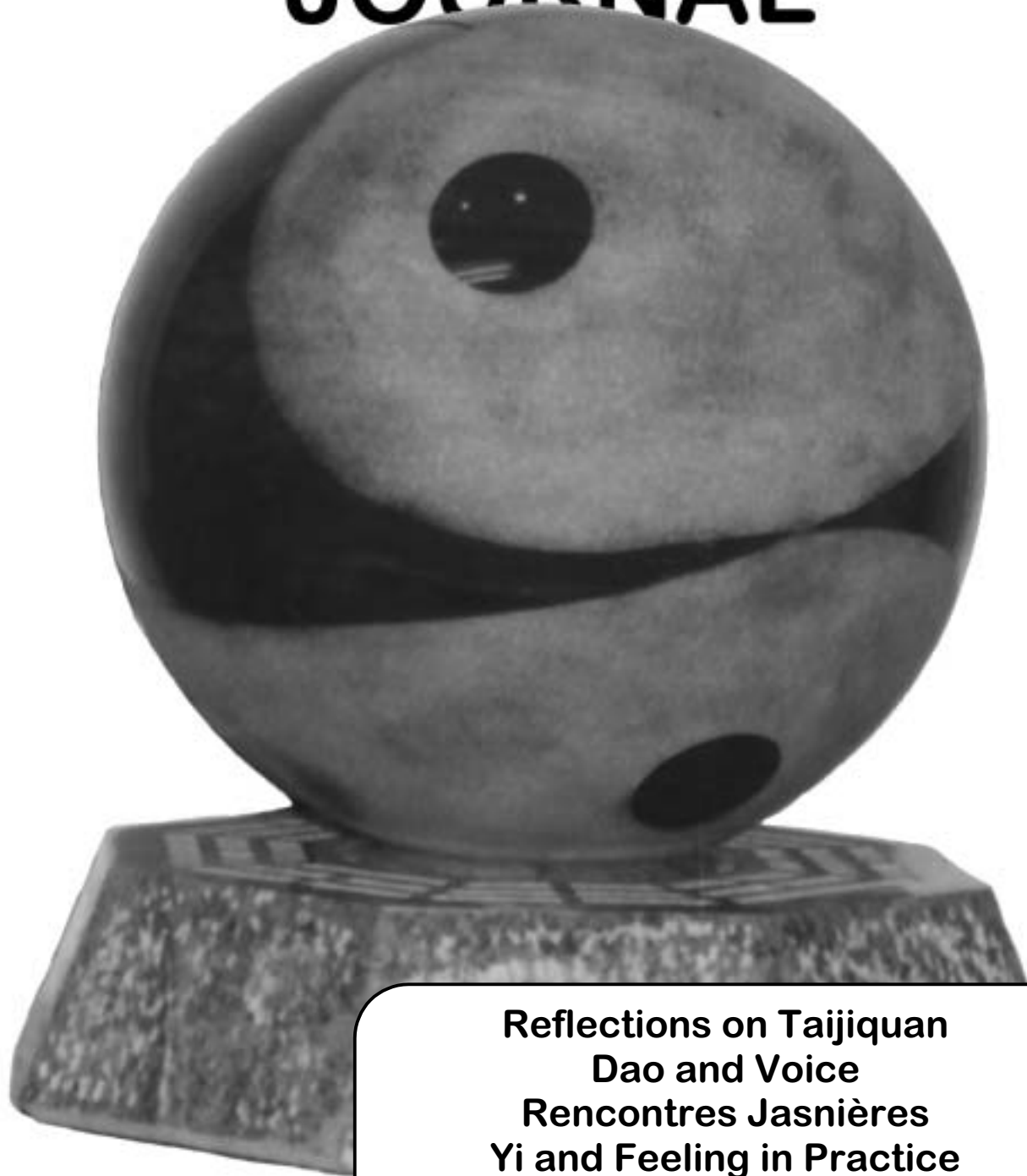


# **AYMTA JOURNAL**



**Reflections on Taijiquan  
Dao and Voice  
Rencontres Jasnières  
Yi and Feeling in Practice  
Jieqi and Zhongqi for 2004  
Ritualized Function in Our Practice**



## Rencontres Jasnères

Two AYMTA teachers who attended the annual workshop in Marçon, France, share some of their impressions with you.



