

european school of t'ai chi

NEWSLETTER NOV 2023

Tao Te Ching No 7

Heaven is long, earth enduring.

Long and enduring
because they do not exist for
themselves.

Therefore the Sage
steps back, but is always in front,
stays outside but is always within.

No self- interest?
Self is fulfilled.

S Addiss & S Lombardo



Heaven and earth
are enduring

The universe can live for ever,
because it does not live for itself.

And so both last - outliving themselves.

The sage guides his people
by putting himself last.

Desiring nothing for himself,
he knows how to channel desires.

And is it not because he wants nothing
that he is able to achieve everything?

Man Ho Kwok, Martin Palmer, Jay Ramsay



Welcome

The strength of our t'ai chi family was again felt most warmly at Springhead this last October when Tew led us on a deep weekend connecting with the essential qualities of the spiritual warrior. It was a great time for deepening our understanding , no matter how much experience we did, or did not, have beforehand. And thanks to the sale of Rodney & Cat's beautiful T-shirts we were able to raise more than £345 for Mercy Centre UK.

We have already booked our next weekend with Tew for the beginning of June at Springhead next year - so put it in your diaries now!

The 'Earth and Being' retreat also met again at Roselidden in July when the body and brush met with the elements, and found inspirational insight for young beginners, as well as for the more seasoned.

While local classes continue through the winter months, our next school event will be at the AGM weekend in Surrey in February 2024.

There is only room in these pages for some edited highlights of our school's activities so do turn to our website for more articles and sharing of what we do. www.metta-taichi.org.uk



Tew mentioned the strong presence of this seated bodhisattva statue (Chinese C13th) which he saw at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. She marks a transitional phase in the transformation of the male form of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara into the

Chinese female deity Guanyin, the 'Goddess of Mercy'. Avalokiteshvara was said to be the earthly manifestation of the Buddha Amitabha whose figure can still be seen represented at the front of the headdress. Avalokiteshvara, often translated as "the One who looks upon the world with compassion", was said to be able to appear in 33 different physical forms, seven of these as women or young girls. It is thought that Avalokiteshvara was introduced into China with Buddhism around the 3rd century BC. From his/her introduction and up until the Jin Dynasty (1115–1234) images of the bodhisattva were increasingly androgynous, incorporating both male and female characteristics. In China from the 12th century Avalokiteshvara is entirely represented as female, taking the form of the white robed Guanyin.

Mudras are a non-verbal mode of communication and self-expression, consisting of hand gestures and finger-postures often seen in Buddhist statues. The mudra of Avalokiteshvara symbolises charity, compassion and boon-granting. It symbolises the accomplishment of choosing to devote oneself to human salvation. It is nearly always made with the left hand, and can be made with the arm hanging naturally at the side of the body, the palm of the open hand facing forward and the fingers extended. The five extended fingers in this mudra symbolize the following five perfections: generosity, morality, patience, effort and meditative concentration.

A mudra, a sacred gesture, can connect us to our spiritual self. They can be used to recognise and confront our very real fears, and to engage with them fully. Both peace and fear are energies, both infectious but fear can lead us to violence and away from peace, which itself comes from deep acceptance. Mudras are embedded in the t'ai chi practice and we can also live them - not from ambition but from patient, loving practice.

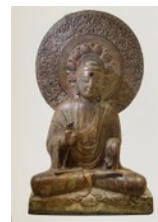
Bhumisparsa - the earth as witness, touching the earth.



Both hands and fingers reach down to the ground, from where we bring up energy through the body, up into the heart, from where we open, connected to the source, which is that much greater than our small selves, but which we are a part of.

Double Abhaya - connecting with what we face, recognising, accepting, and naming it. Both palms open forward as we connect to the transcendent, channeling fearlessness while facing fear. We come through fear to a deep acceptance, a deep peace, even while the fear is still present.

Abhaya and Varada - channelling compassion as we face fear.



The fingers of the one hand connecting upwards as we reach to connect with and calm the 'monkey' of fear and the open palm of the other facing downwards, offering compassion, listening to the fear

Vajra Mushti - thunderbolt fist

Fisting the hands to grasp the fear fully, stepping towards it with equanimity and courage; there is no other choice, but to fully confront it. Engaging with this destructive force.

