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It happens: We sit here in a circle in silence. Most of the time we find it very difficult to sit and not break the silence . . . and just allow something to happen.

I'm not here to teach you anything. I'm here to share with you how I learn about t'ai chi. So hopefully by the end of the week you will begin to learn about t'ai chi through *you*. T'ai chi is just a Chinese word for something that appears in many forms of discipline. Yoga, in essence, is t'ai chi. Zen is t'ai chi. T'ai chi is what is. No more, no less.

Some of you have learned the *form* of t'ai chi ch'uan. We will practice some of the forms and we will work on them, but my main purpose is to help you to recreate what happened many hundreds of years ago when the taoists first created t'ai chi ch'uan. What happened then? What was that creative process that made it such a spontaneous form that even now we look at this phrase of movement and say, "Ah, that's beautiful, that's so simple, and I can identify with it." And then when you begin to learn, it's so hard, because you're fighting between the structure and what seems to be so unattainable.

There is a lot of confusion about what t'ai chi is, and what t'ai chi ch'uan is. Mostly everybody is concerned with what form is being done. "Oh, I study from so and so, and he studies from Master Tsung—or Master Choy—and this is the Ma style and this is the Wu

style and this is the Yan style. What do you practice?" I say "I practice the Huang style." My style comes out of all these other styles, and I have to develop to the point that it becomes me.

I discovered t'ai chi first as a child, completely unprejudiced. Out in the field every morning, the t'ai chi master would practice, and we would follow and have fun with ourselves. We had years and years of working this way with the master, and before we knew it we were doing it, and it had become ours. I lost it when I came to this country, and then I had to work backward and recapture it after I became a concert dancer. I found that the only way I can really keep my movement and my dancing fresh is to work within myself in the t'ai chi way—which is a constant re-creation, a regeneration of energy and a re-birth each time I do it. This is why t'ai chi is so vital for movement and dance, where you really work with your body.

In this culture, we rely so much on the mind that we become separated from other aspects of our living. An exercise, a discipline like t'ai chi immediately points out where you lack, where you go astray. Why do you find something that is so easy to understand intellectually, so difficult to do? This division between thinking and doing is so clear; it takes so long to really find that yin/yang balance.

The yin/yang symbol is the interlocking, melting together of the flow of movement within a circle. The similar—and at the same time obviously contrasting—energies are moving *together*. Within the black area there is a white dot and within the white fish shape, there is a black dot. The whole idea of a circle divided in this way is to show that within a unity there is duality and polarity and contrast. The only way to find real balance without losing the centering feeling of the circle is to think of the contrasting energies moving together and in union, in harmony, interlocking. In a sense this is really like a white fish and a black fish mating. It's a union and flowing interaction. It's a kind of consummation between two forces, male and female, mind and body, good and bad. It's a very important way of living. People identify with this kind of concept in the Orient much more than in our Western culture, where the tendency is to identify with one force and to reject the contrasting element. If you identify with only one side of the duality, then you become unbalanced. T'ai

chi can help you to realize how you are unbalanced and help you to become centered again as you re-establish a flow between the two sides. So don't get stuck in a corner, because a circle has no corners. If you think in this way, you open up more, and you don't feel like you have to catch up with anything.

Someone said that the difference between an Oriental man and a Western man is this: The Oriental man is very empty and light up here in the head and very heavy down here in the belly and he feels very secure. The Western man is light in the belly and very heavy up here in the head, so he topples over. In our Western society so much is in the head, so much is in talking and thinking about things, that we can analyze everything to pieces and it's still distant from us, still not really understood. We have so many mechanical gadgets to do our work for us that our bodies are underemphasized. In order to regain balance we have to emphasize the body and we must work with the mind-body together.

Some people realize that their bodies need more work, so they run, jog, ride bicycles, swim, and then say "O.K. I have done my share of exercise." But this is still a separation of "body time" and "mind time," like the separation of work and play that most people experience. You work very hard so that you can take a vacation and come to a beautiful place to enjoy yourself. This brings a separation in your life. Working shouldn't be such a chore. Playing shouldn't be such a straining for fun, fun, fun. Work and play can combine. Non-verbal activities are a very important way to regain balance and find unity in your life. When you stop talking you have a chance to open up and become receptive to what is happening in your body and to what is going on around you.

T'ai chi is one of the many ways to help you to discipline your body and find a way to release that tension within you. T'ai chi can be a way of letting your body really teach you and be with you and help you to get through the conflicts you encounter every day.

As a movement teacher, as a t'ai chi teacher, I find the most difficult thing is an *unlearning* process that we have to go through. So the first couple of days we will be unlearning.