### Scott Chaplowe

While I may not be able to pronounce it, I can report that *Rencontres Jasnères* is a delicious smorgasbord for the internal martial artist. It is a festival where people of various styles, levels, and languages gather to share knowledge and play martial

arts in a safe, supportive community. Having heard about the event for years, I finally made it there this summer as a teacher and participant, and am thankful that I did!

RJ takes place during the last Fri-Sat-Sun of July in the rural countryside of France (about two hours south of Paris). Since the late 1980s, this event has attracted people from around the world, and for good reason. RJ left me with a deeper appreciation and renewed enthusiasm for internal martial arts, as well as a host of new friends and acquaintances. In an era when martial arts is rapidly spreading throughout the world, eroding barriers of secrecy, dogmatism, exclusiveness and elitism, RJ is an open and welcome forum for cross-fertilization and evolution in the internal martial-arts community.

So, where do I begin? How about a few memory snapshots:

- Pushing among a field of people like a child gleefully running about in a candy store.
- Making huge bubbles under which children and adults merged in awe and play.
- Teaching taiji movements and applications while laughing in the steady rain.
- Dipping my body into the cool, relaxing lake after an afternoon of satisfying pushing.
- Lounging in camp with a fine glass of wine and a choice plate of cheese and, of course, a baguette.
- Exchanging eyebrow staff movements with other enthusiasts.
- Staying up late into the night in both heartfelt and lighthearted conversation.

One of the greatest testimonies of RJ was that despite the unseasonable rain experienced this year, it was nevertheless a wonderful experience. There were two periods of workshops in



**Body Mechanics: Lauren Smith and Scott Chaplowe**

the morning, during which a variety of teachers taught various classes ranging from form and weapons to pushing hands. In the afternoon, after a period for lunch and siesta, people met out on a field for open, noncompetitive pushing hands. For me, the latter was an extremely invaluable opportunity to play with a variety of people of different sizes, shapes, skills, backgrounds and attitudes.

As a teacher, I was in a somewhat awkward position of teaching three different workshops of separate themes, each of which could have easily occupied the whole weekend. I had initially proposed three topics that the RJ organizers would let me know which could best compliment the other workshops. Well, when I arrived, I saw a printed schedule listing me to each topic on each successive day. "Bend with the wind" and all went well. In my first workshop, "Pushing Hands Fundamentals," I introduced a variety of interactive exercises stressing generation, absorption, rooting, sensing and projection. It was a great way to start out the workshop, introducing me to about two dozen new friends to play and learn with.

On Day 2, my workshop drew upon the circle/spiral in taiji to explore the endless possibilities of applied movement, while maintaining underlying principles of relaxation, alignment and sensitivity in response to change. This workshop was memorable in that there was a steady rainfall, ensuring that the handful of folks who showed up were especially keen to learn. On Day 3, I was finally able to share with others the eyebrow staff that had accompanied me on my European travels prior to RJ. The morning drizzle stopped just in time for my class. It is fun introducing this weapon to beginners, and new movements to those with a background. Several of the people at RJ were practiced in the eyebrow staff in the same form and from the same teacher that initially introduced me to the eyebrow staff: Serge Dreyer. I was able to share additional movements and interactive exercises that I had since trained in, and prior to the last afternoon pushing-hands session, I even gave a demonstration in front of the whole gathering of the somewhat esoteric staff form I have been studying. This proved a

supportive venue for me to concentrate and focus on form presentation.

As a RJ participant, I spent my free morning sessions participating in a workshop on the short stick taught by Arun Song. It was hard to choose among all the other workshops, but I couldn't pass up the opportunity to examine another weapon, close to my primary weapon, but of different length and girth. Similarities, as well as different interpretations, deepened my understanding of movement in this medium. Of course, I also participated in the afternoon pushing hands. After an introduction to the whole gathering about the structure and guidelines of the pushing, a bell would ring every 10 or 15 minutes, signaling for people to change partners. (For beginners, an informal class took place on the side introducing principles). Ah, if you could see the smile on my face as I remember these afternoons. The exchanges were like conversations, some playful, some earnest, some exploratory, others cautious ... all unique opportunities to practice the principles of taiji in spontaneous interplay with another.

