

Reflections on the Tai Chi & Meditation Retreat, April 2016 — Chief Instructor Brett Wagland

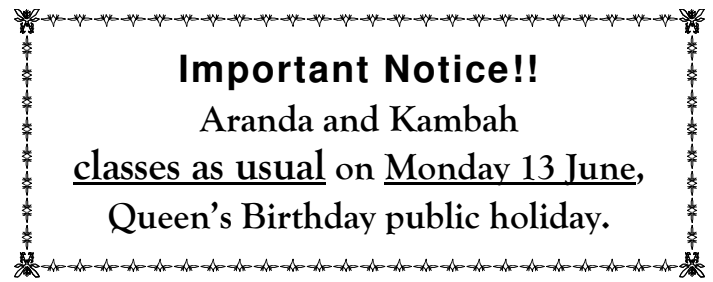
We recently held our 9th Tai Chi and Meditation Retreat at the wonderful SIBA centre in East Gippsland, Victoria. We were blessed with great weather and were joined by 30 people from Canberra, the South Coast, Melbourne, as far away as Queensland and as close as Bairnsdale (about an hour away). Participants such as Kath Kovac from Dalton (near Canberra) and Di Bacon and Rod Dunn from Quaama have been coming for many years. It is great to see these students who are like old friends to us and are a great inspiration to so many others.

Rod, a Tai Chi instructor in Cobargo, was back with us this year after having to miss last year because of a health challenge. His brave encounter with cancer and his attitude have inspired us all. **His great story-telling ability and wicked sense of humour had everyone laughing.** Rod recounted that after a major operation, still in hospital, he was concerned that he could not feel his energy centre in the abdomen. So in shock, he asked Fontane and myself, “Where the f*** is my Dan Tian?!” We reassured him then that with training, he would feel his Dan Tian again. Rod talked about how Tai Chi and Qigong have helped him to stay strong and endure the cancer treatment regime. We wish him well and are so happy to see him again. He is a cherished member of the Tai Chi family.



On the first night, I talked about the importance of doing a retreat in terms of leaving our everyday lives and activities behind. At SIBA, in the quiet of the mountains without our usual distractions, we have an opportunity to go deeper into our practices and gain insight and experience about ourselves. **We learn these arts so that we can awaken the beingness that we are.** Normally, our everyday experiences hide our original nature under a range of personas, attachments and stories we tell ourselves. A retreat gives us the opportunity to strip away some of these attachments and learn to just be, enabling a natural state of happiness and peace to arise.

During the **morning sessions** of this retreat, we focused on **two forms of Taoist Qigong from the Wudang Mountains**, the birthplace of Tai Chi and a mecca for martial artists and Chinese cultural enthusiasts. The Golden Hall, which has brightly coloured Tibetan Buddhist artworks, as well as some Chinese paintings and calligraphy, made it a special place for training. Looking out through the glass doors and windows, we could see a pond with a variety of birds flying around, wallabies and kangaroos grazing in grassland and further away, the banks of thickly wooded hills that surround the retreat grounds. What a lovely setting to do our practice!



Important Notice!!

Aranda and Kambah
classes as usual on Monday 13 June,
Queen's Birthday public holiday.

We began with the **Wudang Hun Yuan Qigong** form which calms and nourishes the mind and body, allowing us to become immersed in the practice. After the initial opening sequence which calms and prepares the mind and body, we then collect qi (energy) from the front and sides of the body, finishing with the Holding the Tree posture which helps to mix the internal qi with the external qi. **The second Qigong form has the calming and nourishing qualities with an added strengthening component.** Both of these practices give us an excellent understanding of the way in which qi affects the body and the joy of moving meditation. Fortunately, they are easy to learn. However, with all things Taoist, they have a depth of knowledge behind them and need to be taught correctly in order for them to affect us deeply. Otherwise, they will become mere exercises that can be performed mindlessly.

In the **evenings**, those who wanted to experience more of the internal health arts joined me in the Golden Hall to try **Push Hands and Ba Gua** circle walking and its first palm change. These exercises are important training in the development of a coordinated and more powerful body. **Push Hands** is a skill involving a partner and is a way of training a special power called *pung jin*, a type of spring force. It is a force that is between hard, stiff power and soft power. **Ba Gua Zhang** (Eight Trigram Palm) is a Taoist art that is based on walking a circle which corresponds to the movement of the cosmos. It is a way of harmonising ourselves with the universe. This practice develops strong legs, a flexible waist, strong back and a powerful flow of internal qi. Students at the retreat found it both challenging and exciting to learn. This is an advanced art which teaches three dimensional movement patterns, totally changing our linear perception of movement and space.