There is a lovely story about a professor who comes to a zen

master. He says, "Hello, I'm doctor so and so, I'm such and such. I would like to learn from you about Zen Buddhism." The master says, "Would you like to sit down?" "Yes." "Would you like some tea?" "Yes." He pours some tea, and he continues pouring even after the cup is full, and finally the professor says, "The tea is spilling all over, it is spilling all over!" And the master says, "Exactly. You come with a full cup. Your cup is already spilling over, so how can I give you anything? You are already overflowing with all that knowledge. Unless you come with emptiness and openness, I can give you nothing." We need that kind of innocence, that kind of ignorance, in learning and dealing with things every day.

So we will have to practice emptying our cups to allow us to receive. We were doing some of this as we were sitting here in silence. In a way we were emptying our thoughts and anticipations. Each of you come with a different kind of expectation. Some of you know my work; some of you think it's going to be good for you. For others, this is just a try. You all have different kinds of anticipations of what you want, and it will take a few sessions for us to really settle down and just be with ourselves *now* in working.

Sitting in a circle is such a simple way of saying that I'm you and you and you and you, and we are the circle, we are here. Right there is the center. While I'm talking, I'm using verbal thoughts to communicate with you but what I'm really doing is sensing you. This also gives me time to empty my own cup of what I want to say—my anxiety to get across to you what t'ai chi is. It's so easy for me to say and so hard for me to get *to* you. And sooner or later we reach a dead end when we talk.

So what we have to do is go back and forth between talk and experience. We will talk for a while, and then experiment with movement. I like to start my own meditation practice as early as possible, and t'ai chi works very well in the early morning. But because of the hours we keep here at Big Sur, and the reluctance to go to bed, if we begin to dance and enjoy the baths and the moon, we usually don't get to bed as early as we should. Because of the mountain, the sun comes up very late, about seven o'clock now. I will begin practicing by the pool around seven-thirty, and I would like all of you to come

and join me. Tonight, before we finish, I will provide you with some structure and motifs for you to do. But in the morning, I do not speak: I do not talk to you; you do not talk to me. And you should not watch me and say, "Let's do what he does." You each do your own t'ai chi.

Those of you who have studied t'ai chi from another master, don't say, "Let's compare this: this is not quite the same," or "He is doing that first, I'm doing that last." T'ai chi is an individual discipline; it's not the kind of unison movement you find in a set choreography.

One of the best images for t'ai chi is nature, and the movement of nature. The different branches on the same tree do not move the same but they are moving in unity. When you look at nature, everything has its own motion: the tree and the rock and the water running—they somehow tie together without making a point to fit. When you watch the waves coming over the rocks, you see that the wave has wave-nature, rock has rock-nature. They do not violate each other's nature. That's a tao concept, a zen concept that exactly fits into t'ai chi practice.

In the evenings, we will have an open movement session with live music. We will do some folk dancing. I have also brought some tapes which are a result of my t'ai chi sessions with some musicians that I've worked with. So we can work through different ways to get to the same process.

Now there is change. Our circle just expanded because of the new people joining in. Understanding t'ai chi makes you feel like an amoeba. That's something we have to do: We have to return to being an amoeba, so we can recapture our resilience. There are always these two elements: You wish you could dance like somebody else, and you wish you could still move like a child. You look at children or you look at somebody who happens to be a very fine mover or dancer and you say, "That's very graceful, that's very nice." And I would say you can do the same thing. You may not be able to kick your leg as high as someone else, but that's not the point. That's only a particular extension, a particular achievement.

The basic process in movement is a sense of *awareness*, and a sense of *being*. When you feel like you're together, you're dancing.

When you are not dancing is when you feel like you are "all over the place." Your mind is thinking here, your muscle tensed up there; you do not know where you are any more, and suddenly you trip over something and hurt yourself. Being together means centering, means t'ai chi.

This is all intellectual so far—we all understand this. Those of you who come here, you already have some positive sense of what you want—to be *more* with yourself. You want to *extend* more, you want to *come back* more, you want to just *feel* more—with your whole total being: body and mind moving together. And I would say do more with the body. Most of us are heavy enough up here in the head, so let's get down here, in the body.

All right. Let's stand up where we are now. Tonight I just want to point out some simple, obvious things that we can do. When you are standing up, you are nothing but muscles holding your bones. What is important is *how* you are holding up this structure. My daughter is one year old; she's just walking. It's a marvel to watch her having so much fun squatting down and standing up—a real discovery with her body. We usually take most of this for granted, and at other times we try too hard to hold ourselves up.

