

european school of t'ai chi

NEWSLETTER May 2021

Tao Te Ching No 11

Thirty spokes share one hub
to make a wheel.
Through its non-being (wu),
There is (yu) the use (yung)
of the carriage.

Mold clay into a vessel (ch'i).
Through its non-being (wu),
There is (yu) the use (yung)
of the vessel.

Cut out doors and windows
to make a house.
Through its non-being (wu),
There is (yu) the use (yung)
of the house.

Therefore in the being (yu-chih)
of a thing,
There lies the benefit (li).
In the non-being (wu-chih)
of a thing,
there lies its use (yin).

E M Chen



Welcome

Whilst we may still not be able to dance the t'ai chi together as we have in previous years, we are all part of this great family (or sangha) in whatever location we find ourselves.

In a recent teaching, Tew spoke about the dojo of practice that can materialise wherever we are. Thus, every time we bow at the beginning and end of the form, we are joining together with all those who do this practice, wherever they may be.

As we bow, we make space to breathe and move, sense and connect. When we relax into this space we can simply be, dropping into the non-doing of our being. This space, this pause, is the key to all that we do. So, wherever we find ourselves, whatever we are facing, it helps to recall the value and importance of keeping our spaciousness within - this huge potential which lies within us all.

Jos Hadfield



New shoots

Spring is well on its way. The wood energy rises and swells. We start to come out of lock down and look around and connect once more. We can begin to emerge, have conversations in person and travel further afield.

The Wednesday Zoom sessions have really come into their own with a wonderful range of teachings on line from experienced teachers and newcomers. This has been such a rich experience and provided a real anchor through the past darker days. It has been joyful to connect on screen and share this precious weekly hour together. These sessions will continue for the time being and add a new dimension to the school practice. Most of them are available on our website.

Since our October Newsletter, we have remained active: Tew led us in an inspirational on- line retreat; Equanimity and Courage, exploring how to maintain these qualities using the mudras and sequences of

tai chi. The recordings from this retreat are available now on the web site.

This January, Caroline and Jos led a creative weekend of calligraphy and tai chi, 'Finding the still Point,' a wonderful combination of art and movement.

In mid- April we moved off screen to join Louanne in the wonderful College House Garden to learn the Sabre Form

This newsletter contains some new, green shoots: Nika has shared a piece about her exciting qualitative research on t'ai chi and Fran includes a piece about her new role as librarian for the school, helped by Becky Curtis. Louanne shares an article about the Jade Screen Project which the school has agreed to support this year.

The future remains uncertain. Rather than the usual May retreat, practice will continue to be on line and stay local: Springhead is provisionally booked for October, 21.

Hoping to see you all soon on screen or IRL.

Sue Beecraft
Chair ESTCC

May 21

Line drawing by Janet Bell

ESTCC Book Team

Following ideas discussed at this year's AGM Fran Kandler-Singer has put forward some initial ideas to create an online book resource of recommended reading. Both she and Becky Curtis will implement this and it will be for both ESTCC members & the general public. Fran and Becky will start to organise a booklist for the website starting with a list of key texts recommended by ESTCC teachers.

The purpose of this resource is to encourage reflective thought and self-development, as well as to widen interest in the history, philosophy & practice of Tai Chi.

We welcome any suggestions you may have, including texts in other languages, translations and dual language.

If you have any thoughts on topics & questions you would like covered please let them know.

They are at the early stages of planning. and are wondering what this resource could be called - further reading / reading list / reading suggestions / booklist / library / resources / reading resources?

Longer term the list could even expand beyond the printed page to other media, such as, video links to key lectures, discussions & seminars on topics that are recommended in the reading list. They welcome all comments & ideas!

Contact: Frances.singer@gmail.com



Insights from “It’s an Amazing Toolkit’- Older Adults’ Experience of Long-Term Tai Chi Practice” – a MSc psychology project by Dominika Opyrchal

Research into tai chi has mainly focused on the physiological effects and benefits of the practice and largely has been undertaken in the USA and China. Furthermore, it usually involves short (up to 12 weeks) interventions where ‘tai chi group’ is compared to other activity group. In my 2019 Masters project, I wanted to focus on the psychological effects and conducted interviews with long term tai chi practitioners seeking their perspective on the practice. Multitude of topics emerged from the conversations, but what was most striking and reoccurred in the narratives of almost all my interlocutors were two overarching themes, which I called: ‘tai chi as a transformative experience’ and ‘tai chi as a practice of living’.