But the organized sessions, whether workshops or the afternoon pushing, are just one aspect of RJ. The qi flowed back into camp, where people intermingled with play and laughter, food and drink, children, music and dance, and (of course) more sharing of martial arts. I could produce a long list of old friendships renewed, and the many more new ones made. Suffice to say, I finally got to meet, or better yet push with, Jean-Luc Perot. And especially meaningful to me was to hang once more with one of my primary taiji mentors, and dear friend, Lauren Smith. I regretted not being able to attend the workshop Lauren taught during RJ itself, but I am very thankful that I stayed three days afterwards to participate in his follow-up pushing-hands workshop at the same location. It is worth noting that several of the teachers offer their own workshops that bookend RJ.

My only regret about my RJ experience was that Serge Dreyer was absent. Not only is Serge one of the initial organizers and primary teachers of the event, he was my introduction to and subsequently principal teacher of the YMT system. It was hard to believe that I was finally making it to RJ and he was to be absent, but he is hard at work completing his Ph.D. dissertation (a labor I well respect after my years in graduate school). Nevertheless, his presence was felt, and I found myself reflecting on something he once confided to me: one of the most profound ways taiji has enriched his life has been through the people it has brought into his life. RJ is certainly a testimony to this, and I am thankful to heartily confer.

I have often looked at taiji as a conversation. In the form, one's conversation is internal, which is at the core of self-inquiry. With a school or system, the conversation extends to the "family," which plays a critical role in one's development. At events such as RJ, the conversation expands to the larger community, in which one aspires to assimilate and integrate the principals more fully into their life and social interactions. While each aspect of the conversation is ultimately part of the whole, the latter is especially precious in that it is so rare, and yet so fulfilling.

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Scott teaches in Santa Monica, California



Scott teaching eyebrow pole



Charlie with group

### Charlie Adamec

*Rencontres Jasnières* (which I believe means a gathering in the Jasnières wine region of France) is an internal martial-arts festival that has been taking place in the Loir (not the Loire) Valley of France for the past 17 years. The event is hosted by the European Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan group called ARAMIS (Association de Recherche en Arts Martiaux Internes en Sarthe). The gist of the event is to bring together people from all different internal martial-arts styles (mostly taiji) from anywhere (mainly Europe) to gather for a lakeside camping retreat. The event is for three days (sandwiched between independent workshops before and after) in which there is a wellspring of opportunity to study, practice and socialize with quite a medley of folks, all of which is fostered by the idea of growth and development of internal martial arts as a whole. From my perspective, I found this to be quite true.

The gathering site, Camping des Varennes, is tucked away in the countryside and is shrouded by small villages. I don't believe that any of the 300 participants were locals, so this meant that everyone had to make a special trip to get there. Such a situation really bolstered the enthusiasm level. People always seemed to be up to something: taking a workshop from one of the over 25 teachers who were present, taking a dip in the lovely

lake, practicing push hands, or chitchatting by the snack stand. One had only to take a moment and step out of the hubbub to see a picture of community forming before one's eyes.

All three days featured one-and-a-half hour workshops in both the early and late morning. There was quite an array of things being taught. Some folks had been waiting for several years to study with particular teachers. Others simply joined a workshop in progress because it piqued their fancy as they were strolling by it. It looked like a 25-ring circus sprawled along the lakeshore.

The afternoon sessions were, to me, the centerpiece of the whole event. For 3 hours each afternoon we'd gather in a big, grassy field for freestyle push hands. The only structure was that someone would ring a bell every 10 minutes to announce that it was time to change partners. The bustle of such an event reminded me of a high-school dance (with only the air of camaraderie serving as the chaperone). All levels of experience and styles of practice pushed with each other. There's a certain wide-eyed wonder in simply turning to someone you've never met, asking them to push hands with you, and within moments be engaged in a profound energy exchange ... Hmmm, perhaps that's a bit of an over-generalization as there were a few TV wrestling-style bouts and a fair share of absent-minded arm swinging that served as a backdrop to conversation. Anyway you choose it, the spectrum was there to sample. I personally feel that my Taiji practice was up'd a notch because I participated.



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Charlie teaches in Berkeley, California

Photographs supplied by Scott Chaplowe and Fabienne Poncin-Epaillard

2004 Rencontres Jasnières will take place July 25–27 at Camping des Varennes in Marçon located in the heart of a vineyard region 30 kilometers South of Le Mans which is about 200 kilometers southwest of Paris (1 hour by train). From there one can take a train to Gare Château-du-Loir and a taxi to the camping grounds—although reportedly Charlie hiked from Château-du-Loir and Scott took a taxi from Le Mans. Hmmm ...

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