One way of loosening up is by shaking yourself all over. In this kind of shaking you sometimes do too much, and become more tense. I want you to extend this shaking movement and at the same time just let everything go. If you still feel tension, try to simply become more aware of your tension, and go with it. Sometimes this takes a little longer, but it really is a better way. If you shake yourself, you are still *doing* something with your body instead of *allowing* it to happen. When you shake yourself you sometimes become more tense. Letting go by just becoming aware of tension is an example of wu wei—doing by not doing, non-assertion, non-interference. So in the beginning it is useful to simply accept what your body is doing. When you really accept your tension, letting go will happen without effort and you will become less tense. All your life you've been told, "Stand up on your own two feet. Take care of yourself. Be responsible. Hold the world on your shoulders." You try so hard to stand up straight, to be strong and not to crumble, not to give in, not to be a failure, not to do the wrong thing.

Right now, allow your body to let go while remaining in a standing position. Become really aware of what gravity is doing to you, and go along with that. It's not a matter of being crushed down and crumbling. Just let gravity pull you down and help you let go. Give in to this force. You don't have to be either weak or strong.

If I go around and push down on your shoulders, you should bounce with me like a ping-pong ball. The basic thing is to realize how tight we are, just standing up. No matter how free we *think* we want to be, it is still often just in our minds. The mental freedom and the physical freedom are soon separated. This is why we need the body awareness and discipline. The whole idea of this kind of technique is first an acceptance, and then a willingness to give in, and then a discipline to help you find a constant understanding of this living balance in your body.

Usually in my beginning sessions when I push down on your shoulders, almost everybody makes me work very hard, until you realize how unnecessary it is to fight back. Your body has the curves and bends to give in, to be resilient in your ankles, knees, hips and shoulders. When we realize that all this holding up is unnecessary, and all this tightening and rigidity is not needed, then we can bounce again.

The second time I come around to push you down, it is usually a little easier for you to give. Now you can sense how much energy I push with; you can go with me, and somehow we are rhythmically in tune. It's an easy feeling. Now your body doesn't need to hold up so straight. The body is made with these marvelous joints which bounce and recoil. One of the best images of zen and tao is to be like bamboo, or a bow. You can feel the weight here on your shoulders. But instead of resisting, you bend like a bow and then spring back when the weight releases. Instead of resisting the energy, you store it up and use it as you recoil.

Now stretch your arms up over your head. Get hold of your hands and stretch to your full length. Keep stretching and think of this energy going up. Then let your hands come apart; let your arms just flow out and down to your sides. You can sense how this upward energy moves out and down in a circle. The length of your arm becomes the curve of a ball and your energy shoots out and

down. Now experience the relief of that feeling in your neck and chest when you let your arm go, and enjoy the descent.

When energy stores inside of us without natural release, we build up tension. Since energy is a continuous source of being alive every day, we must learn to be with it, to release it when necessary and to regenerate it. This time when your hands release, try to let the body also settle down; let your knees go a little bit, and sink.

Some of you begin to forget to breathe. When you release your arms, release that air too and let it come out. You can begin to discover the natural coordination of your inhalation/exhalation that corresponds with this simple gesture of stretching, and then letting go and descending.

As you do it several times, you also notice that the hands have to break when they do. You do not plan to break. When the hands have to break, they break. Those of you who have read Herrigel's *Zen in the Art of Archery* know the imagery when he writes that "the arrow lets go." When it's ready to shoot, it will go and the energy will aim for the bulls-eye. The bulls-eye is not a fixed place. It only appears as the energy gathers, ready to be sent forth. What you can feel is the release in your chest, and the sensation of the air flowing out. Unless the whole body allows this giving in to it, you can't be sure of the release of the chest and the whole feeling of letting the air just flow out. Inhale as you reach up and clasp your hands together and stretch, and then let the air flow out as your hands break apart and flow down. Let your whole body sink a little as your arms come down.

Now let the downward movement flow continuously into an upward movement, so that you don't lose the energy. As your hands come down, let them come in and then scoop up in front of you as you reach up again.

Just try this for fun. I'm going to give you three counts up, three counts down. When you get into a regular rhythm like this, it makes you feel somewhat mechanical. Because of our individual differences in height, because of our own differing sense of expansion and contraction, we are varying in spite of our efforts to stay with the count. Those of you who are familiar with the Eastern or

Hindu music know that the whole rhythmical structure is quite different from most conventional Western music which depends on the bar-line structure. Many contemporary musicians try to get out of this rigid confinement by doing away with bar-lines and by mixing meters. This music gets back to a more natural flow that corresponds with the emotional and bodily changes.