What transformative impact did tai chi have on the practitioners? Well, what transpired was that most of them reported a certain ‘organic change’ happening outside their consciousness, a kind of multi-level or ‘organism learning’, where body, emotions and mind are intertwined in the process. For majority, the effect of the transformation was, what we could call, increased resilience or strengthened psychological structure. Some mentioned feeling of vulnerability disappearing which affected how other people perceived them – as ‘strong and steady’. Others noticed how the application of the ‘tai chi movement’ – the awareness and intention - to other aspects of life, transformed and improved their other skills such as creative writing, drawing or swimming. Another reported effect of the practice was ‘mental clarity’ and acceptance, not resisting things, which in turn seemed to promote feelings of compassion towards the self and to the wider world.

The second overarching theme emerging from the conversations was the idea of tai chi as a ‘practice of living’, applying tai chi philosophy and movement to everyday life. One participant referred to tai chi practice as ‘an amazing toolkit’, revealing different benefits at different stages in life, more physical in earlier years and more spiritual in older age. One of the prevailing descriptions of the practice was that of ‘grounding’ experience, which helped with maintaining psychological balance. Almost all interlocutors mentioned the aspect of constant learning in tai chi as there is always a room for improvement and mastering the details in postures. Many mentioned that tai chi helped them ‘tune in’ into themselves, they used it as a kind of psychological scanner allowing them to become aware of mental or emotional blockages. Many participants referred to the tai chi practice as something they could depend on in difficult times. Agnes, a 74-year-old with 30 years of tai chi experience, expressed this beautifully: *‘It’s a solid practice... you can hold onto it, when things are all over the place and distracted. (...) it’s a sort of lifeline.’* And I think we can all testify how true that rings, especially now during the Covid19 pandemic.

This short summary does not cover all the aspects of tai chi practice as experienced by the practitioners. The project itself opened many varied avenues to investigate in greater detail, which I am hoping to follow. So watch that space!

Dominika Opyrchal



The Jade Screen Project

The Jade Screen Project was set up as a practical response to the Covid emergency. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has a long tradition of treating epidemics and plagues and the pharmacopeia has a wealth of antiviral and anti-inflammatory herbs that have been used successfully for many centuries.

Early in April 2020 Andrew Flower, a lead herbalist and member of the Register of Chinese Herbal Medicine realised that TCM had much to offer to people on the NHS frontline.

He gathered together a group of volunteer herbalists and researchers to form the Jade Screen Project (JSP). The name Jade Screen was chosen because Jade (Yu) which the Chinese believed is formed in the dark womb of the earth by the agency of lightning, possesses the quality of longevity. In medicine it is thought of as an internal panacea that regenerates the body. Still in use today, is an historic Jade Windscreen formula which supports the protective (Wei) Qi from being invaded by external pathogens.

Initially the aim was to offer free herbal formulae to frontline workers to help in the prevention, treatment and recovery from Covid-19. As the project progressed, it became clear that many NHS nurses, doctors, midwives and drivers who had been

exposed to high viral loads early on in the pandemic were now suffering from the complicated symptoms of long-covid

This has led to JSP putting considerable focus on relieving the persistent breathing and blood deficiency problems along with exhaustion, brain fog, depression and a host of other symptoms. Because many of these NHS patients feel far too vulnerable to consider being vaccinated (at 06/05/21 MHRA figures for adverse reactions have reached 786,350 and for deaths 1,143) they are choosing to put their trust in a completely wholistic system of healing, which for many is gratifyingly giving them back their active lives.

Having become one of the JSP herbal volunteers, I find that I learn from the frontline patients just what they have been through, how utterly confusing and desperate their world became and how much their dedication to their patients has cost them in terms of personal health. I am also experiencing the extent to which Chinese herbal medicine can adapt to each individual's varying physical and psychological needs as they move through the stages of their covid journey.

The Jade Screen Project relies entirely on donations and we owe our existence to the generosity of many individuals and various groups such as Pukka Herbs and Earth Song and recently the ESTCC. We are extremely grateful to the school for the wonderfully helpful £500 donation.

Louanne

May 21

Wednesdays 6 - 7pm

We are continuing to offer these teaching sessions through this year. They offer the riches of teaching from within our school and is a wonderful way to keep connected with each other beyond our own homes and country - meeting also with our family members in Norway, Spain and Greece.

If you wish to go on the mailing list then please go to info@metta-taichi.org.uk. May we all keep well.

