

## Reflections on the 11th Tai Chi & Meditation Retreat — Chief Instructor Brett Wagland

Once again, 25 students made the scenic five and a half hour journey to **SIBA, a very tranquil retreat centre**. To make the effort to travel so far and spend 5 days at a location had better be worth it! The drive from Canberra through Bombala and Cann River is very special. The rolling open plains from Cooma to Bombala give you the feeling of expansiveness. The pastel colours merging with the oranges, greys and blues of the sky are glorious. From Bombala, you travel through the national forests down to the Cann River and the green coastal pastures. There are many dairy farms in the district so the whole area is very country. Travelling to Nowa Nowa and up through beautiful Buchan is very interesting and other worldly. Finally you arrive in W. Tree with its towering snow gums and thick vegetation. The retreat centre is a short drive off the main road down for half a kilometre. Then you see a lovely spot nestled into the side of a hill. Finally, you have arrived and immediately feel that you are at somewhere special.



The **SIBA complex** is a combination of brick motel style units, a spacious dining hall with a geodesic dome and a Tibetan Gompa (for prayers). There is also a building with an amazing ornate wooden structure that we use for meditation and a large hall for Qigong and Tai Chi with peaceful views to the pond. There are also camping grounds and facilities and quaint cabins which are for residents, workers and Tibetan Buddhist practitioners on solitary retreats. The property has organic gardens and bush walking trails. Another interesting aspect to SIBA is that it has hosted retreats by some of Tibet's high lamas. They have all blessed the buildings which does give it a special aura, something you notice once you spend a few days there.

It is in this tranquil and blessed environment that we conduct our retreat. Once you arrive, you begin to feel the changes in the mind and body. The busyness of everyday life and the tension of the body start to drop away. The first evening was a welcome and introduction session. **Hearing others' stories** of their reasons for coming to the retreat is **very powerful**. It forges friendships and recognition and understanding of each other's journey. Fontane and I are always in awe of what others have done and gone through to get to this point. Before we retired for the evening, we did some Tai Chi loosening exercises and Qigong to relax and calm the mind and body.



The first **morning** began with the powerful **Wudang Mountain 5 Pillars Qigong**. This is a set of semi-dynamic movements that open the body and its meridians producing a powerful energy flow. My teacher Li Shifu said that this set can give the sick a lifeline to hold on to and raise the level of health for anyone who practises it. The resident monk, Tenzin, commented that he could feel his Dan Tian (energy centre) in the abdomen warm. All students felt energised and relaxed. Kathryn from Cobargo on the South Coast, a regular of our annual retreat, said that doing the 5 Pillars Qigong made her cells feel full and plump like honey. Then, doing the meditation with Fontane put a smile (an extra glow) on those ripe cells. By the end of the retreat, students were practising up to 15 minutes on each of the 5 pillars, challenging but rewarding work.

The **meditation with Fontane is always fascinating**. Fontane has trained with great masters of meditation and qigong for years. Her own cultivation enables her to shed light on topics that are unfathomable to the mind. This is great for students as they can learn from someone who can guide them through the many aspects of the mental and

### Important Notice!!



**Aranda and Kambah —**  
classes as usual on Mon 28 May  
& Mon 11 June, public holidays.

### Workshops on Sat 2 June

- Powerful Wuji Gong
- Spiralling Energy in Tai Chi



energy landscape. Students are always amazed by the simplicity and depth of her teaching. The theme this year was on what it means to be (yourself). This was an interesting exploration and helped everyone to go through many layers of the mind and to arrive at the door of collapsing dualities. As with all our retreats, students are gradually taken deeper into the practice. By the end of the retreat, students (even beginners) were sitting for 45 minutes.



On the Tai Chi side, beginners had the opportunity to learn the Hun Yuan system. It is a fusion of the traditional Chen style of the great master Chen Fa Ke and the Qigong of the famous traditional Chinese medical and Xin Yi master Hu Yao Zhen. Both of these legendary practitioners were teachers of Feng Zhi Qiang, the founder of this system. **This style enables students to relax deeply and experience the inner flow of Tai Chi**. Some students had studied different forms of Tai Chi but all enjoyed the depth and beauty of this system. Fontane taught the advanced students and refined their skills. As always, she can highlight something you are not doing correctly even when you thought you were correct. There is always something more to learn in Tai Chi and it really is a never-ending journey.

In the evening, some students explored the 2 person **chin na set (joint locking skills)**. Concealed in the Tai Chi form are many movements used to lock or subdue an opponent. In this set, you learn how to lock your partner's joints and how to escape from the locks. This simple set helps you to understand your Tai Chi movements more clearly, revealing many hidden applications and skills. Many people learning Tai Chi today are unfamiliar with its martial uses. If you have an insight into these practices, your own understanding and skill level is greatly enhanced. It is also a lot of fun.



In the last evening of the retreat, each participant talked about how they were impacted by the experience. This is truly powerful and uplifting. **It shows the importance of the arts that we are privileged to teach and practise ourselves**. The staff at SIBA were amazing. Jampal and Yue-l's cooking went to another level. They even made kung fu cookies for morning tea. Those who helped, such as Joe and the other staff, were great. We all felt as if we were part of one big family. As usual, Kath celebrated her birthday at the retreat, meaning we all got birthday cake. Michael played his guitar and sang lovely songs. Very nice. Thank you for that.

The trip home was another five and a half hours but this time, it was filled with many pleasant memories and teachings from the retreat. Thank you all for your support and wonderful spirit. We couldn't do it without you. To all those who couldn't attend this time, **we look forward to seeing you next year**.