This is why in t'ai chi practice we do not count: We work on a continuous flow. This is another aspect of t'ai chi, which ties in exactly with the *I Ching*, the *Book of Changes*. Change is yin and constant is yang, or vice versa. So the constant thing is that we all can fit into the changing rise and fall. The change is constant; the constant is change. In movement, we learn to really understand this intellectual concept. Part of our everyday conflict is how to cope with the changes and how to be happy with the constant. We are usually bored with the constant, and we get frantic with the change. We have all kinds of gimmicks: "Meditate!" "Pull yourself together!" "Relax!" "Do therapy!" But these all boil down to one thing: Accept *both* the constant and the change. Learn how to be resilient and responsive to your surroundings, to time, and to yourself.

In t'ai chi practice, you move very slowly. By moving very slowly you have time to be aware of all the subtle details of your movement and your relationship to your surroundings. It's so slow that you really have no way of saying this is slower than that or faster than that. You reach a level of speed that is like slow motion, in which everything is just happening. You slow it to the point that you are fully involved in the process of each moment as it happens. You transcend the form and any concern you might have to achieve some particular motif.

It's like when we were sitting here very silently and you were waiting for me to start. You were wondering, "When is he going to begin?" Everybody is getting tense. You keep wondering and waiting, and after a while you realize there's no use wondering. "He'll start whenever he wants to start, and I'll just relax." Some of you begin to relax. Suddenly time stands still for a second. There's a moment when you are willing to say, "Let it happen, whatever happens, whenever it's happening." "It's not my worry, I don't have

to push it or rush it." You allow that moment to happen.

The same is true for me. If I worry, if I am self-conscious, I must first allow that tension to go, and then I will begin. I may have a whole bunch of things stuffed in my mind that "I have to get across to you tonight," but if I don't just drop it and let it all go, it will never come out right. I will just be reciting what I have written down. Or I will just tell you all about t'ai chi history and concepts. Most of you have read about this already, and intellectually you understand—there's no need for me to repeat it. What happens tonight must grow out of what we feel now.

I came here a little earlier on Friday, to sit in on the last two sessions of an aikido workshop. They were working on sensing and the feeling of balance. Aikido is an outgrowth of t'ai chi, created by Morihei Uyeshiba less than a hundred years ago in Japan. Aiki means the unity, the gathering of the ki. The Japanese ki is the same as the ch'i, the breath essence of t'ai chi. The do in the word aikido is the same as tao, the path or the way. Aikido means the way of unifying your ch'i.

There are many other outgrowths of t'ai chi. Judo means "the gentle way." Karate means "the empty hand." Kendo and kenpo are Japanese sword practices which also developed out of the same basic principles. All of these are extensions and developments of the t'ai chi foundation, and all are based on the sense of meditation and movement, flow and awareness.

All these Japanese forms of movement and centering are very highly developed forms of t'ai chi. The Japanese forms developed out of Zen Buddhism, which came from the Chinese Ch'an Buddhism. Ch'an Buddhism developed out of the union between Hindu mysticism and Chinese Taoism. Two major forms are exclusively Chinese. One is the t'ai chi ch'uan; the other is kung-fu, which literally means "the skillful man—the man's skill, his energy skill." It's commonly used to mean various series of exercises that show how strong you can be, that you know how to fight. Kung-fu is a very masculine, aggressive, yang way of extending your t'ai chi energy. Judo and aikido use the contrasting receptive yin approach, self-protection rather than aggression. T'ai chi is both yin and yang; it is the center

pole, right in the middle. With t'ai chi as a basis you can move easily into any of these different extensions.

Important to all of these is the sense of balance, and the feeling of knowing where you are. Most of you have some sense of where your center is, physically. When you sit, you try to find a comfortable position. In a way you are trying to find your center so you can be more settled and comfortable. In Zen Buddhist zazen when you sit in lotus position, you find your center. In hatha yoga postures you also put your body into a closer position so you can really sense where you are. All these ways are basically static. T'ai chi is slightly different in this one point: It helps you to find a *moving* center. It's a movement meditation; you move your center with you. Although you are constantly in motion, you retain that quietness and stillness.

Experiment with this as you are sitting here now. I want you to physically find the place where you think your center is. Let your arms rest in your lap so you feel compact and balanced, sitting with a straight back. When you want to be quiet, just let your movement subside and diminish, and you will slowly come to a real stillness and centeredness. If you think you have to stop all movement, then you will become tense and rigid. You may look quiet from the outside, but inside there will be all kinds of tension and confusion. When you allow your movement to come to rest, you don't stop moving. Allow yourself to be like a pond that has been stirred up and slowly returns to a calm, smooth surface. Movement diminishes, but it's still there, like the stillness of this quiet pond, where there are still little ripples from time to time.

