

An Introductory Comparative between the underlying Taoist Philosophy of Chi Kung and Tai Chi Chuan and the Christian Contemplative Tradition

Chi Kung (Qigong) and Tai Chi Chuan (Taijiquan) are ancient arts which were largely influenced by the religious practices of Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism and in particular Taoism. Taoism as a religion has always been associated with mystical, magical practices. It is a way of *enlightened* life in which the adept is taught to escape death by the gradual transformation of the physical body into an *immortal* body by refining the life force, *The Great Chi*. Respiratory, gymnastic and alchemical exercises were practised in combination or separately to realise this aim. Some practitioners were said to become Immortals and ascended to Heaven in broad daylight. Others, so as not to trouble society, made a semblance of dying, and buried an object, such as a sword or a cane, that took their shape as they ascended to immortal paradise.

Hsing and Ming

The term Hsing-Ming (Nature and Life) was often used to explain spiritual attainment. Hsing (Nature) is the inborn quality of a person where spiritual consciousness begins. Ming (Life) is destiny as decreed by Heaven. Together, Hsing-Ming is used to explain the spiritual state as it exists before it is corrupted by the contact of life.¹

At birth, Hsing-Ming separates into two. Hsing is the beginning of consciousness and Ming is the beginning of breath and chi. It is said that by meditative practices, one is able to unite these two into one again. Through concentration and resurrection of the *Immortal Seed* or *Divine Spark*, which is the infinite rather than finite potential, one uniquely realises original nature (Hsing). By breath control, one invigorates health and lengthens life (Ming). Hence when the two are united, one integrates the *self consciousness* into the Hsing-Ming or *Original Nature*, and that which is above Nature. That which is above Nature, and yet contains it, is the uncreated essence, power and energy of universal consciousness. It is not subject to change. However, self, or egocentric consciousness is bound by the senses, and is subject to changes in time and space. The ego contains sphere upon sphere of scattered and oscillating energies. It reflects everything back to itself, rather like looking into a mirror, which distorts the timeless reality it reflects. A useful illustration of this was given by Plato. He compared humanity's position to that of life-long prisoners in a cave who could only see passing shadows of the world outside, and to whom these shadows were their reality. If they had managed to get away from their shackles and walk out of the cave into the clear sunlight, they would not even have the words to describe its limitless wonder.

It is said that when we were newly born, we shone with a Holy Radiance and our steps were light. Then as we began to fulfil our desires, our bodies grew heavy, and the Holy light grew dim. Returning to the *source of being*, the Tao, one becomes powerful and wise, but gentle, and does not desire what others have; or live where others live, that is in the world of self pre-occupation, and derives his or her pleasure from purity and quiet, free from all attachments. By nurturing the element that is akin to Heaven, and checking the element that is akin to Earth, we may ascend to Heaven as an *Immortal*, just as a flame rises.

The Five Elements

As with all traditions, there are different concepts and interpretations. In some schools, Hsing is the emotional mind, which is to be united with Yi, the Universal or *wisdom* mind. Elaborate and complex theories were developed to transmute the body's generative force into vitality and Spirit (Shen). Most schools laid great emphasis on enhancing and balancing the five elements of the body, which in the Chinese tradition are metal, water, fire, earth and wood. The five elements refer to the proper functioning of the internal organs and also affect the psychological health. For instance, fear is associated with the kidneys; anger, the liver; depression the lungs, etc. In many Western traditions, we talk of the four elements of the body which are fire, air, water and earth. Fire and air, which

corresponds with *metal* in the Chinese theory, are elements akin to Heaven. Water and earth are elements akin to earth. The fifth element is the life-giving spiritual power *wood*, which is associated with the colour green and is the energy of the liver. In the Chinese theory, the liver is the home of the incorporeal soul. "The soul is the green life force of the flesh" wrote St. Hildegard von Bingen² from twelfth century Germany. Hildegard was the Abbess of a Benedictine convent, and was known throughout the Western world as a theologian, prophet, contemplative, composer and healer. In her many writings, she conceives of humanity as a microcosm of the world's macrocosm.

