

Misfortunes in Student – Teacher Relationship

by John Chow, of Tao of Tai Chi Chuan Institute, Melbourne, Australia

These are the misfortunes that a student or practitioner of martial arts should be on the vigil to avoid. There are many more, but the following should suffice:-

- 1) **Learning from, and following an unqualified teacher(s).** An unqualified teacher does not have sufficient knowledge, skill, experience, and understanding to transmit authentic Tai Chi Chuan. Even a teacher who is very knowledgeable, intellectually through much intellectual study, is unable to transmit authentic Tai Chi Chuan. However, a teacher who is not so knowledgeable, but who is skilful, experienced and has the correct and deep understanding of Tai Chi Chuan, will still be able to transmit genuine Tai Chi Chuan.
- 2) **Not learning from and following a qualified teacher who has integrity and character.** Our elders, seniors and parents have a subconscious influence on our way of thinking. Our teachers and priests wield a greater influence on us than realised. Students tend to acquire certain traits or attitudes from their teachers. If one's teacher is not of good character, one may acquire incorrect views, attitudes, and habits without realising it. Martial skill must be used constructively for defence and health. It is not for showing-off or intimidating others. One must be humble and amiable. The proper teacher teaches the student "Wu De".
- 3) **Not learning from and following a qualified teacher who is amiable to the oneself, and who is thoroughly willing to teach one without hiding the secrets.** Everybody wants to learn from the best martial arts teacher. But not everybody is suitable for studying under that best teacher. A warm and trusting relationship must exist between the student and teacher. The teacher must feel well disposed towards the student in order to pass down his secrets. The teacher must really want to pass down his secrets to the particular student, and really want the student to excel.
- 4) **Not having taken the opportunity to learn from a qualified teacher, but wasting one's time learning from other teachers.** Having a teacher who is qualified and is amiable to one, and is willing to teach one, is a very rare opportunity. But, if, for whatever reason, one fails to take advantage of this precious opportunity, one has foolishly let a precious opportunity slip by. It is not that one can not or should not learn from other teachers. One can, and should, and since one's teacher always wants one to excel, one would be permitted and encourage to learn from other teachers. However, most students pursue this activity to the limit of extremes - to the point that they, in effect, ignore their teacher to hanker after other teachers. Their teacher is their real source, and real home. Their teacher is willing, ready, able, and waiting with anticipation, but the student does not come forward but is hiding under the skirts of other teachers. What misfortune!
- 5) **Not having enough faith in the teacher.**
 - Not believing the instructions of the teacher.
 - Not believing the advice or guidance of the teacher.
 - Thinking that one's is smarter than the teacher. Relying on one's ingenuity instead of trusting the teacher's understanding.
 - Substituting one's innovations for the teacher's without consulting the teacher.

- 6) **Hiding techniques from one's teacher who then can not correct one's mistakes and is unable to guide one in new unfamiliar territory.** If in misguided error, one thinks one is very clever and has devised one's innovations to the teachings, one may not be at liberty to show to one's teacher or classmates, thinking these innovations are "special" and have an advantage over others. One may also have learnt the "special techniques" from other teachers and thus am unable to show it to one's teacher. It may also be felt that one's teacher may not know the topic or understand it well enough. Or, one may feel that one does not need to be reviewed and corrected, since other teachers are better than one's teacher. In such cases, the teacher, who is always so kindly disposed and amiable to the student is unable to review the student's "very special secrets", and thus unable to correct the student. Thus one's teacher is limited in helping the student who hides his "special innovations", or the "special techniques" learnt from other "better" teachers.
- 7) **Not always trying to learn as much as possible from one's teacher.** The teacher always wants the student to excel. The teacher always encourages the student to learn and practice as much and diligently as possible. The teacher is always waiting, in anticipation, for the student to arrive. The teacher always tries to make free time, and to re-allocate schedules in order to suit the student's time - sometimes at great sacrifice. However, many students are in the ceaseless habit of abusing the teacher's time and amiability. If any timing is merely mildly inconvenient, they will ask the teacher to change it, not caring whether it may greatly inconvenience the teacher (who does not mind, because the teacher will always want the student to learn). The teacher is always waiting for the student to arrive, but the student never arrives - most probably either enjoying somewhere else, or learning from another teacher. Thus, the student misses the opportunity to learn as much as possible from one's teacher.
- 8) **Hankering after and patronising other teachers, thinking that one can learn more from them than one can learn from one's teacher, and will gain an advantage, while ignoring the golden opportunities one has with one's teacher.** One teacher is qualified. Therefore, one can learn a lot from one's teacher, and rarely needs to learn from another teacher. If one's teacher has not taught one the "special techniques" one desires, then one should ask oneself why is this so, and if one can not find the answer, one should directly ask the teacher in private. Maybe one has a tendency not to patronise one's teacher, but habitually patronises other teachers so the teacher is still waiting very patiently for many years! Maybe one is perceived to pay more respect to other teachers, and so one's teacher is still perplexed what is going on, and when will this sordid state of flirtations end? Maybe one's teacher is more able than the other teachers, but does not have the reputation, nor pedigree, so the student wants to associate with teachers of higher status. This is a great disaster! The teacher is placed in a very uncomfortable position where his student does not look upon him as the true teacher, but will "skip boat" and jump into the camp of other teachers. So why should he teach his secrets to the student - so that the other teachers will be able to claim the credits due to himself? In any case, one's teacher will think "If the other teachers are so good that he ignores me and hankers after them like a dog after a bitch on heat, thinking that they can teach him what I can not teach him, then, he should sever the relationship and go to them. Do not waste his time here, and do not waste my time here waiting endlessly for him". In this case, one's

teacher will hold on to his secrets for a long time without teaching them, even when asked. The teacher is half-way ready to disown the student!

