



T'ai Chi

European School of T'ai Chi Chuan: Autumn 2005 newsletter

Paramis - perserverance, courage and compassionate love

We met at the May retreat heavy hearted at the deaths of two friends: Brian Cookman, who had co-led the autumn 2004 retreat, and Arie Gershuni, who'd been in Kamal's class.

Tew's guidance and the sharing of his Metta practice helped us to strengthen our own practice and support each other. We were also inspired by the video he showed of the latest work at the Mercy Centre in Bangkok and in the areas of south Thailand affected by the tsunami. Here is the Kuan Yin chant that we used:

Na Mo Ta Pe Kuan She Yin Pu Sa

Homage to the great listener,
to the sounds of the world
Hail to the compassionate cosmic mother,
wisdom body

The chant refers to the Goddess or Cosmic Mother, the feminine aspect of Buddha - she who harkens to the cries of the world. You

might find the name spelt in a number of ways: Kuan/Kwuan/Quan. The word means to inquire or look deeply into. Yin means 'cries' and the words are often seen as Kuan Shi Yin, Shi meaning world of people

The goddess is said to have emerged directly from the light from Amitabha Buddha's eye. He is said to have cried out, "Om Mani Padme Hum". This translates as 'Hail to the jewel in the lotus'. This is often used as a mantra to gain Kuan Yin's merciful intercession.

Kuan Yin is a bodhisattva, destined to become a Buddha, but foregoes the bliss of Nirvana with a vow to save all sentient beings. She is the embodiment of Karuna or compassion. She is depicted in many forms revealing aspects of her merciful presence, often in white with a child, sometimes with many arms. She is the Mistress of the Southern Seas and patron of fishermen.

Jane Muir

Tribute to Brian Cookman, pioneer of T'ai Chi and special needs

It was a big shock when Brian died suddenly from cancer on 18th February. Brian was, along with Linda Chase Broda and other founder members of the TCKK Forum for Health, one of the pioneers working with T'ai Chi and Special Needs. He dedicated much of his time to showing how T'ai Chi can help people who are seriously disabled. Brian worked at the Pain Clinic at Kent and Canterbury Hospital where he was much respected by the nursing staff and adored by the patients, who were greatly helped by his humour, empathy and encouragement.

Brian was a unique mix of the tough and the tender. He was primarily a musician - a blues

singer and father of four, who are all musicians. I always felt that he kept a musician's focus on energy - on *chi* moving in strange ways. His teaching was about unravelling *chi* - unravelling pain - and through the discipline of detail and posture searching out the body's harmony - finding the 'true' note for each individual.

There are many things that I will miss about Brian. He had generosity of spirit, a great sense of the absurd and he always 'down-played' the innovative T'ai Chi work he was doing at the Pain Clinic. He would deny it, but he was living a tough life tenderly and beautifully.

Louanne Richards

Until You Remember

In early March Jos and I flew to Oslo to see Kristina and watch her latest performance *Until You Remember*. Oslo was sparkling in brilliant sunshine, the snow was thick and white on the pavements and the cold was unbelievable - especially at night when after the first performance we all walked through the streets to eat a celebratory Chinese meal. It was almost cold enough to throw up hot coffee and watch it freeze in mid air.

Jos and I are still laughing today about our journey. I think I have to come clean and tell you what happened. I won't embarrass Jos by revealing in full glaring print the nick name we occasionally tease her with but I am sure everybody in the tai chi family knows her for a highly efficient and organised person - the former secretary of the UK branch of the European School of Tai Chi Chuan, no less.

Unfortunately on this occasion she was travelling with somebody who does not have any such reputation and who led her astray to such an extent that we missed our stop. As we dozed out of the train window at the stations, wondering when we would reach the capital city of Norway, we found ourselves in the depths of the country in a place called Drammen. We had passed Oslo some time back! Eric, Kristina's partner, was patiently and kindly waiting to pick us up all this time. He must have thought we were completely mad.

Eric, Kristina, Tom and Tara live in a beautiful flat. An elaborately decorated green iron staircase took us up out of the snow and into their flat, heated by a huge tiled wood burning stove - like the old Russian ones. The heat was such a contrast to the freezing cold outside. And of course we were lovingly welcomed by all four of them.

Eric had cooked delicious food, Tara laid the table and read us stories while Tom showed us his wonderful room. Kristina looked tired, happy and beautiful. She put Sonia Loinsworth singing Tibetan mantras on the CD player and as I listened, partly to the haunting singing, and to the others talking, I had the strong sensation that there was nowhere else in the world that I wanted to be at that time, than there.

Until You Remember is the second performance of Kristina's that I have seen. Once again I was carried away with the passion of her choreography and the intensity of her dancing. It is a solo piece based on the five elements; a combination of a meditation in dance, variations on the tai chi forms and a deeply personal journey moving through the elements.

The set was made up of a waterfall of horticultural fleece from behind which emerged Kristina's arms, flowing like water. In front was a bowl, lacquered gold inside shining in the light like an alchemical elixir. At the back of the stage was a textured wall on which light and shadow was thrown and like a recurring theme, the patterns of our lives were danced in light and shadow.