On the **meditation** front, Fontane explained methods of meditation and the **different stages of meditative absorption.** This enables meditators to gauge where they are at with their practice, especially if they happen to stumble across one of the higher meditative states. Some of the seasoned meditators, who have been meditating for many years, commented that this was the first time that they have heard of this road map. Everyone found it fascinating. Now they can see

how a high level practitioner could sit for hours doing meditation. In the retreat, having the opportunity to practise meditation in a more focused way had a profound effect on many of the students.

In the **afternoons**, students were divided into two groups : beginners and continuing students. The beginners worked with me and Fontane took the more advanced group. The three hour session gave students time to really work on their practice. In the Temple, we had a beautiful afternoon sunset, reflecting sunlight through the various windows and adding to the tranquillity and charm of the environment. The students applied themselves and gained a better understanding and feel of Tai Chi. The more advanced group trained in the Golden Hall with Fontane who taught them how to go deeper into the Tai Chi form through following the principles correctly and practising the form five times in a row on some days. Students commented that they never knew Tai Chi could feel so good. Some felt their Dan Tian in the abdomen warm for the first time.

The retreat is such a special event. We were blessed to have such a wonderful atmosphere and the support of the warm and friendly staff led by Jampal. They cooked amazing meals and even made three delicious chocolate birthday cakes. Due to the enthusiasm of this group of participants, we are already looking forward to the next retreat. Hope you can join us then!



Wudang Mountain Qigong for Calmness & Energy Cultivation Workshop – Sat 4 June 2pm to 5pm

**Easy & Enjoyable. No experience is necessary.
Conducted by Chief Instructor Brett Wagland**

Wudang Mountain is the birthplace of internal arts from where Tai Chi and various forms of Qigong have evolved. **Internal arts** are practices that place an emphasis on quieting the mind, strengthening the body and cultivating qi (energy). This way of training is different from the harder style workouts that can exhaust vital energy and damage the body. In China, this is very much **part of the Taoist tradition of life-enhancement, both in terms of longevity and quality of life.** Taoists believe that the more you know about health and healing, the more control you have over your life and well being. “Your life is in your hands” is a famous Taoist saying.



In this workshop, you will learn the **Wudang Hun Yuan Qigong**, a favourite of the Tai Chi and Meditation Retreat participants. Hun Yuan means to mix and blend. In this context, it is referring to the qi (life energy) that you are gathering from the environment and mixing with your own qi. **This form is easy to learn and easy on the body, so it enables you to enter into the energy state quickly.** You feel very absorbed in the practice. It is only once you have entered this state that you can experience the absolute benefits and joy of qigong practice. There are three stages to this Qigong set. The first stage calms the mind and relaxes the

body. It can be practised independent of the other two stages. The second stage involves collecting or gathering qi from around us. This is the nourishing component. It contains gentle twisting and strengthening movements of the waist and legs. The third component is the mixing of the external qi with that of the internal qi. This is trained through the Holding the Tree posture. **With all three stages, you will experience a deep sense of well being that will permeate the day’s activities.**



The second internal training exercise is **the Dragon from the Five Animal Qigong.** It helps to loosen any areas of tension, open the joints and strengthen the waist. The dragon belongs to the element of wood and represents wisdom. This exercise is beneficial for the liver, gall-bladder and circulation. It is an elegant and powerful blending of movement and inner work. You will be captivated by the beauty of this exercise which you will enjoy practising.



During the workshop, **you will also learn** about correct postural alignment, whole body coordination and leg strengthening exercises from the Wudang Turtle Swimming Form. This workshop is suitable for all students and their friends. Join us for a special afternoon of internal cultivation practices!



Sat 4 June 2pm to 5pm \$100-

Bookings are essential. To ensure your place, please pay the workshop fee \$100- to your instructor, phone the Office on 6296 1357 or enrol online (www.taichiacademy.com.au — click on How to Enrol, then click on Workshops & Other Courses)

Wesley Centre Common Area , behind the Rydges Hotel corner National Circt & Fitzroy St, **Forrest**

Enter through the main entrance of the building in the car park.

>> Please bring a drink and snack. <<