

40<sup>th</sup> Annual Tai Chi Friends Reunion  
Westerbeke Retreat Center, Sonoma County, CA  
June 2-June 11, 2019

MODES OF DAILINESS: TAI CHI AS A PRACTICE

We stress the importance of the dailiness of our Tai Chi practice, but Tai Chi isn't about necessarily moving every day. For instance, if you write a letter to a friend, that's Tai Chi or if you call a Tai Chi friend on the phone to chat, that is also Tai Chi practice. If you read a text that leads toward Taoist conceptions, that's Tai Chi practice and if you teach Tai Chi that, too -- perhaps especially that -- is Tai Chi practice. If you communicate with your students or work on a Tai Chi handout, this, too, is Tai Chi practice.

It is worth noting that, in terms of discipline, our practice is not a matter of doing or practicing or playing more and more Tai Chi, longer and longer stints of movement, or more interesting movement or more forms or more speeds or variations of forms or knowing more moves or more styles of Tai Chi. Practicing one movement 1,000 times is more important than doing 1,000 movements one time. Along this line of thinking, discipline is more than practice of moves, it is staying engaged a little bit every day in the Tai Chi spirit, the Tai Chi notion of abundant life. Real discipline is doing the mere five minutes of Tai Chi that you can do *every single day* rather than fretting and feeling bad about that elusive hour of Tai Chi practice that is impossible for your day today. By leaning into the variety of modes of Tai Chi dailiness instead of only the body movement aspect, it remains possible to develop a stronger, more flexible and more adept type of Tai Chi practice.

Therefore, in regard to Tai Chi practice, you can choose to treat your Tai Chi practice casually like a motel room or you can choose to treat your practice like a mansion, cultivating gardens all around it, cultivating the beauty of the arrangements of the flowers in every room, the draperies in the sunny windows, the plantings, the delectable foods to share with friends who come by.

This kind of attention to a rich and varied practice of Tai Chi is critical. Tai Chi is not about the daily gymnastics but rather about a daily attentiveness: the Tai Chi of doing doing doing *living* Tai Chi, in short Tai Chi is about establishing *a way of life*. It is an inner penetration of an individual life with the Tao, the Tao of the life of the individual: *What you will be you are now becoming*.

In view of this, there is also the over-arching consideration of the personal aspect of what Tai Chi is on a daily basis, the friendships. Charlie Hathaway, a seasoned practitioner of several disciplines and experienced with several Tai Chi teachers, put it so well that I asked him if I include his reflections here, and he was kind enough to say yes:

“For me, tai chi is about connection. We all know about being “rooted”, connected to the earth, and about letting the tan t'ien connect our arms and legs as it orchestrates movement. We talk about the brain-body connection that prioritizes relaxation so that attention and intention are not betrayed by the momentum of muscles or emotion. And we enjoy our connection with the beauty of Greenbrook and with the friends who make our Saturday mornings enviable. But

harmony depends on complementary connections between apparent opposites, the good and the bad, the yang and the yin. Thus, we must also face the less appealing aspects of our environment: a biting wind on a sunless January day, the sadness felt about a friend who is sick, the pain of an unreasonable colleague at work, or, of course, a sword attack by a samurai of the Third Shinobi Seven Swordsmen. In each case, we focus, observe, CONNECT, and deal with the situation in the best way possible. In each case, distancing oneself from the issue is not a good approach. There is no good chi to keep or bad chi to cast off, just your chi to be cultivated and kept moving. Thus, we enter into the space, try to understand the situation fully, and act, whether by yielding or advancing, to either better appreciate and more easily accept the status quo or to bring improvement. For me, all this represents a mindful approach to life that I am years away from fully adopting. It applies to one you love as much as it does to one you do not. And within the context of tai chi chuan, it provides a framework and rationale, a connection between me and all that is found within the boundaries of my small sphere.”

We connect, as Charlie makes clear, and we keep moving, not only in body and spirit, but through space, through circumstance, connecting with life in an ever more integrated way.

Damian Caspary, famously one of Mr. Lui's youngest students ever, also brings the importance of our connectedness into view when he describes our “togetherness and moving as a group” in this way: “For me when we gather we celebrate vitamin L. We practice our Joy together. I feel uplifted and grounded ....”

Damian’s appreciation for the group coordination and the synchronization of movements across the class of arms, legs, torsos, across the breath, across the room from corner to corner has always been a strong focus for him, bringing that physicality into what Charlie called above the “complementary connections between apparent opposites” that leads not only to a collective harmony, but also to a unique transformation of each solo Tai Chi practitioner. I have often thought that the amazing stories that pour into each movement from each class and from each new teacher are part of the magical “look” of Tai Chi, but Charlie and Damien help us to see that our *dailiness* in practice is also a continuous reminder that our existence is deeply implicated with others.

In reflecting on our Tai Chi practice, Marianne Jeffreys, a Tai Chi friend with deep experience in the healing art of nursing and in teaching of nurses and teaching *teachers* of nursing and who emphasizes cross-cultural sensitivities in nurses' training, also points to this connectedness: “It is important to have one's life filled with many positive people and activities that may have different circles but somehow they all interconnect to provide the support, stimulation, creativity, and beauty that we all need to keep us balanced and on the path to becoming the person we have the potential to become within the context of the big universe.”

In context of this big universe, the will to practice Tai Chi movements daily is only an aspect of the power of our Tai Chi practice. The nurturing of connectivity through people and texts is as crucial as the body's participation. After all, when life has quieted to stillness and we are in that cozy rocker on the beautiful front porch of life, what will we do when we are physically no longer capable of practicing Tai Chi? These are the moments to prepare for via the deep fabric of a dailiness of practice that finds the mind which leads the body still redolent with Tai Chi

sensibility. It is possible, for instance, in illness or in sitting meditation, to continue to practice, not in body moves, but following the mind with the power and commensurate benefit of mental doing of Tai Chi, exercising the imagination, our greatest human organ, and bringing into ultimate resolution the general conception of Lao Tzu (Chapter 48) and also of Chuang-Tzu (Chapter 6): “Do nothing and nothing is undone.”

The mind/body connection explored in these holistic ways has immeasurable value now at our retreat as we rise to the challenge of mastering physical movements of Tai Chi Chu'an. *The dailiness of our practice*, however, can be realized in diverse ways so that we are prepared to inhabit our practice in course of interesting changes that lie ahead, that is a practice of physical movement, imaginative mental practice, and, ultimately, the simple *being in Tai Chi*. At this, I hear Web Kirksey's voice -- exact words approximate -- gently encouraging us to “eat in love, play in love, practice in love, learn in love, live in love, be in love.” And thus we shall continue, all and ever connected, as it were, on the Tao.

*Nancy M. Hoffman, PhD  
May 28, 2019  
New York City*

*In memory of Shizu ("Sue") Lofton of Chicago who taught at White Crane Wellness Center there:  
this handout can be copied and shared with anyone.*

*With gratitude to Judith A. Chambliss, teacher of teachers,  
and to Hubert H. Lui, the great teacher of us all.*