The pain of 'snake goes down to water', the compassion of 'lady weaves the shuttles' and the joy of 'bird spreads its wings' were echoed in movements shadowed against the back wall. On the other side of the stage were hanging chains made of metal and attached to one a burning flame. Kristina moved in and around the chains, sometimes consumed by the fire, sometimes warmed by it, and once, memorably, dancing with the golden lining of her skirt outlined against the dark like an eclipse.

Both Jos and myself remember the eloquence and simplicity of Kristina's hand movements. They stayed with me long after I had come back home and now, some time later, when I am revisiting the performance. Jos has a memory of the stillness and quietude that Kristina maintained through all the changes of rhythm and tempo but always coming back to the focus of the still centre, of going with the flow but not letting it take over.

Until you Remember is also a collaborative piece with Kristina's partner Eric. The performance opened with a video of Eric 'dancing' calligraphy with a long brush and a bowl of black ink. Two of his poems which I have written out at the end of this review, say far more than I ever can about the Taoist quality of Kristina's work and its message to us. Jos and Kristina are also hoping to collaborate on a performance in 2007, following on from the work that Jos is doing in Japan and Kristina is exploring in the desert in Idaho.

I have absolutely no doubt in my mind that the money will be raised for this project and that I will be there at the first performance. It will be of huge significance to me. Jos and Kristina are my Bodhisattvas. At pivotal moments in my life they have both been there and with gentle and penetrating insistence they set me on the road. This visit to Oslo, the celebration of the dance and the future plans are all bound up for me in the enduring friendship of my two wise and creative tai chi sisters.

Sue McAlpine, September 2005



Jos, Kristina, Eric and Tom.

Here are some poems written by Eric (Williams)

Pushing hands

Ink

Wings arching

Backing away

Gravity bends

It carries the memory of motion

Motion resting

Continuing the hand

Giving, resisting

Holding form in slow shadow

Soul expands

Its water spirit

Soul extending

Dying

Pushing hands

For the last word

Walking

Falling in rhythm

Flying

Falling up

Dancing

Falling emotion

You land sleeping

To find them, you must pause

Call them by name

If you are praying the body

They will answer.

To find them you must move

In the spaces between

Until you remember.

and they follow each to each

in gathering waves

earth, metal, water, wood, fire

echoing your every step

until even the air itself

carries the memory of motion.

Eyes open

Keep moving

Breathe

Suck the safe air deep into your belly

Feel anything, feel everything

What ever you do keep moving

Whatever you do

don't leave

The last wasp is gone

A quilt of red and yellow

Softens every step

For the next issue we invite contributions about what Tai Chi means to you and particularly about all the different locations in which you have practised.

Arie Gershuni: a force of nature

Arie started learning T'ai Chi in Louanne's class in Tooting and then carried on with me for some years. He loved T'ai Chi and really got deeply into it, to the extent that for the last few years he had been training with Karel Kostubo, as he felt our school was not rigorous enough. He had also got into Bikram yoga at this stage. I had kept in touch and saw him every few months during this period.

He greatly enjoyed his one international retreat, the Greek one in Mytilene (Lesbos). After this retreat Arie, Jane and I had a delightful and memorable beach holiday.

I shall never forget our regular evenings out after class. A group of us would visit the local Indian or Italian restaurant to eat, drink and talk till late. Arie kept widely informed and loved disputing everything and anything. He was quite a foodie and more of a fanatic about Indian food than even me. He always managed to make friends with the waiters.

Arie was like a force of nature, big loud and not to be ignored in a group. The strange thing was that he always claimed to be very shy. He had an intense interest in people and their motivations. This led to him often

being insensitive to others as he probed away trying to find what made them tick; he only wished to help them. Although this was often uncomfortable for all concerned it was surprising how perceptive he could be about people even after meeting them very briefly.

He was totally genuine in that he had no guile and was always upfront about his opinions and feelings. He could not bear any bullshit and would jump in with both feet into arguments and never hold himself back. This made it fun to be with him. It is a bittersweet pleasure to know that Arie would have hated to have anything affectionate written about him; but I miss my good friend.

Kamal Thapen

Arie passed away in March earlier this year aged fifty six after a massive heart attack. Although he had suffered bouts of anxiety and depression previously, he was never ill otherwise and it was a shock to hear of this at his early age. He had a great interest in alternative and complementary therapies and was forever suggesting different formulations of vitamins or supplements. I had met up with him only a couple of weeks before and he had been his usual self.

The Now of T'ai Chi is the theme of our autumn retreat at Springhead from 14 -16 October. Chris Sadler will be leading the retreat and Sue Webber is helping organise the weekend. Suggestions and ideas are very welcome.

Sodge Adams, practice group in Hampstead, north London

Val Androutsopoulou, Corfu,

Helen Baker, Havant,

Keith Gull, central London,

Jos Hadfield, Farnham,

Glyn Jones, Machynlleth,
Workshop 26/27 Nov in Vale of Clwyd, Chen form on Saturday and tree planting on Sunday. Also Chinese calligraphy and Mandarin lessons in London and Farnham.

Ian Lillicrap, Battersea,

Sue McAlpine

Georgina McLaurin, Isle of Man,

Caroline Merry, Oxford,

Rory Norton, Sussex,

Louanne Richards, Oxford,

Chris Sadler, Inverness,

Ali Sandeman, Havant,

Richard Siviak, York,

Kamal Thapen, Balham,

Sue Webber, Egham,

Julia Webster, Farnham,

Sue Woodd, Surrey, Sussex and Glasgow