"For God fashioned the human form according to the constitution of the firmament and of all the other creatures, as the founder has a certain form according to which he makes his vessels. Thus human kind is earthly according to its humble station in the flesh and heavenly because of the heights of Heaven which it possesses in the soul."

Hildegard asserts that we are ourselves constituted by the very same elements that make up the external world.

"The four elements hold the world together, they also form the structure for the human body. Their distribution and function in the whole human being are such that they constantly sustain the person, just as they are spread throughout all the rest of the world and have their effects. Fire, air, water and earth are in humankind and humans consist of them."

Beyond Theory

Whatever the theories of East and West, we have to understand their limitations, however impressive, from the spiritual perspective. Beyond all theory is Spirit, and Spirit by its very nature, cannot be satisfactorily subjected to theory. This is why all attempts to systemise the trigrams of the ancient Chinese, Book of Changes, (the I Ching), which reflect the spirit, have proved so consistently unproductive. However, Spirit can be experienced by fully entering into its experience. Unless this mystery, to which these theories direct us, is contacted, the theories remain dried up and lifeless philosophical ideas. Mental consciousness must eventually give way and open up to the fuller way of knowing which is heart consciousness, or the seat of wisdom. Throughout the history of humankind, practical disciplines have been developed to serve such a purpose. In the Christian tradition, such methods of illumination and transforming union were known as *prayer of the heart* or *pure prayer*. These were perfected in the monastic orders of Byzantium and the Latin West. In the East, the various sects of Bhuddism and Taoism each similarly developed their own disciplines.

Chang San Feng

In the thirteenth century, the legendary *Immortal* Chang San Feng is credited with formulating Tai Chi Chuan. He is said to have been inspired by a vision of a fight between a snake and a crane. The conflict between the snake and the crane may be interpreted literally in terms of martial techniques, but this is not the whole picture. Whilst it is essential to be able to comprehend and apply the martial principles at a high level, for spirituality here includes every aspect of the art, a literal or fundamentalist interpretation alone is not sufficient. As with all traditions, a multi-levelled understanding of a particular revelation applies. It is more likely that Chang San Feng's vision was mythical, in that it was a poetic expression of a mystical experience. Mystical, in that the meaning was *hidden* from the rational level of consciousness. In the Christian contemplative tradition, St. John Cassian, spoke in the fifth century, of the integrated spiritual knowledge to be found in the scriptures. He gives a simple example of the City of Jerusalem to explain different levels of meaning. Jerusalem can be viewed *literally* as the historical City of the Jews, *symbolically* as the Church of Christ, *metaphysically* as the Heavenly City of God which is, "the Mother of us all", and finally *mystically*, which is the very soul of every individual. This multi-levelled understanding applies throughout the whole of the Bible, and indeed every other sacred revelation.

Uniqueness

The human soul, or our unique essential nature, is the setting for all the colourful stories, battles, defeats and victories of the Old Testament through to the Apocalypse. Moreover, the human soul is the setting for all the martial arts, including Tai Chi Chuan, which are none other than exterior reflections of interior realities. In the case of Chang San Feng's vision, it is our view that the conflict between the snake and the crane reflects mankind's perennial struggle. This is the struggle that is necessary for our evolution through the perilous journey of matter, life and consciousness. The vision also reveals a way of transforming these seemingly conflicting energies by a way of gentle but powerful transcendence through the daily discipline of coming into reverential silence. In this case, we can say that words or images are merely intended to reveal the mystery of the silence from which they came. The Taoist philosopher Chuang Tzu, expresses this well with these words,

"The purpose of a fish trap is to catch a fish, and when the fish are caught, the trap is forgotten. The purpose of a rabbit snare is to catch rabbits. When the rabbits are caught, the snare is forgotten. The purpose of the word is to convey ideas. When the ideas are grasped, the words are forgotten. Where can I find a man who has forgotten words? He is the one I would like to talk to."³

In Chang San Feng's vision, we touch the profoundest depths of the essential healing aspect of the art, to reconcile Hsing and Ming and transform individual concern into Universal Compassion. *Longevity* in this context is not length of years, but a consequence of this healing. This transcends the concepts of space and time and means entering into the fullness of life, the fullness of consciousness from partial awareness to wholeness. This may be called the *perpetual now* or *eternal life* if you will, which completely surpasses our limited range of thought and understanding.

