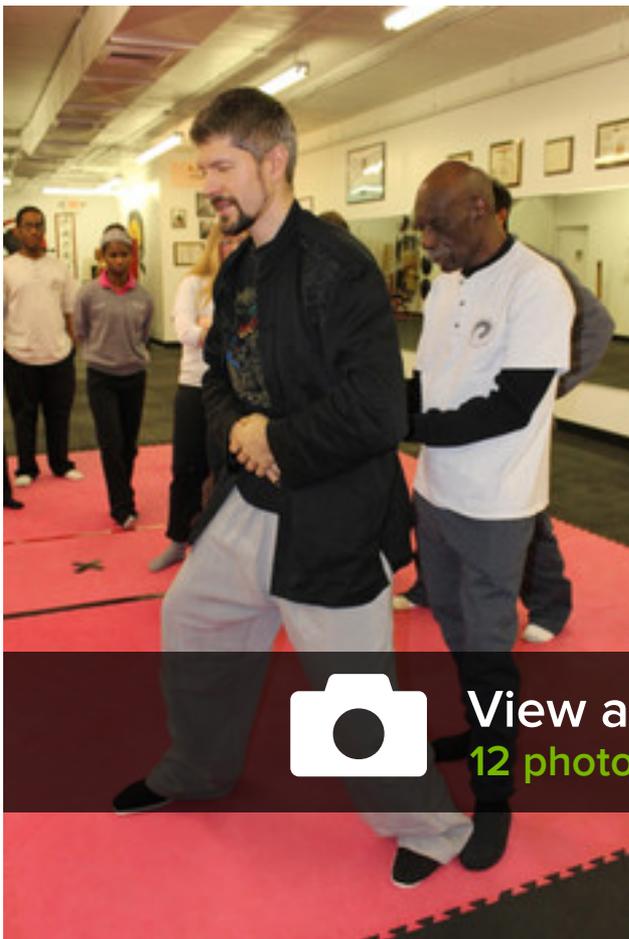


# Learned Neigong from Master Vladimir Sidorov (Photos)

March 21, 2013

4:03 PM MST

In [Tai Chi](#) (Taiji) practice, there is a famous saying “Lian Quan bu lian gong, lao lai yi chang kong” it translates as “if you practice Tai Chi without practicing basic kung fu, you will accomplish nothing in the end”. Your form may look exquisite but it will lack of true martial art prowess. Your health will improve but cannot maximize the incredible benefits you could otherwise obtain. Some wonder what the basic kung fu is. To true Tai Chi masters, it is the cultivation of internal alchemy or Qi and some call it Neigong (or internal kung fu). Unlike external forms, Neigong is extremely hard to learn, partially because it is challenging for instructors to teach. Unless you are lucky and find someone who can lead you step-by-step, you will stumble your way through the journey and not necessarily reach your goal. Master Vladimir Sidorov of Russia has developed a systematic way to cultivating Qi. Last month, he was in St. Louis and hosted two small workshops with experienced Tai Chi practitioners. The overall response from the attendees was extremely favorable.



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Before he started the workshop, he hung a Chinese scroll with four large characters on it: “Tian, di, ren and he” or “sky, earth, people and harmony”. He explained these represent a formula how Chen Style Hun Yuan Tai Chi works. Practitioners should extract the Yang energy from sky and Yin energy from earth, work their own Dan Tian thus producing physical as well as spiritual harmony. This sounds abstract or esoteric to some. But Vladimir’s method brings clarity and de-mystifies it.

During the first workshop, the first exercise Master Sidorov taught was “contracting and expanding Dan Tian”. He told practitioners to part their legs shoulder width apart with the knees softly bent, slightly tug the tailbone, put one hand over the Dan Tian (or three fingers width below the belly button) and the other hand over it (it does not matter which hand touches the lower abdominal wall). First, contract the Dan Tian or pull the lower abdominal wall toward Ming Men (an important pressure point which is situated in the back along the spine in between kidneys). Then relax so Dan Tian returns to a normal position. The last part is to expand Dan Tian by pushing the abdominal wall all the way out.