Now imagine that this is a zazen class and the master is watching you. You want to do a good job so you are really holding yourself very still. Now let's say you feel some discomfort in your back or somewhere else, and you feel a desire to move. The more you try to hold that position and deny that discomfort, the worse the discomfort becomes. Now let your body go a little and let movement happen. Instead of fighting it, let it happen and follow it. Let your spine sway a little from side to side. If you follow the movement, it will eventually curve around some way and return to your center.

If you think of a gentle uplift from the top of your head, then

your spine will be quite straight without rigid holding. Let your spine be like a willow that moves with the wind, and then returns to straightness. Let all these curving movements get smaller and smaller. Eventually you will get to the point where you seem to be sitting still, but actually this movement is still circulating in your body. This is very comfortable and easy for your back, because you have allowed movement to come to rest instead of fighting it and becoming tense. You maintain the same kind of moving energy within your stillness.

As you're doing this, be aware of your breathing pattern. Try to breathe very fully, without forcing it. Sometimes we say "observing the breathing." This does not mean that you are outside of it; it means that you just follow it, and go with it. Don't force the stomach to come out, for instance, just because you think it should be healthier.

In t'ai chi, we call the breath-energy the ch'i. It is the energy that we use as we move. The lower abdomen just below the navel is called the tant'ien, and is considered to be both a reservoir for the ch'i, and the center from which our movement originates. Tan means the distilled vital essence, and also the rich, red color of blood. T'ien means field or place. So the tant'ien is the field of energy, the intrinsic energy, the reservoir of your vital force. The tant'ien corresponds to the Japanese hara or the sufi kath. Focusing attention on the breathing and the tant'ien is a useful way of becoming centered.

T'ai chi emphasizes a continuous circular breathing pattern. Circular means that you do not stop breathing out to breathe in, or the other way around. The letting go of your breath is the beginning of the coming in. This happens automatically when you just take a few minutes to do breathing. I emphasize this because it is very important that you realize the circular flow of your breathing. As you think of circular breathing, can you visualize the pattern of the relationship to your body? Is it a circle that goes running up the back and down the front of your torso? Do you visualize the air as an abstract pattern coming out of your nostrils, going down to the back part of your spine, coming back? How do you see it? Is it counter-clockwise or clockwise? Does it turn horizontally or vertically, or

does it go in a diagonal pattern? How is it? The circle expands, contracts, and changes. Make this circle a little more flexible. In t'ai chi movement, that circle goes all around. All the extensions of your body originate in your center, and then return to center again. You have all these individual loops and circles that keep coming back into this sphere of energy which is somewhere in your center. During the meditation process you allow that to happen. When all the imagery in your thoughts becomes your bodily feeling, then the first movement begins.

Now concentrate a little more into the base of your spine where you sit. If you're not sitting straight, try to sit straighter so you can really feel it. Breathe a little deeper and see if you can feel each disc of your back moving in relation to that expansion and contraction. Feel the back part of your spine with your breathing. Breathe a little bigger without tensing or forcing. See if you can identify that circular curve. If we had straight-backed chairs, it would be very good for you to feel your body leaning and pushing against it. The other day I had a belt on that was touching the back part of the wooden chair, and it kept saying "dat dat dat dat, dat . . . dat . . . dat . . . dat, dat, datdatdat"—as my back was going up and down with my breathing. That should happen in your back. Most of us have a certain part of our back that is not as flexible as it could be. When you feel the length, how does it curve back, and when does this happen?

Stretch a little longer—in length, in breadth, and in time. Don't think of holding your breath longer—think of extending that length of your spine longer each time. Space it longer if you can. Now can you also go sideways instead of just up? Can you let that circular feeling open outwards through your shoulder blades and out into your shoulders? It goes up and opens and fans out. See if you can get energy out through your shoulder blades, as far as your shoulders. It should affect your back, and the upper parts of your arms. Each time, keep returning to the beginning of the breathing circle.

T'ai chi has often been misunderstood by people observing it. They see a straight spine and ask, "How come your back is so stiff?" If your back is stiff, you are practicing t'ai chi incorrectly. This circular movement may not show so markedly, but your back must

have the continuation of this flow. The next time you breathe way up, see if you can let the shoulder blades lift, and let the arms float forward and up just a little bit . . . and then come down. As you expand, keep this flow moving out, and then when you recoil, just pull back into yourself. Let the movement begin in your chest and shoulders and flow out into your arms. Don't begin in your hands.