- 9) **Mixing teachings, styles and theory from other teachers, whether of the same art, or from another art, without guidance from a qualified teacher.** All teachers, generally, are more experienced than the student. When the student has mixed the theories and styles, there is much danger of error, which the student is not aware of. The student is likely to of bad habits, which are very difficult to rectify. Since one's teacher is always amiable to oneself, and always trying to make the student excel, the teacher will always correct one's errors and provide guidance.
- 10) **Not financially supporting one's teacher so that the teacher may free up his time and resources to teach one.** The Universal Law applies:- No matter how much the teacher is willing to give, in finality, you can only receive the same amount from the teacher that you gave the teacher. Even if the teacher teaches one all his secrets, trying so hard to transmit his personal secrets, if one has not generously given him abundantly in return, one is likely to end up having benefited little in the end. One must be generous to the teacher in heart, thought, deed and financially. Remember - the teacher spent a lot of money acquiring the secrets himself. In addition, the teacher sacrificed a lot of time, leisure, enjoyment, family life, career opportunities in order to acquire a bit of secret. Furthermore, the teacher spent many long hours practising the art, sometimes in discomfort and pain, having suffered beatings, injuries, and humiliation from his teachers, classmates, and opponents. An authentic teacher had many years of hard training. A university graduate has only 3 years and misses lectures a lot of the time, and fools around, yet we expect a good salary remuneration. A plumber or electrician fools around in school and has no commitment to study, and then goes to a technical college for 2 years, and works as a (salaried) apprentice for another 2 years, and earns a lot of money on qualification. Is it fair for the martial arts teacher to study and train so hard for 30 years, and not receive any comparable remuneration? Please do not think that you can have his secrets for a mere \$10,000. This is what is wrong with the martial arts world nowadays. The teacher is expected to be a charitable institution to students who set up their own big organisations and mercilessly rack of lots of money from the public. That is a hint.
- 11) Not supporting the teacher in his aspirations for his school, students, the art, and himself. Every teacher would like to have an ongoing school, have many good able students, promote and propagate his art, make a name for himself, and earn a livelihood. Ideally, the teacher's should have a strong and reliable group of students who can demonstrate their skills to the public at a moment's notice. Ideally also, the teacher should be able to afford proper premises which acts as the training place, meeting place, and office for the group. It is the responsibility of the students to assist the teacher in his aspirations.
- 12) **Mistakenly thinking that other teachers are more worthy of one's support and patronage.** Because of the teacher-student relationship, the teacher will always try to ensure the student excels in the art. It is like a parent-children relationship:- parents try their best to support and guide their children and will endure much discomfort to ensure their children get the best education. Therefore, whatever the student needs, the teacher will provide - if the student is wise enough to patronise the teacher. Other teachers are not the student's teacher, and so do not provide such level of support. It is a wonder how

- students hanker and patronise other teachers for years while ignoring their own teacher. Yet, despite the absence of proof that the student has benefited greatly from the “extra curricular patronage”, this strange occurrence continues. It is wise to support and patronise one’s teacher because the teacher will definitely teach one the secrets and guide one to mastery. To do otherwise is a misfortune.
- 13) **Not contributing to the development of the teacher’s training, knowledge, skills, and understanding.** One never finishes learning in the martial arts. Even the teacher has to keep on practising, training, and studying. It is the student’s to act as a training partner for the teacher. In this way, the student contribute to the teacher’s training and development. For example, after the famous Tai Chi Chuan master Cheng Man Ching moved to Taiwan from China, in order to further develop his Internal Power, he had a live-in student, William Chen, to assist him. In assisting the teacher to train and develop, one is witnessing, first hand, how the secrets of the teacher, and how the teacher’s secret training program is. This is an honour and an opportunity not to be missed, even if one has to pay a lot of money for it - remember:- this is the teacher’s personal secret, and there is seldom much deeper secret than this.
 - 14) **Leaving one’s teacher too early before having acquiring sufficient skill, proficiency, and understanding.** Learning and acquisition of proficiency is a long process. The student who leaves the teacher too early, may not have sufficient skill and understanding in the art to be independent, and may deviate from the correct way. The teacher is the reliable guide to gauge one’s level of attainment. It is advisable to regularly check with the teacher even after one has left his physical presence.
 - 15) **Being a teacher too early before having acquiring sufficient skill, proficiency, and understanding.** Most students entertain fantasies of being a teacher, but not every practitioner is skilled enough to be an authentic martial arts teacher. The training of an authentic teacher takes many long years of consistent hard practice, study, and training. The student should stay with the teacher and train as a student for as long as possible before becoming a teacher. Traditionally, a student is s student until the teacher explicitly request he opens his own school and be independent, or be his representative in a new school. In the West and in mainland China, students have transformed into teachers after a 3 week course. This produces unqualified teachers who do not have the skills, proficiency, and understanding.

15 August 2005

Written by John Chow, a practitioner of Chinese medicine, acupuncturist, masseur, healer and teacher of martial arts and spiritual paths.

Copyright:-

No part of this article can be used, quoted, copied in any form without the permission from the author.

For further information on this article, please contact John Chow at vajra_master@yahoo.com.