, the footwork, the body shifting, the techniques, the shengxin...everything has to be just so. Lots of discipline!

And then it struck me that there's a discipline that comes before any of these, a discipline without which martial skill cannot possibly be developed. It's the most important discipline; the one that leads all of the others. And here it is:

The First Discipline is...showing up for practice!

Okay, so it doesn't sound very esoteric but think about it. It really IS the first discipline because if it isn't observed, none of the other disciplines can be applied! Whether it involves attending class or simply “showing up for training” at home, it's the same thing...the First Discipline. And if you don't do what it tells you, you'll never get anywhere in martial arts (or anything else).

And if you observe the First Discipline, there you are! You've shown up for training! You've gone to the trouble to get dressed and show up so you might as well do it right, right? I mean, if you're not going to train correctly and give it your best why bother even showing up in the first place?

So there I was, facing my second wife (the striking post) and I was tired because I hadn't had enough sleep. My legs ached (probably because I'm old) and I hadn't even had a second cup of coffee. BUT I was THERE! I was on the patio with her, so...I might as well do it and do it RIGHT! And I chambered my fist and began my first series of punches.

That's when I realized that the First Discipline is SHOWING UP. And if you adhere to it's simple principle, the rest is easy!

Sifu Philip Starr is the founder of Yiliquan and Sifu Ken Gullette's teacher from 1987 to 1991 (Ken earned a black sash in Yiliquan, learning the basics of Hsing-I, Tai Chi and Bagua). Starr was named to the *Inside Kung-Fu Hall of Fame* in 1991. He is the author of “The Making of a Butterfly,” “Martial Mechanics,” and his next book, “Martial Maneuvers” will be published August 4 and will be available at amazon.com and in bookstores. Sifu Starr lives and teaches in the Omaha area.

Three Crucial Stances in Tai Chi, Hsing-I and Bagua



Each of the three main internal arts has its own unique primary stance, although the stances share certain qualities that make them internal.

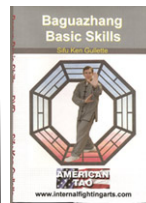
The photos above show--from left to right--Hsing-I's San Ti stance, Bagua's Dragon stance, and the standing stake stance from Tai Chi.

When performing San Ti, more of your weight is on the rear leg but you maintain a centered stance. Your lower back is relaxed. You maintain downward energy in your lower hand (the thumb pointed at the dan t'ien) and maintain ground from the rear leg through the upper hand. This stance is wonderful for meditation and building leg strength, developing a sense of peng, and learning to drop your energy. Change sides to work the other leg.

In the Dragon stance, the waist is turned toward the center of the circle. More weight is on the rear leg, thighs are turned slightly inward, and there is ground in both hands. The lower hand is protecting the ribs and you are looking through the Tiger's Mouth part of the upper hand. This is also an excellent stance for meditation, building leg strength and learning to relax and drop your energy. Change sides to work the other leg.

The third photo shows me coaching a new student in the standing stake position. Some say that all stances in Tai Chi are just a variation of standing stake. Its benefits include building leg strength, teaching you to develop a feeling of peng, and you can even do subtle silk-reeling exercises while standing. Stand and meditate in these postures at least 10-30 minutes daily and you'll see a great improvement in your art.

Check Out These Popular DVDs



Basic Bagua Skills

The skills you need to build a solid foundation for baguazhang. Two and a half hours of instruction on one DVD. A great bargain!



Hsing-I Straight Sword

Learn a great Hsing-I straight sword form and fighting applications. Bonus section -- straight sword techniques for any style.



Chen Broadsword Form

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Tai Chi Push Hands

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A website member in Oakland, CA



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