We are doing this sitting; it is slightly easier when you're standing. But standing and moving the legs properly is one of the most difficult things. The thigh usually hurts very much in the first few lessons of t'ai chi because of the tension of holding on. Sitting here, you don't have to worry about the legs.

Begin with the spine, and lift up in this breathing expansion. Your arms will begin lifting up at the shoulders and this lift will flow into your arms. Your arms will lift slowly until they are almost horizontal. You can think of a horizontal energy that keeps lifting your arms until they are level and then goes out through your fingertips. When your arms begin to sink down, imagine that the space underneath your arms is a soft, uneven supporting surface, like moving water. Feel this surface moving slightly and supporting you as you balance on top of it. As your arms sink down and come back in toward your body, allow the upper part of the arm to come in first, and then pull the rest back. Let the fingertips trail behind, as if flowing behind the upper arm and shoulder. As you settle, you will have the sense of sinking and the unity of a flowing curve. Don't worry about watching the length and height of your arm gesture, as long as it has this flow action. And also don't take it literally when I say level. It's like the water surface: It slants and tips and curves when you move, but all of these curves are only small departures from the straight level line. So don't say, "I've got to stay completely parallel." The whole idea is to *not* get limited.

Each time, you have to go through the whole sequence of this energy flow. It starts from way down here in your tant'ien, up through your chest and shoulders, and keeps expanding through and through as your arms rise . . . until you feel the energy come out of your fingertips and then the return happens. This is why just the feeling of this first rise and fall takes months and months to begin to

learn in actual t'ai chi practice. The problem is that it can become very dull. You have nothing to hang on to. It's too bland—all you do is raise your arm. All of us are strong enough to raise our arms and put our arms down. The challenge is not the flashiness of the movement; the challenge is to get the feeling of one thing at a time—*now*. Each extension of the energy becomes that new moment. This is the most difficult movement of t'ai chi. All the other motifs are really just extensions of this first basic t'ai chi movement.

A good way to get the feeling of this movement is in a hot bath or a swimming pool. The water will support your arms more than the air because it has greater density. The next time you are in water, sit in a cross-legged position, and just let your spine float upward like grass, like water weeds flowing up. Then let your arms float upwards, and let them rest on the substance of the water. Air also has its own density and space, and you can let the air around you support you in the same way.

This space around you is called yin space, in contrast to the yang space that is occupied by your body. I want you to feel your yang, physical self accepting the yin space—playing hide-and-seek with it. Be aware of the space around you as if it were water touching you. Look at me now, but look only at my outline, and the space around me. Let me disappear and see only the remaining movement in the air.

Now feel this yourself. Let your body disappear into the space/energy around you. You are resting on this space and being moved by it. There's nothing that you have to do or force. All your yang is settling, expanding, feeling. You enfold it all over, equally, smoothly. You feel like clouds, like steam, with its little tiny particles. You have a sense of almost getting lost within it, and then recapture an awareness of your own reality in that relationship. Both things are happening at the same time. In order to understand the yang, the solid, you must come to know the yin, the space around you. Learn to trust this energy and play with it.

Now as you are sitting here, just let your arms float up and then let the elbows sink down again. The entire movement is sequential. It really makes you go through all the parts of your body with this

whole breathing/feeling process. Not one place is neglected. This is why t'ai chi is a healing exercise used to correct joint problems, or any other congestion or blockage that divides the body. When you practice t'ai chi, you become aware of where your body is stiff and divided, and you feel how you are misusing your body. You discover how your movement is fragmented, and you also learn how to move in a more flowing way so as to reconnect your movements into a smooth, easy sequence.

If you learn dancing or movement, people will say move your arms. In t'ai chi I would say here's a space being moved by your hands, or here are hands being moved by space. T'ai chi energy is in *inaction*, by not doing. But when I say inaction in English it sounds like paralysis, instead of the happening that occurs when you stop doing things intentionally. With intention you think, "I have to do it," and usually "I don't want to," or "I'm afraid I can't," so you soon get into conflict. T'ai chi can bring you into a unity in which you don't think, and movement just happens. When you really allow yourself to give in and open up, your whole body tingles, your pores seem to open, you get goose bumps.

It's *both* the feeling of letting go *and* the feeling of awareness. It's not one-sided. I could put on some nice music and say, "OK, let's let go for a while, and pretty soon you will be relaxed." That's like providing you a big bathtub of pink bubbly champagne for you to submerge in and indulge in. That's only a one-sided way of doing it. T'ai chi doesn't allow you that kind of license to say, "OK, I'll just have a good time dancing." I want you to enjoy it, but at the same time I want you to be really aware of what you're doing. In t'ai chi, there's an outside and inside awareness together. It does not have that kind of introversion that so much meditation has.

