

# Weapon and Instrument of the Tao

by

Ken Van Sickle

Cheng Man-ch'ing said that his tai chi practice had three legs, the Tai Chi Form, Push Hands and Tai Chi Sword—which includes both the Sword Form and Fencing.

In the past, the sword was used for war or self-defense. In that case it was a weapon. Tai chi sword can also be practiced as a sport, as western fencing is a sport.

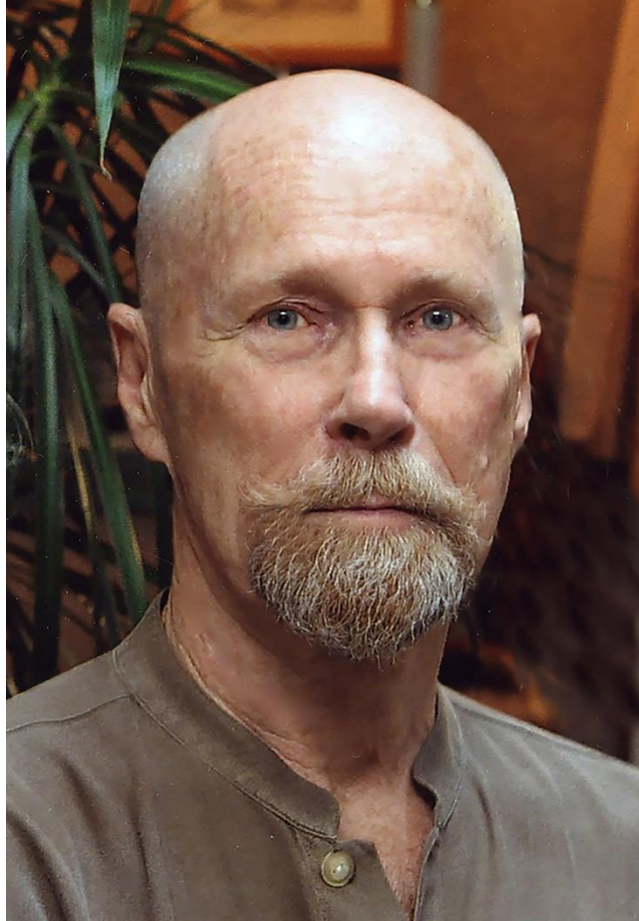
There are two functions that the tai chi sword practice will give the tai chi fencer, and there is no other instrument, be it a shovel, tennis racket, or violin bow that can be used to help in the use of *all* instruments.

Tai chi fencing is different from any other instrument because we stay in contact with the Other. I refer to the “Other” as the O's sword. Blade to blade, we use this contact for its intelligence.

We feel, we *listen* to the O's energy and intentions through the blades. In this way we get constant objective feedback and an acute awareness and sensitivity of the O.

We develop optimum use of the instrument relative to its two functions—both as a weapon and an instrument of the Tao.

The Other can also be called the One and is the partner with whom we are fencing. The Other and the One is also our Push Hands partner.



Ken Van Sickle was fascinated with sword play since he was a boy, and he studied some western fencing in the late 1950's. Later, Ken had the incredible opportunity to study with Grand Master Cheng Man-ch'ing from 1967 until 1975.

In Ken's own words: "From the first day that Cheng Man-ch'ing began teaching us Tai Chi Sword I participated in every class and fenced with him at every opportunity I could. I don't believe that anyone except Ed Young and Wolf Lowenthal have passed more time than I have practicing sword with the Master."

Over the last twenty plus years, Ken has taught Tai Chi Sword workshops in nine cities across Europe, Great Britain, and Israel, as well as in nine cities across the United States. He authored a book, titled *Tai Chi Sword*

which illuminates how Tai Chi Sword works practically and philosophically with the Tai Chi Classics.

Ken is also a professional photographer, well-known for his stunning black and white photography of New York and Paris in the 1950s and 60s.

During his eight years of study with Cheng Man-ch'ing, Ken turned his camera toward documenting Cheng Man-ch'ing's many classes, using the same eye for composition, atmosphere, balance, and motion that distinguishes his other work.

Ken is the cinematographer of the documentary feature *The Professor: Tai Chi's Journey West*. He and Terry Marks published the book *NYC T'ai Chi in black and white* filled with photographs of various tai chi classes throughout decades.

Ken's photographs can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's permanent collection.

Photos by Ken Van Sickle