

Bonsai Tai Chi

The Blog



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It is said that: 'A Buddha only points the way.'

When, for whatever reason, we decide that we want to learn tai chi we usually sign up for a class. In my brief time as a teacher I have heard most of the reasons from "Know nothing about it – just curious," to "My personal trainer thought I should take it up." (After I met that student I began to think the personal trainer just wanted off the case.)

But whatever the reason we expect the teacher to teach us. Not an unreasonable proposition, you pay your money and you expect value for it. Usually for the first few weeks it seems to work fine. It is probably different to what you expected, more complicated, hard even. But, if you persist, gradually it dawns on you that there is something more than you are being shown. After all the instructor seems to send that senior student flying across the room without even pushing him (or her). Harry Potter move over. And the more advanced students, though they do do the form you are trying to learn, and while you can't quite put your finger on it, somehow they do it differently.

Now the next bit depends on your instructor. If he or she is wise they will tell you what is going on but gently, bit by bit opening you up to the ideas and possibilities. Too much too soon and the danger is that you won't understand and might be put off. Whether because you are frustrated that you cannot immediately do the advanced stuff (the rotten instructor won't explain how to do it) or just think you can never learn it, or even, (and it has happened) you are just so freaked out that that you can't cope with it.

It is possible, probable even, that as long as you practice tai chi, no matter how advanced you become, you will think your instructor is holding something back. I have been in classes with competent practitioners who don't seem to realise their own abilities, who are still expecting the instructor to show them what they should do to perform at his level.

Not going to happen.

And that has nothing to do with the instructor. Tai chi is a journey. A learning process in which you must open up to yourself, let go of your pre-learned prejudices and accept what is happening. I have described my journey as 'a cascade of pennies dropping'. One of my students will often come to the class and declare: "I have had (another) epiphany." The instructor can only start you on your journey. Point out the direction and

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guide you along the way. But it is your journey, you have to take the steps, do the work.

A big part is developing sensitivity. By this we usually mean being physically sensitive to others, being able to connect with your training partner, penetrate their centre and move them around. It is more than this. You have to become sensitive to the world, to feel other people, know what they are feeling, what they are going to do (very important for self-defence). This is something your instructor cannot teach you. It is something only you can feel. It happens gradually and nobody can tell you how to grow.

Do your chi gung, practise your form, listen to your instructor, be prepared to learn from other students even if they are newcomers. If you take up teaching you will be amazed at how much a first time student can teach you.

It is your practice, your journey: an instructor can only point the way. 🌀