Now try this same beginning arm-lift sequence while standing. As the arms come down, let your legs go into the flow. Imagine that you are standing on water, and let your base become soft and yielding. You see, I ask you to think of the yin space as if it were more solid, and to think of the yang space as if it were more transparent. This is a readjustment of space which you can work with wherever you are. Think of your feet extending beneath the floor. Sometimes

we use the imagery of having roots spreading down into the ground. It's as if the sole of your foot is really testing where you're standing, and you feel this from your center.

Now close your eyes for a minute and let your body go slightly lopsided. Don't worry about falling. Shift your weight from one leg to another. Be insecure at first, and then just go with the movement of this imbalance. Just keep going with the curve and it will eventually find its way back to center. The circle gets smaller and smaller, and you get closer and closer to yourself as you settle down. You have to do this with resilience in your legs—without tightening your knees, without pulling your thigh muscles, without blocking your calf muscles. Let your joints flow, and just sort of roll and rock around. Imagine that you're in the middle of a wave.

I spoke to three surfing champions from Hawaii who watched the t'ai chi group working and they said, "Hey! that's interesting—this is exactly what we have been working on. We have developed a surfing yoga and that's exactly what we're doing." Those of you who have done surfing, you *know*. How can you stay on the surfboard without constantly letting the body give with the wave? Try this while standing on a waterbed, and then walk on it. It's something you cannot fight: You must *give in* to it and *then* you can begin.

You have to have the patience and willingness to give in before the real sense of the imagery comes through. The difficult part of t'ai chi practice is how long can you sway around and keep doing this first arm-lifting movement before you get bored and want to go on to some other movement? How do you stay with it? If you begin to think this is too slow and is not working for you, just imagine doing zazen in a zendo. This is like flying compared to zazen where you just sit in lotus position with your back straight. Even zazen is not really a solid-set stillness; it's really a moving stillness. You are breathing and you feel that marvelous thin line flowing upward and that settling back down into center. You are moving into stillness.

Now let's experiment with this moving in a somewhat different way. As you sway around, move your arms a little from your shoulders and rotate your torso from right to left and back. Let your arms swing freely and flop against your body. Notice how the shoulder

swing affects your base. Do a swing, and then just before the end of the swing, begin to rotate back in the other direction. Rotate and swing out until you feel the pull in your arms, and then slow down. This swing really helps you to sense how the movement of the upper body is connected through the spine and down into the pelvis.

When you pull back, see if you can feel the back settling down, pulling the arms back sequentially, with the fingertips last. Swing into it, and pull back. As you swing out, your body is slightly lopsided. When you pull back, find the middle and then let the arms flow out to the other side so you can feel the sense of the circle. As you do this swinging, you will find that your weight shifts on your feet. As you swing to the right, most of your weight comes off your left foot. Actually pick up this unweighted foot, and then set it down again as you swing back. Each time you give in to a new base.

So far, we are still keeping the pelvic area pretty steady. Allow some movement in the hip joints and thighs. If you pivot from side to side, you feel that your spine rotates with this movement. You have to make adjustment with your whole foot, keeping contact with the floor so you don't feel unsteady.

Now let's use these ideas in the movement called Embracing the Moon, or carrying the t'ai chi sphere. Imagine that you are carrying a soapy, slippery sphere about the size of a basketball in your hands. Play with holding this slippery ball and tip it around. If you hold it too tightly, it will slip away, and if you hold it too loosely, it will fall. As you move it around, your balance will change and you will have to shift your base. Make adjustments with your base without thinking which foot you have to move. Get into the feeling of the imagery. Give the sphere weight if you need to. Pantomime, and imagine that you're holding something very heavy.

As you shift around, your weight has to be adjusted on your legs. Do this without thinking which foot must move next. Curve out, and move back in a loop. It's not "Go there—and then come back." It is the whole circle: Loop, and back, and loop again. It's a circle that you can feel within: In relationship to your legs, in relationship of one arm to another, in relationship with the floor. Continue to just play with this sphere a little longer.

Now let this sphere slowly increase in size until the whole front of your body contacts the surface of this soapy sphere. Continue to move with the sphere touching the inside of your arms and the front of your torso and legs. The whole t'ai chi movement starts with the simple understanding that your body is the center of your energy sphere. Your body, with awareness of its different parts, all comes together as a center in moving circular motion. All the different movements of the t'ai chi ch'uan are variations of this flowing circular movement. Sometimes it is a small circle, sometimes it is large, sometimes the circle becomes a long elliptical curve, returning back in a double loop like a figure eight.