Unity

The same theme of uniting Hsing and Ming is found in all the World's religious traditions. The root word for religion is the Latin *religio* which means to *bind together*. In the so called Western traditions, the separation of Hsing and Ming refers to *Heart and Mind*. This constitutes the *fall of mankind* and is often called *original sin*, which is the illusory state of dualistic self consciousness. In our times, the great theologian and contemplative, Thomas Merton has stated,

"Recollection makes me present to myself by bringing together two aspects or activities of my being as if they were two lenses of a telescope. One lens is the basic semblance of my spiritual being, the inward soul, the deep will, the spiritual intelligence. The other is my outward soul, the will engaged in activities of life....When the active soul knows only itself, then it is absent from its true self. It does not know its own inward spirit. It never acts according to the need and measure of its own true personality, which exists where my spirit is wedded with the silent presence of the Lord's Spirit and where my deep will responds to his gravitation towards the secrecy of the Godhead."⁴

It is suggested by the seventeenth century German contemplative, Jacob Boehme that the unification of Heart and Mind is through perseverance in silent meditation wherein our whole attention is focused on one point. He writes,

"Cease from thine own activity, fix thine eyes upon one point....Gather in all thy thoughts and by faith press into the centre....Be silent before the Lord, sitting alone with Him in thy inmost and hidden cell, thy inward being centrally united in life."⁵

To be *centrally united in life* is the reconciliation of Hsing and Ming, or Heart and Mind. Generally, concentration is focused upon the one point of the Dan Tien or *Ocean of Energy* just below the navel. The secret of inner gazing, nurturing the life force and the Immortalists' wondrous art of refining elixir are based on methods of breathing taught in Bhuddism.

In an ancient Bhuddist text book on Immortalism is written,

"What is most essential to nurturing life is refining the body. The subtle aspect of refining the body is in congealing the spirit. When the spirit congeals, energy accumulates, when energy accumulates, the elixir develops. When the elixir develops, the body is stabilised, when the body is stable, the spirit is whole."⁶

Consider how this most profound teaching corresponds with the words of Christ, "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you", and again, "Set your hearts on His Kingdom first, and on God's saving justice, and all these other things will be given to you as well."⁷ Setting your heart on God's Kingdom represents the one central point of reality, which is pure uncreated/creative energy. It is beyond the fixed patterns of self centredness and yet everywhere present. We may call it Love; the ultimate and benevolent truth.

Reflect upon these most profound words attributed to the legendary and mysterious figure of Chang San Feng,

"The mind is like an eye - if even a tiny hair gets in an eye, the eye is uncomfortable. Similarly, if even a small matter concerns the mind, the mind will be disturbed. Once afflicted by disturbance, it is hard to concentrate.

Just as an enormous tree grows from a tiny sprout, the stabilisation of the spirit and attainment of enlightenment comes about through accumulated practice.

Luxurious food and clothing, social distinction, and material riches are all extraneous likes of psychological desire, not good medicines that enhance life. When people pursue them, they bring about their own destruction. What could be more confused?

Nonetheless, the body that practices the Way must be sustained by food and clothing. There are some matters that cannot be neglected, some things that cannot be abandoned . . . Social relations and the necessities of life are a boat for us - If we want to cross the sea, we need the aid of a boat.

Every meal, every nap, is a potential source of gain or loss; every act every word, can be a basis of calamity or fortune.

One's deeds are done by oneself, but destiny is bestowed by heaven. The relation of deeds to destiny is like shadows and echoes following form and sound.

If you want to practice the way to attain reality, first get rid of warped behaviour.

