

In ancient China, physicians and Taoist sages made acute observations of the effects of climate, and other natural phenomena on living organisms. Rather than merely recording data, these individuals saw deeply into the patterns inherent in the natural world. This allowed them to both understand and articulate certain principles that could be applied universally to the fields of medicine and physical training.

In time a number of these principles became part of Chinese thought, and were adopted by martial arts practitioners (especially those of the *nei jia* or internal schools), because they had practical and effective applications to training and health.

Deng Xiu Sheng was one of the great *xing-yi* boxers of his generation. Born in the late 19th century, he studied with many of most-famous teachers of the time, because as a doctor of Chinese medicine, he traveled all over northern China treating patients and studying martial arts. Deng's essay on the practice of martial

arts in accordance with the four seasons links the principles of Chinese medicine with martial arts training. His essay describes one of the foundational principles of Chinese medicine: that the *yang qi* increases in the spring and flourishes in the summer and that *yin* increases in the fall and flourishes in the winter.

In Chinese medicine, each season is described in terms of its energetic signature. The spring brings the renewal of life and growth after the dormancy of winter. Living things are renewed and hibernating animals reappear. The world warms up and is full of life and energy. In the summer, life flourishes and plants reach their full flowering and bear fruits as the *yang* energy reaches its peak. In autumn, *yin* begins to grow and *yang* wanes, as the world grows colder. This is the time of the harvest when the earth and living things prepare for the winter. In winter, the *yang* energy is hidden and the *yin* is shown on the exterior. The energy of living things should be stored and nourished for the coming spring.

As human beings we are part of the natural world, no matter how much central heating and modern conveniences insulate us from climate and weather. The cycles of *yin* and *yang* that we observe in the natural world also occur within us and affect our health and well being. For this reason, Deng advised kung-fu practitioners to train in accordance with these seasonal fluctuations of *yin* and *yang* to preserve health and maximize the effect of training.

In the spring, getting up early and walking in nature allows the *yang qi* to circulate to the vertex (the DU 20 acupoint at the top of the head). This helps the liver *qi* to circulate smooth and unobstructed to the tendons and ligaments. Therefore, stretching and flexibility exercises will yield better results in the spring. Practice early in the morning when the sun comes up. Hard and vigorous training is appropriate and

healthy for the body in the spring.

The heart *qi* is more active in the summer. At this time, the fire of the heart circulates with the *yang qi* in the exterior of the body. The summer is a good time to rid the body of excess heat through hard training that causes perspiration. This will aid the heart *qi* and protect the body against autumn illness. Stretching and strengthening exercises are appropriate and more effective, because the muscles are warm and adequately nourished by the blood, which circulates more easily in the summer.

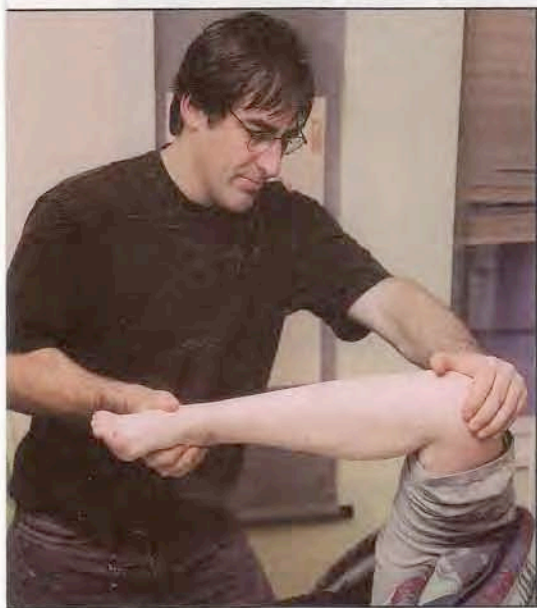
In autumn the balance of *yin* and *yang* is more equal. The *yin* and cold begin to grow as *yang* and warmth diminish. Practice should occur later in the day and be more balanced between "motion" (hard vigorous training) and "tranquility" (basic skills, and lighter more inward directed exercises such as meditation, *qi gong* and yoga).

In winter when earth is cold and the *yin* prevails, it is important to avoid sweating too much to prevent wind and cold from penetrating the muscles and joints. Deng advises training later in the day when the sun is out and it is relatively warmer. During the winter, one should focus on storing and nourishing *yin*, while conserving *yang*. Therefore, more dynamic exercise is reduced and stress is put on quiescent exercises: meditation, standing post exercises or slow practice of basic techniques is appropriate.

These are guidelines, not hard and fast rules. Athletes and martial artists who compete in the winter may have to train hard, but they can still benefit from these ideas by not expending their energy needlessly in other areas. Clinically, I have seen people improve their health and athletic performance by adhering to these principles. ☯

Tom Bisio's new book, A Tooth From The Tiger's Mouth, "How to Treat Your Injuries with Powerful Secrets of the Great Chinese Warriors," is available nationwide. For more information, visit www.tombisio.com or www.simonsays.com

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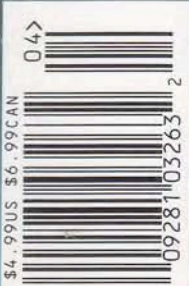
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