Master Sidorov said there are a few principles to adhere to: 1. Relax your entire body; 2. Do not try to sync your breathing with the contraction and expansion. Just breathe normally; 3. Keep the waist and the lower back stable and do not push it back or out while contracting; 4. Exercise them as slowly as possible; 5. Watch your Dan Tian as it moves; 6. Sense the Yin energy or emptiness in front of your lower abdomen as you contract and feel the Yin energy or emptiness at the back as you expand; 7. Feel the energy move like waves; 8. Pay close attention to your Dan Tian when it is at a normal or neutral position because this is the state of Hun Yuan when Yin and Yang are balanced and feel the stillness at the Hun Yuan state. One analogy he used was that Qi moves like wind with Dan Tian contraction and Ming Men is a sail. The stronger the wind, the more the sail extends. As one gets used

to this first exercise, Sidorov said that he could squeeze kidneys outwards as he expands Dan Tian. This is a good way to massage the kidneys. After I tried this for a minute, my kidneys felt very warm. This exercise can be done with a Tai Chi ruler or stick held in one hand. It is better to find a stick with a ridge in the middle, which will provide an extra benefit of massaging the pressure point of Qi Hai (or Ocean of Qi) as you contract and expand Dan Tian.

Once the students practiced this exercise for a while, he asked them to pair up with another person in a Push Hands stand stance facing each other. The first person would continue the same contracting/expanding exercise as before while the second person put hands on the first person's helping to push as the first person contracted. He also partnered with one student and provided hands-on coaching. After a few minutes, they changed and the first person pushed the second person. He asked the class to rotate and continue to change partners so everyone had a chance to work at least half of the class and him. Sidorov said this exercise had similar effect as regular Push Hands. Practitioners learn how to listening to other's energy.

Back in Russia, Master Sidorov has his students do this type of drill for nine months. The next sets of exercises for his Neigong training include opening/closing Dan Tian either barehanded or with a stick, contracting/expanding Dan Tian with moving steps, Mo Pan Gong, and Silk Reeling with a stick. He cited Grandmaster Feng Zhiqian's famous saying about stepping like a phoenix and arm (movement) like a dragon. His footwork training includes 14 different steps. It takes three years to complete Neigong training.

During his second workshop in St. Louis, Master Vladimir taught Mo Pan Gong. Again, the body should be relaxed. Place the feet shoulder width apart. Extend both arms out while bent with both hands holding a Tai Chi stick while move the hips and Dan Tian backwards. Move the bent arms to the right and the hips along with Dan Tian to the left. Move the bent arms close to the body while the hips and Dan Tian back to the normal position. Move the bent arms to left while the hips and Dan Tian to the right. In other words, the arms and Dan Tian go opposition direction. This seemingly easy maneuver can be challenging for beginners but once you get a hang of it, you need to go as slow and smooth as possible. This soft-spoken Russian master constantly reminded workshop attendees that "man-man-di (or slowly in Chinese)" and "qing-qing-di (or softly in Chinese)". Once learned, they reversed the arms and Dan Tian movements. Practitioners were impressed when Master Vladimir demonstrated the martial art applications of Peng (ward off), Lu (roll back), Ji (squeeze) and An (push) in these simple movements. He proclaimed that Hun Yuan is a very logical system.

In the past eight years, Master Sidorov went to China to study with Grandmaster Feng Zhiqian in Beijing, China at least two dozen times. In his observation, the difference between Chinese people and westerners is that westerners like to understand the theory and principles more but Chinese practice more. To him, there is no shortcut to cultivate Qi. When asked how many hours he practices outside teaching daily, he said that I don't really set the time aside to do it. Actually, he constantly contracted

and expanded his Dan Tian as we talked either standing or sitting. To him, cultivating Qi is part of his daily life. No wonder his Qi was so strong he could bounce people off easily.

Sifu Justin Meehan of St. Louis invited Master Vladimir Sidorov to the States for friendship and knowledge exchange. It was a great opportunity for me to learn the profound art of the Hun Yuan system. It would be wonderful if Master Sidorov visited the States in the future to host more workshops, not only in St. Louis but in other cities as well. To learn more about Master Vladimir Sidorov, read [From Russia with true Tai Chi power](#).

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