There are people who are serene and free, following natural reality, whom others consider lazy, but I consider to be at peace.

There are people who conduct themselves simply and have very stable personalities, whom others consider uncultured, but I consider unspoiled.

To those who want to know the way to deal with the world, I suggest, Love People."⁸

The Tao and the Kingdom

The Tao, or *The way* is essentially indefinable, except to say, it is a universal or natural law grounded in love which surpasses all concepts images or language. It dynamically creates and completes all things through its constant issue and return from the source. It advances, comforts, matures, nourishes and protects. In its subtle power, it produces but does not possess. It acts without expectation, it advances without dominating. Tirelessly it abides our *external* vanities, our trivial pursuits and entanglements. It suffers the ego's drive for safety symbols, security and the fantasy of novelty amidst the changing and uncertain tides of existence. In its superabundance, it initiates all our

selfless actions. It even initiates, when not rightly motivated, our discontent and distress until we realign our selves with its enduring Power.

It is the total generosity and perfect clarity of love and only love which activates the light of spiritual knowledge and increases in proportion to our rootedness and participation in it. Conversely, the shallow world of the ego or self consciousness, is a diminishing world of shadows and endless distorted reflections. The ego, according to its degree of alienation from the Creative Centre, generates illusory and impassioned images. The ego mistakenly perceives reality as revolving around itself. It creates an isolated and distracted implosion of energies which may include degrees of fear, anger, hate, etc. It is precisely this which frustrates the full and free expression of creative energy or love. The ancient Chinese book, the Tao Te Ching, ("The Classic of the Way and its Power")⁹ upon which Tai Chi Chuan and many other martial arts have their roots, variously calls these *interior* impassioned energies, "birds of prey", "fierce beasts", "straw dogs", "overgrown fields", "hoardings", etc. In Biblical language in the contemplative tradition, examples are, "serpent", "arrows", "men", "nations", "Goliath", "Egyptians" and "Assyrians" etc. Attributed to St. Maximus the Confessor, the great seventh century Greek theologian of Orthodox Christianity, King Herod can be mystically interpreted as the will of the flesh, Pilate the senses, Caesar the sense objects, etc. All of these combine to put Christ's Consciousness to death. The crowd, representing the ego, inevitably chooses symbols of strength and temporal power, represented by Barabbas, rather than the meek and eternal power of Christ. The life, death and resurrection of Christ can be likened to the Yin/Yang and the uncreated/creative changelessness beyond appearances in Taoism. The coming of the *Kingdom* is, in a sense, the endlessly perfecting *conversion* of energy; a total expression of the Tao. That is not to say they are one and the same thing. The term *same* has no meaning in the spiritual dimension. However, whether the mysterious and divine revelation is of a snake and a crane, or Adam and Eve, its universal message is consistently to transform human energies to its divine potential.

Healing

The message then of these traditions and indeed all contemplation is the realisation of a *healing* of Universal proportions. It is the healing of body, mind and Spirit through which we come to know that, "One man is every man". Listen to the universal wisdom expressed by the very same St. Maximus in the seventh century.

"Within reality, there are five divisions. The first is uncreated nature and the created nature that acquires existence through coming into being. Second, the created nature that receives its existence from God is divided into the intelligible and the sensible. Third, within sensible or visible nature there is a division between heaven and earth. Fourth, earth is divided into paradise and the world. Fifth, man is divided into male and female. Now man is, as it were, a workshop that contains everything in an all-inclusive way; and so by virtue of his nature he acts as mediator, endowed with full power to link and unify the extreme points of the five different levels of division, because in the various aspects of his nature, he is himself related to all these extremes. It is thus his vocation to make manifest in this person the great mystery of the divine intention - to show how the divided extremes in created things may be reconciled to harmony, the near with the far, the lower with the higher, so that through gradual ascent, all are eventually brought into union with God. That is why man was introduced last of all into creation, as a natural bond of unity, mediating between all divided things because related to all through the different aspects of his own self, drawing them all to a unity within himself, and so uniting them all to God their cause, in whom there is no division. Through dispassion he transcends the difference between male and female. Through the holiness of his life he unites paradise and the world, thus producing a single earth. Through his angelic life of virtue, so far as this is possible for human beings, he unites heaven and earth, integrating the visible creation. Then, through his equality with the angels in spiritual knowledge, he unifies the intelligible and the sensible, making all created things into one single creation. Finally in addition to all this, through love he unites created nature with the uncreated, rendering them one through the state of grace that he has attained. With the fullness of his being he merges fully in the fullness of God, becoming everything that God himself is, save for the identity of essence."¹⁰

