

Bonsai Tai Chi

The Blog



March

Have your say: email theblog@bonsaitaichi.eu

There is a Zen story about a master lifting his finger and pointing upwards. There is a big moon in the sky and a student asks "What is that master?" "The moon" replies the master. The lesson for the student is: 'do not mistake the pointing finger for the moon.'

One of the less obtuse stories from Zen but profound nonetheless.

I work with a lot of people both as training partners and students. Most of the time we spend trying to get the tai chi form right. It is inevitable. The form is the core of tai chi. It is its public face, what everyone sees when it is demonstrated. But in reality it is for us a training tool.

As qi gung it distributes chi around the body. As martial artists it teaches us correct posture balance and movement. But tai chi is more than just the form and here, for many students, the problem lies.

We learn to be soft, to sink, heaviness (chun) to shift our weight. All of these things you can teach a student. Even to project their energy. And any intermediate student can do all of those things. The problem is that they become exercises in their own right..Ask a student to punch over and forward, say, and you see the brain working: "Right, this is an opening move, I have to shift forward..." and with no effort the instructor will stop them in their tracks.

Instructors are rumoured to have secret ways to stop students performing moves. And it is true that there are a few ways, and perhaps a few instructors who will employ them. But if a student brings all of the elements into his move and has the sensitivity to respond to what is going on – after all, what tai chi is about is feeling, being aware of and responding to what your opponent/instructor is doing – the move will work.

But testing the form students will often tend to get carried away, regarding the kinesiology, the physical movements as what it is all about. Get the movement right and, maybe, put a bit of muscle behind it and that's tai chi.

Don't get me wrong, the form is important. The structure is important. We have to get them right. But of itself the form is not the whole of tai chi. It is what is inside you that makes the whole.

As I said, you must be careful not to mistake the finger for the moon. ☯