Vajra Pradhana - unshakeable trust, both hands on the heart

Connecting the smaller heart to the source, the universal. Keeping that consciousness with confidence and trust. Nothing to do, just to connect.

Tess

'The long weekend retreat at Springhead was full of love, laughter, tears and trust. Springhead in Fontmell Magna is a beautiful place to be, peaceful and welcoming.'

On arrival at Springhead, I felt embraced by everyone on the retreat. There was a tremendous feeling of loving kindness. We started outside on the grass by the lake on Friday evening as the sun was setting. Tew Bunnag introduced some fundamentals of tai chi with some practice before we went indoors for a delicious vegan/vegetarian dinner followed by meditation and 'good nights'.

Every morning, practice started early on the grass, we felt the cold morning dew wake up our bodies from the base of our feet. The days unfolded and developed naturally with Tew sharing his wisdom and knowledge to the group with many amusing anecdotes. The theme for the weekend was compassion, courage and facing fear.

As someone new to Tai Chi and the retreat I was excited to listen and learn, and for me, although the form wasn't familiar, there was the opportunity of following the group and learning from them. We chanted, recited prayers & Paramis, meditated, practised the short/long form and had many interesting and illuminating conversations.

Tew is an exceptional person full of selfless love, compassion and support. Everyone was so kind and giving and I felt completely at home.

I could go on and write an essay on the wonderful journey I was fortunate enough to be part of. Thank you so much for sharing your experiences and love.'



www.metta-taichi.org.uk

Sue McAlpine

'Standing by the lake in the evening at Springhead, hearing the sound of the mill race and the owls hooting in the trees, watching the bats swoop overhead as the sun dipped under the hill and the dusk dropped softly, reminded me so much of Yeats' poem 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree'. Back in the city he hears lake water lapping reminding him of the beauty and peace of the place in the same way that I can be reminded of Springhead in the midst of London's noise. But I can keep with me too the teachings of the heart, the love and support of the sangha and my boddisattva vows. As the poet says 'I hear it in the deep heart's core'. These were the last words my mother said to me before she died so I can also carry a memory of her when I hear the poem.'

What an enormous pleasure it was to read the poem on my 74th birthday in one of the most beautiful places I know'.



Sue Webber

*'Copper beech, spring waters, and scented Springhead roses
Our circle is the many,
each small heart beating with.
Sun shines on sorrows,
sun shines on joys.
Rain falls on sorrow,
falls on joy.
Blessings befall our circle.
Courage reaching out hands in lines
sustains our circle,
circle that holds the many.'*

At Springhead there was opportunity to share poems and song around the fire and lake. Here is one such.

Crossing the bar

Sunset and evening star,
 And one clear call for me!
 And may there be no moaning of the bar,
 When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
 Too full for sound and foam,
 When that which drew from out the boundless deep
 Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
 And after that the dark!
 And may there be no sadness of farewell,
 When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
 The flood may bear me far,
 I hope to see my Pilot face to face
 When I have crost the bar.

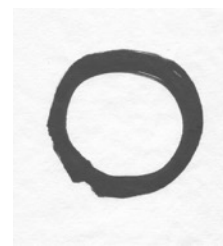
Alfred, Lord Tennyson



2024 DATES

- AGM weekend in Surrey 17 February 2024
- Mountain retreat in France 13 -16 March 2024
- Springhead May 31 - 2 June & 11 -13 Oct 2024

www.metta-taichi.org.uk



HOLDING THE CENTRE

The ensō, which could also be seen as a mandala, is a way of perceiving our place in the world. It is a means of bringing hand and heart together to express the inexpressible.

We use timeless tools for orientation, the compass, the calligraphy brush, and our own somatic gestures as we practise T'ai Chi.

'I went to Roselidden for the first time this summer and one thing that I particularly enjoyed was the Zen brushwork, which I had never done before. I found it to be an amazing experience, both incredibly rigid and wonderfully creative, powerful and delicate, absorbing but freeing. The people there, however, were what made it such an enjoyable process. Everyone was so supportive, kind and dedicated!

The whole retreat was fabulous and shall remain with me for a very long time. '
 Freya (aged 15)