Reality

The classical arts of Chi Kung and Tai Chi Chuan, and the contemplative tradition of Christianity have been reverently passed down through the centuries. They have come to us from holy mountains and monasteries, and from master to disciple. In their essence, they direct us centrewards, towards the active dynamic of stillness. As with all great traditions, they can, and do become superficial or trivialised to perpetuate both self and corporate interest, in its many guises. But if we remain true to the traditions' origins, they can lead us to the very ground of our being, which is the source of all Being. For the student of Chi Kung or Tai Chi Chuan, this is the Tao, and its essence, experienced as *Immortality* or a state of unrefracted consciousness of innocence, which cannot reasonably be explained. Similarly, for the contemplative Christian, it is a personal union at the centre of one's being with the consciousness of the risen Christ, through which the Father is known as unfathomable living light.

The ongoing awakening, or realisation of our innermost centre, the harmonious fount of all energy, occurs beyond all ideas and elaborate theories. It occurs beyond all analysis and complexity, and beyond all our habitual attachments to fluctuating thoughts, moods and feelings. It also occurs beyond the more subtle projections of the ego such as psychic activities. It is realised through total attentiveness in ever deepening spheres of silence, stillness and simplicity, which is charged with creative presence. It is in the necessary depth of consciousness, and in the clarity of stillness, where Hsing and Ming, or Heart and Mind are united. These are united in a progressive dethronement of the rigid and false dualism of the ego or self will, where the barriers which we have set up around ourselves are disassembled. This is not self oblivion, rather it is the re-integration, a finding of our true self beyond the external deception which has masqueraded as reality. It is in the stillness where the Universal or Divine current is *earthed* in mankind as an infinite expansion of peace. It is in the stillness where we discover the magnitude and wonder of the gift and meaning of life. It is a gift and meaning which could never be known through theory alone. This mysterious discovery or *knowledge of the heart* transcends all frontiers. It is of the infinite, which is a perpetually renewing and effortless power that increases without measure. It is a totally new dimension of Absolute Being which opens up from within as supreme compassion, simplicity and joy, which nothing *exterior* can overcome. This new dimension is subject only to our co-operation and our degree of selflessness. Listen to the words of the twelfth century Scot, Richard of Saint Victor, a monastery in France,

"The rational soul finds in itself the chief and principal mirror for seeing God. Let him who desires to see God wipe his mirror and cleanse his heart. When the mirror has been cleansed and examined a long time carefully, a brightness of the divine light begins to shine through to him and a great beam of illumination not known hitherto appears before his eyes."¹¹

In the Christian contemplative tradition, learning the discipline of selflessness is, in effect, *coming to rest*, which from the original Hebrew is the literal translation of *to pray without ceasing*. In the Taoist tradition, it is being mindful of the presence of Tai Chi, or the Supreme Ultimate in all that we are and all that we do. In both traditions, it is mindfulness of an internal power greater than ourselves. As beginners, and in this dimension of being we are always beginning, we progressively leave behind desire, restlessness, possessiveness and all the images that these passions create.

