

## ***The Effects of Practice of the Spiritual Arts of Tai Chi Chuan and Chi Kung***

If we look briefly at the effects of practising Tai Chi Chuan and Chi Kung, we see that in a spiritual context, they are different, just as people are different. Everything depends upon commitment and perseverance. Each person begins from an unique departure point, depending on that person's physical, psychological and spiritual characteristics. What was once the property of an elite few is now the property of every man and woman responding to the prompting of their own spirit. This spirit connects everything, all creation, and wills everything into a greater participation in its boundless energy.

Of course, it is possible to practice Tai Chi Chuan and Chi Kung just to attain some degree of relaxation. But this alone would not begin to penetrate the vast richness of the arts. Attaining some relaxation is fine in itself, but it is nevertheless limited to the world of opposites embraced by the ego. In this respect, the ego knows only its own extremes of relaxation and tension. True relaxation is to be rested in the Creative Centre, detached from external phenomena. What we come to know is that the positive principle of creative energy is everywhere, and our perception of external phenomena is our dreamlike identification with its apparent activity. The Spiritual aspect of Tai Chi Chuan and Chi Kung is quite literally beyond our grasp and cannot be fully understood as it is unfathomable. However once one is surprised by its light, the meaning of its essence is personally verified, and the tradition through which it comes is continued. Continuity occurs because the experience is self-communicating. The only 'secret' of these arts worthy of note is that there is no secret other than correct and faithful practice. There is no master outside yourself. There is nothing external to yourself. These arts were passed down from monasteries and Holy mountains of a highly sophisticated ancient culture, for the benefit of all. They knew that true relaxation, rest or peace can only begin with the individual, and that its effects reverberate through both corporeal and incorporeal reality.

Certain Chi Kung forms, and all the long forms of the Classical Tai Chi Chuan schools symbolise the progressive journey towards enlightenment. 'Enlightenment' is a process of refining discernment through a series of disillusionments. It cannot be achieved in the way that the superficial self temporarily satisfies its desires. It cannot be possessed except through a way of dispossession. It is the opening of consciousness; a 'letting go' of everything that is transient and ultimately not real. This is perhaps a good way of understanding the ancient Chinese word 'sung', for which the Western equivalent is humility, renunciation and such like. It is only in letting go through ever purifying spheres of silence that we can 'awaken' to what is ultimately real. This is the Reality beyond time and created appearances. Initially, great courage is needed. This is because beneath the surface activities of ordinary consciousness, we directly confront forces which we may have previously masked over or avoided facing.

As the unconscious mind unloads, the repressed forces and impassioned impulses are 'uprooted'. This process can obscure even the sense of fruitfulness in ordinary life. All of this depends on how much implosive energy is present, how attached we are to these forces of repression, and how deep our underlying fear runs. For some, it is minimal, and progress is swift and easy. For others, when the energies are released, a turbulent mind and a fragmented perception of reality may occur. It is at this level that some students give up their practice and turn to some other activity. This is since the release of forces such as anger leads us to new levels of sensitivity and even vulnerability.

Sensitivity at these deeper levels of consciousness enables us to see with an ever greater clarity of vision on how much a product we are of our 'materialistic' producer/consumer society. We may realise how deeply ingrained are the forces of conformity, exploitation and unwitting manipulation. Sensitivity allows us to see how the mind creates so many alternative realities, fantasies and deceptions throughout every level of our being, individually and collectively. Here discernment of reality and illusion is at the heart of our spiritual practice of Tai Chi Chuan and Chi Kung. We understand more as our capacity increases, that the forms and actions we perform are external symbols of an internal reality. The outward forms actually reflect the interior, 'immaterial' spiritual combat. This has nothing to do with the relative terms of good and bad, or success and failure which so govern our surface thinking. Rather, it is to do with that which is real, and that which is not or that which is true and that which is false. The false in us divides us both individually and collectively.

As these 'false' or discordant energies are released through the practice, they can feel quite uncomfortable to even very painful. For instance, forces such as anger and the fear in which it is rooted may be turned upon ourselves or unfortunately projected outward to others. But eventually as the 'uncreated' light emerges and fear and other repressed forces dissolve, courage gives way to faithfulness. The fruits of practice are subtle and gradual. We know we are progressing spiritually from the deep changes taking place in ourselves. These changes gradually break through to our consciousness by the dilation of the positive creative centre, and we become aware of the liberating effects in our relationships, in our world, and above all our love. It is not so much that the questions are answered, rather that they cease to be. In the practice, we realise the absolute insufficiency of language. We come to know, though it is beyond understanding, the interior meaning of the trigrams of the I Ching. We are led to a clear meaning of the Tao Te Ching, and the subtleties of Tai Chi Chuan and Chi Kung forms.

In the practice, there is realisation, clarity and simplicity of being that makes our former complexity and dividedness absurdly irrelevant. In the ongoing process of this illuminating realisation, false images and illusions fall away. They are gently laid to rest with the coming of an unifying greater power. This greater power cannot properly be named, but through its mysterious presence, and in the light of its knowledge, the very meaning of our being becomes fulfilled.