

Natural Connection

I can best describe this connection with the natural world as a Universal experience. It has happened a number of times but none more vivid than the first time.

When teaching Tai Chi with a group I had been involved with for over a year I experienced a comprehension of oneness with all present and with the complete world around us. I was not the only one of the group to have this experience, which made it all the more special. The group was a senior class of students who had all completed the learning phase of the Tai Chi form and some were practitioners of many years standing. The routine of my senior classes is a brief warm up followed by group practice in unison of a complete form, followed by a question and answer session where students can request a deeper explanation of any particular area or element of the form. Some practice and deeper discussion of the relevance of the movement and the nuances contained in the form are often shared at this time. This particular Monday evening I changed the format a little and asked if anyone had any queries or portions of their form that they would like to check before we practiced. In a way, I think this released me from trying to observe the group while I practiced with them and was contributory to the synergy and existential experience we shared.

We practiced and discussed a couple of the more physically difficult movements and as is my way, I tried to put a martial arts perspective on the moves to give a greater understanding of the reasoning behind the form.

I requested everyone then to focus on the new things they had learned and to relax as completely as they could while maintaining their focus on their own form and only to be aware of the others in the group to keep in unison.

From the opening form there was a special quietness about the group, I focused on my form completely and became aware of the group, not as a formation of individuals, but as single entity. After a short while I became aware that the floor was no longer beneath my feet, we floated in a space that was open. The movement was sinuous but not of my body or of a collection of bodies in harmony, more of a singular connection. It was euphoric and completely still at the same time. The sounds of the night outside the room were clearly in the room and became one with the experience, the scent of the gum trees permeated the night air and the starlit blackness was the only visual boundary. It is the first time I have understood my Grand Masters expression "the nonspecific stare into the middle

distance that sees all". I was not aware of any particular physical exertion and had a light and sensitive understanding of the power possessed of each and every movement. I had the feeling of a soft seedling plant pushing through soil without effort, the universe accepting and taking part in the motion.

The final section of the form is the most physically demanding and as we closed the form instead of there being a sense of relief, there was a sense of freshness, anticipation and renewal. I stood there on my own with the rest of the group behind me and knew there was something, very special, present in the room. No one spoke; our breathing was palpable, as if someone else was breathing for us all.

As is customary at the end of our form the leader requests the group to show respect to the founder of our form by bowing and presenting the Tai Chi salute, right fist wrapped in the left palm, to a photograph of Fu Song Wen. I didn't speak, just bowed and saluted, as I turned to pay respect to my class; I saw the feeling in the faces of the group. We saluted each other. There were tears in the eyes of some and I realised that my own cheeks were also soaked in tears, my tunic, soaked in sweat, although I had no feeling of exertion. The realisation was fantastic; we stood for quite some time acknowledging each other, knowing that something very special had just occurred. We had been to a very special place together and had no words to describe it. When I could finally speak, I expressed my gratitude for their part in the best class I had ever attended and there was excitement in their responses, I knew they had all felt it too.

In the describing of this event I have just been through a similar embodiment of those feelings and my body is alive and full of awareness as I write this, I hope something of the feeling has been transmitted to you.

Warmly

Rick