Testing

It is important, however, to understand that in both these traditions, as practice and commitment deepen, there may be a good deal of testing and turbulence. Repressed feelings and memories may rise to the surface of our consciousness, and sensitivity becomes heightened. These are the birth pangs of the spirit which may feel negative and painful, but are actually purifying and liberating. It is at these times when half-heartedness shows itself and can cause many to discontinue practice. If our nature is undisciplined and unprepared and if we stubbornly cling to self centred desire, conceit/deceit or anger, the effects of sustained practice against such resistance will be abrasive and seem intolerable. The gradual loosening and release of discordant energies are emotionally charged images which have been held in the deeper reaches of the psyche. Such images are inevitably based on fear and present difficulties of integration and adaptation. To cope with such tensions, we may try to create solutions from outside ourselves, by gathering more information, acquiring greater

knowledge or learning new techniques. However, mental knowledge or physical skills alone will not activate the light of spiritual knowledge. The wisdom contained in these traditions, if resolutely followed, is sufficient in itself. We discover that through diligent, prolonged, and correct practice, the greatest teacher is indeed our own experience.

Counsel

It is only when we begin to cut loose from self consciousness that real growth in the consciousness of spirit can occur. This is, for instance, symbolised in the Tai Chi Chuan form by '*sweep the lotus*' kick as the severing of our deepest instincts and the sense of separateness. Whilst both traditions advocate going within, there is equal emphasis on going out beyond ourselves in the service of others. Generations of wise spiritual counsel on contemplation and action safeguard against common errors on the spiritual path. Provided the teachings of previous generations are adhered to, they safeguard against the mediocrity of a false peace, material and psychic phenomena, and even worse, narcissism and spiritual pride. These are errors which are not conducive to spiritual development, and barely, if at all, pierce the surface of self consciousness. Many modern psychological and 'positive thinking' systems can produce this 'false peace' which fails to confront the sense of isolation. The individual is encouraged to control or manipulate, by affirming that which is to be adjudged to be *good* and denying or avoiding that adjudged to be *bad*. At best, the ego attempts to deal with what it can see in its own reflective and narrow vision. Hence there occurs the absurd situation of the ego trying to overcome itself. This situation can so easily lead to the oppressive control and manipulation of others through a complex of fear and guilt, under the authority of it being for their own good. The next development is, of course, often resistance and violence. When creative energy, freely given, is controlled, manipulated or possessed in this way, it quickly degenerates into that which is de-creative. Material or psychic phenomena, however startling, invariably remains confined to the novel and distracting realm of subject-object. It is a realm notoriously laden with seemingly endless images, fantasies and reflections; it can be full of byways, side roads and dead-ends. Narcissism, a morbid self-adoration/protection, and spiritual pride totally contradict the aims of both traditions. Unfortunately, like the aforementioned, they are sadly evident, and indeed flourishing, within these traditions. It is therefore necessary to look beyond the often superficial and distorted levels of teaching and practice in order to remain true to the traditions and their original aims. If we are true to the original aims, we remain true to ourselves. Being true to ourselves, without the blurring effects of partial reality, enables perception of that truth in everything.

Sung

Humility, and its nearest Chinese equivalent, *sung*, is of central importance during the ongoing transformation of energies through body, mind and spirit. Sung involves an alert relaxedness at every level of being; not identifying so much with our immediate surroundings but with the universality of all there is. It is a practical *letting go* or detachment of surface thoughts or feelings which bind us to the past or future. Habits, cycles, or patterns of thought, whatever they may be, will prevent our entry into the serenity of the present. The same also applies if one is excessively attached to institutions, ideologies, schools or styles of practice, or even teachers. The essential direction is the same among the eminent masters, with whom I have studied. The late Grand Master Fu Zhongwen, who was one of the last living disciples of the legendary Yang Chen Fu, said to me, "When practising Tai Chi, one ultimately holds no thing in the mind." The Chi Kung / Meditation Masters of Taoist sects on the holy mountains of Wudang, Emei and Lungmen concur with this. Similarly, the Christian Contemplative tradition advocates, "Whatever thoughts, including sense perceptions, images, feelings, memories or reflections float across the screens of consciousness, let them go. Whatever psychological breakthroughs or even spiritual insights might occur, let them go also." The meaning of any apparent breakthrough or insight can be reflected upon at other times, but not during practice. Lao Tzu, the author of the Tao Te Ching said,

"Push far enough towards the Void,
Hold fast enough to Quietness,
And of the ten thousand things none but can be worked on by you.
I have beheld them, wither they go back.
See, all things howsoever they flourish
Return to the root from which they grew.

