

The Weston Beginners' class will be held on Anzac Day, Tuesday 25 April.

Can You Steal My Art?!

How can we master an art? There are so many steps. At first, you need to be interested in learning it, then you have to find a teacher and finally you must follow all the steps correctly. However, it does not always work this way. You might just stumble across something and gradually fall in love with it. So the art might choose you at first, then you see its value and then you choose it.

In my case, I had no idea of the depth behind the practice of Tai Chi. I thought it was like most things you learn. You are taught how to do it and then you practise and do it. Some things take more effort than others. However, if you keep at it, you will eventually learn it.

How different are Tai Chi and Wu Dao Gong from the above? You begin by just copying and learning a set of postures. Then, you realise there is a lot more going on and it is not so easy to explain or even to do. Take the principle of relaxation. At first, you think this is easy as you say to yourself, "I relax all the time." Then, one day, you realise that you are holding a lot of tension in your body. You thought that you were relaxed, but then you realise just how unaware of your body you have been. You begin to see that this relaxation thing is quite profound. You not only need to relax the body but you also need to relax the mind. I had never noticed how much thinking was going on in my head until I began to relax. How can you possibly stop thinking?! The mind-brain is designed to think or at least that was what I thought or was taught. If I stop thinking, maybe I won't exist and then I may lose my mind. Whoa, that's way too much thinking!

Actually, when you do learn to quiet the mind, you feel calm and less stressed and have greater clarity. You discover that you are not your thoughts or you are more than your thoughts. This is something you realise, the more you practise calming the mind. It is really the only true peace you will find. As long as you are a slave or a victim to your thinking, you will never experience deep peace.



Our practice is meditation in motion. It is a way of integrating the qualities of mindfulness, calmness and flow in our everyday lives. When the monks at the Shaolin Temple only recited Buddhist scriptures and meditated, they suffered from ill health. The great Buddhist Master Damo, who came from India, saw the problem. He found a way of teaching the dharma that relied less on scripture and more on direct understanding through movement and stillness. By being able to merge the two states, the monks could live a life that combined the spiritual with the mundane, giving birth to a transcendence that allowed them to live life in a fully awake and natural way.

Damo's legacy is still seen today in the Shaolin Temple and in many other arts that have been inspired by his profound insight into human nature and the mind. In China, meditation is known as Chan. In Japan, it became known as Zen. In the Shaolin Temple, they combined Chan with Wu. Wu is martial arts, so this combination of Chan and Wu transformed the fighting arts into a way of training the mind and body. Since the mind aspect is something you cannot see or touch, it is difficult to convey what it is that the student needs to do. On the other hand the body is tangible and something that is connected to the mind. It is a more accessible way to train the mind. We can also see how the mind is affecting the body by watching how the body moves. Being able to co-ordinate each part of the body



and then infuse its movement with tranquillity and flow requires a high degree of awareness and a mind that has entered into a meditative state.

This combination of mind and body has many benefits for the practitioner. He will feel calm and relaxed, the breathing becomes smooth and deep, the joints are rotated and strengthened, the blood is pumped through the body and the qi (energy) can be felt flowing through the meridians. The practitioner will sometimes become so immersed in what he is doing that all sense of time and even the awareness of his physical body dissolve into spaciousness. Just observing a good practitioner doing his training will induce a state of calm and joy in those watching him.



There are many stories of students who really wanted to master the internal arts and spent hours each day practising and studying the theories. Still they could not get the essence. Out of frustration, they spied on their masters practising, trying to find out the secret skill that would lead to mastery. In one story, when the student was eventually discovered by the master, he was asked to demonstrate. If he did well, the master was pleased because the student's intention was good. He was willing to go through great lengths to learn and master the art.

Merely copying will not enable you to know the essence. One master famously said, "In order to learn my art completely, you have to steal it." What does that mean? In the context of the training, it refers to the intangible aspect of the art. Nobody can give this to you. For example, you could be learning how to paint from Rembrandt. He could teach you all the colours and strokes. However, if in the end, you paint just like him, you would only be imitating a real artist. You have to make it your own knowledge. Practice and experience will help you to transform, so you can find your own way.

How can we find that X factor? This is the real secret in the art. It is something deep inside us. It is discovered when you become the art. It is ultimately who you really are that transcends the duality between reason and intuition. In Zen, they ask riddles, such as "What is the sound of one hand clapping?", "Show me your original face, the face you had before your parents were born." These puzzles cannot be answered with logic. They force you to go beyond your usual way of categorizing and understanding. To know the essence of the art, we have to change through the practice to transcend our limited self-grasping ego and embrace our universal nature. No matter how good the teacher is, in the end he can only take us so far and inspire us to go further. You have to find your own way. Then, you will truly know and appreciate the art and your life.

— Chief Instructor Brett Wagland



China Trip — 20 Oct to 9 Nov 2017
Shanghai, Chengdu, Tiger Leaping Gorge,
Lugu Lake, Lijiang, Mount Wudang, Xian & Beijing



See itinerary on our website,
www.taichiacademy.com.au

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