This return to the root is called Quietness;
 Quietness is called submission to Fate;
 What has submitted to Fate has become part of the always-so.
 To know the always-so is to be Illumined;
 Not to know it, means to go blindly to disaster.
 He who knows the always-so has room in him for everything;
 He who has room in him for everything is without prejudice.
 To be without prejudice is to be Kingly;
 To be Kingly is to be of heaven;
 To be of heaven is to be in Tao.
 Tao is forever and he that possesses it,
 Though his body ceases, is not destroyed."⁹

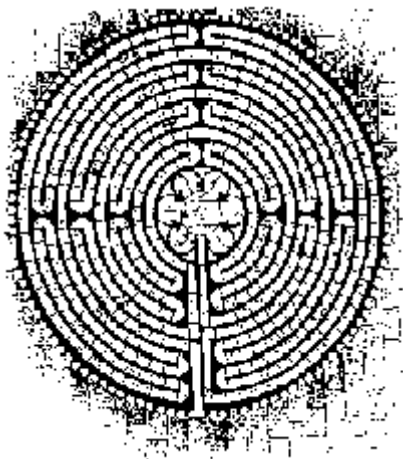
The writing of the Orthodox Christian St. Diadochos of Photiki, Greece, in the fifth century AD had the following comments,

"You should not doubt that the intellect, when it begins to be strongly energised by the Divine Light, becomes so completely translucent that it sees its own light vividly... Our one purpose must be to reach the point where we perceive the love of God fully and consciously in our heart - that is, 'with all your heart and with all your soul... and with all your mind' [Luke 10:27]. For the man who is energised by the grace of God to this point has already left this world, though still present in it."¹²

Transformation

Everything is wholly transformed by the new insights we discover beyond appearances. Once we begin to glimpse *true peace*, our Spiritual centre paradoxically within and beyond us, the priorities in our lives are inevitably re-aligned. All this is a process of growth in our spirit; a gentle yet persistent act of detachment; a turning away from egoism; monitoring and experimentation. This is why, at the outset, it is important not to look for experiences, not to try to engineer or simulate them, to anticipate or possess them. Both traditions commend a steady process of growth. This is similar to the way impurities gradually settle in a glass of cloudy water. At first all the impurities swirl around, making the water cloudy and opaque. But, if we do not interfere with the glass, and allow it to stand still, the impurities settle. When the water is opaque, it reflects, when it is clear, we can see through it. We see

more and more, not with our own vision, but by the light of God or Tao. This is a simple analogy of enlightenment; embracing the Tao, or absorption in the Divine Reality.



Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the authentic forms, sword and broadsword of Tai Chi Chuan. The forms are like mandalas, and externally reflect internal realities. They symbolise perfectly the cyclical but progressive nature of enlightenment. Again and again, sequences and postures are purposefully repeated. When practised in the spirit of the faith, with relaxed yet concentrated attention, energies are integrated, refined and purified. Compare the method of the forms with the famous thirteenth century Pilgrims' labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral, France. From Medieval times, it was used by pilgrims who could not go to Jerusalem. They followed its twists and turns on their knees. We can see how even the apparent setbacks on the pilgrimage remain an essential part of the journey. The pilgrims' journey along the

labyrinth symbolises their lives' journey, coming to realisation of the Christ Consciousness at the very centre of their own beings. It is as the Apostle St. Paul says in his letter to the Colossians,

"... and through many generations, but now disclosed to God's people, to whom it was his will to make it known how rich and glorious it is among all nations. The secret is this: Christ in you, the hope of a glory to come... and to come to the full wealth of conviction which understanding brings, and grasp God's secret. The secret is Christ himself; in him lie hidden all God's treasures of wisdom and knowledge."⁷

Spiritual Path

A spiritual path is quite simply a way of peace. It is a way of completeness that requires a complete, not partial, practice of all its aspects. It does not have to contain rules, dogma or doctrine, but rightly understood, is enriched and enlivened by them.. A contemporary monastic guide has said the only faith needed to begin with is the faith that you exist at all. It is not about 'instant' and ultimately meaningless experiences brought about through techniques, but entering fully into its meaningful experience through discipline. It has little or nothing to do with creating alternate realities, superstition, supernatural acts or ecstatic visions. A spiritual path is not a way of accumulating anything. Instead, it is of *investing in loss*, and paradoxically, preparing for the pure gift of realising what is already happening. Spirituality is not subject to the forces and values of materialism in a consumerist society. Such forces of conformity are, by their nature, *external*, and have a vested interest in keeping the self at an arrested stage of development. According to these traditions, it is a journey away from the closed world of the self, with its fears, scepticism, and attempts at domination. This is why any conscious encounter with *Chi*, or rather *Shen* or Spirit cannot be grasped and slips out of the mind's attempt to possess or control it. In responding to our own inmost nature, we are responding to the call of freedom, and rising up from illusion to the totality of that freedom. A spiritual path is not about philosophising and being elevated from the mundane. It is about living a wholly practical and completely functional life. It is a life which involves ordinary faculties and ordinary people. Such a life is indeed charged with the extraordinary, because, when *rooted in Being*, every action and every moment is creative, transforming and enlightening. With one mind, we can say with the ancient Ch'an poet,

"How wondrously strange,
How miraculous this!
I draw water,
I carry wood."¹³

Traditions

Both traditions quietly summon us, in different ways, to persevere in practice; to personally verify their truths in the only way they can be verified. This is by the discovery of our own spirit. Lao Tzu put it this way, "The truly great man dwells on what is real, and not what is on the surface." In encountering our own spirit, we realise a union of consciousness which is an immortal and expanding mystery. In this way, the essence and message of the tradition is brought to life. A living, dynamic and developing tradition can then, as the word implies, be properly handed on to others, though in as few words as possible.

It would be fitting to conclude this brief comparative with an excerpt from the writings of Bede Griffiths, a Catholic monk, widely regarded as one of the great spiritual Masters of the twentieth century. He gives yet another meaning, perhaps a wider one, to the unification of Hsing and Ming, or Heart and Mind,

"The Spirit is the source, the ground of all being. Everything comes from the Spirit and reflects its power and light. The energy of matter, the life in plants and animals, the soul in man are all reflections, effects of the power and life and knowledge of the one Spirit. To recognise the dependence of all creatures on the inner light and power of the Spirit is to partake of the Spirit's own wisdom and immortality. To refuse to recognise this dependence, to seek to be autonomous and to control the world is to take the path of destruction.

The purpose of creation was that man should become like God, sharing in his wisdom and immortality, but this can come only as we surrender all the powers of our being, of body and soul to the power of the Spirit within. Humanity is divided because man is divided in himself. The two great traditions of East and West stand as the two sides of understanding of man, So far, these two traditions have grown independently with little relation beyond occasional rivalry. The time has come to integrate them. In the West today, the masculine, the rational, the aggressive power of the mind is dominant, while in the East, the feminine aspect, the intuitive aspect of the mind prevails. The future of the World depends on the 'marriage' of these two minds, the conscious and the unconscious, the

rational and the intuitive, the active and the passive. Their marriage must first take place within the individual. Then only can external union take place.

There is a space in the heart in which all space is contained. Both Heaven and Earth are contained within it. Fire, air sun and moon, lightning and stars - everything exists within. When we pass beyond the mind with its measuring faculties, with its categories of time and space, we find the very ground of the universe. There all things are not dead matter as Western science has told us for so long. They are life and intelligence. Western man has been turning outwards to the world of the senses for centuries and losing himself in outer space. The time has now come to turn inwards, to learn to explore the inner space within the heart, and to make that long and exciting journey to the Centre. Compared with this, the exploration of the moon and planets is the play of children."¹⁴

Tony Henrys
11th July 1996

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