If you play with variations of this t'ai chi sphere, you can discover for yourself all the movements that are part of the form. You discover how all these variations have the same kind of flow, and how each movement continues easily into another.

I don't want to show you the form of t'ai chi ch'uan too early, because you will probably only see the structure, which will confuse you. You will only build up more tension, trying too hard to control and imitate the shape. You have to work through the feeling of your body gradually, allowing the form to emerge and become you. T'ai chi is an art: not to be taught, but to be experienced. You can always learn a form later, after you get into this circular flow. Each teacher has a slightly different form, a slightly different way of doing t'ai chi. You don't have to believe me or any master. Your own practice will tell you what feels right to you. I want to show you how much pleasure I can derive from what I do, and how I understand and remind myself about the essence of t'ai chi.

I learned many many forms of t'ai chi when I was a child. We were moving from one village to another, running away from the Japanese-Chinese war. In each village there was someone who did t'ai chi, and I did t'ai chi with him. As a child I didn't concern myself with whether he was the "best" master, or whether he was famous, or would give me a certificate. I just did it with whoever was there. Any form is only *one* expression of the essence of t'ai chi, so don't get stuck with only one part of the whole. If you limit yourself to the structure of any one form, you will lose the essence.

Later I will gradually show you some short sequences and motifs, which will give you a structure to work on, something to practice. When you come out and practice with me tomorrow, begin with awareness of movement outside, and movement inside your body. Use the ocean, use the wind blowing, become aware of your breathing. See if you can begin to move *from the sense of where you are*. Follow that beginning of energy and go with it.

Now let me just see you try to begin. Let your body settle into your base. Then sway a little, and discover where you are. Make adjustments of your feet, and then get together and centered. At the same time, don't plant your feet down. The minute you try to say, "This is a nice spot to hang onto" you are stuck, like a nail. You must feel the movement underneath your feet, as if you are walking on the ocean. Feel this lift of energy through the expansion of your breath and the extension of your body happening together. Then work towards the lift of the arms from your back and shoulder. When the arms lift up, let them rest on a surface that is uneven and moves like the waves of the ocean.

When you get the feeling of this flow, play with the t'ai chi sphere. Use the inside of your hands and arms to form the shape of the sphere and then begin to move it around. Keep the sense of the sphere as you play with it and let it change slowly. Let it grow large or shrink small. You may extend one side of the sphere into a longer curve as if the sphere became a long egg-shape. You may bring it sideways, making it a little lower. You may lift it up a little higher, or let it move around you. Be sure to always bring this curve back in so you don't lose contact with your center.

Keep your spine in the middle, so you always have a place to return to. This is like in kundalini yoga, the serpent, that fire energy that keeps moving in your spine. That feeling of one spinal disc at a time keeps moving and falling in a circle, so you know where your center is. If you bend your back, if you move your center, then you don't know where to return. You have to keep that upright torso as a reference point.

You have to maintain a sense of your center as you do this free-form moving with the sphere. Keeping centered means that you

realize that this particular arm movement is related to your center *this way*. That particular leg opening out that way is related back to your center, *this way*. So you have something to retain as you move. That's to keep you from bathing in your pink, bubbly champagne bath and just having a good, lazy time—you may become so relaxed that you feel immobile, and pretty soon you fall asleep. T'ai chi should awaken you; you keep this centeredness and connection with your surroundings.

Do you see everybody around you? Do you see the chairs, do you see the floor, do you see the person next to you? Keep your ears open, too. Do you hear the feet shuffling? Do you hear the talking in the next room? Do you hear your own breathing and the person's breathing next to you? Keep that alertness open all around, without losing your center. This is the t'ai chi meditation. If you do it this way, then the form will continue to challenge you; it will become spontaneous with the human body movement as you go through the process. It's very easy to begin, if you *let* it begin that way. It's very difficult to stay with; it's so easy to get lost. That's why we have the form.

Early morning, before breakfast, is a really good time to do t'ai chi. As you begin, you can do deep breathing and then extend that breathing into movement. Every time you begin, you have to recapture that center all over again. Even after you practice quite a bit, there's no safe place where you know "I can always begin there." You can't depend on past experiences or an accumulation of them. You always begin right here, where you are, with your sense of yourself and your surroundings now.

My ideal of this workshop is that in some way we can recreate that process of the old masters who created the original t'ai chi. How did they do it? If you can experience one part of this original individual creation, maybe something will come out of *you*. Then the t'ai chi is yours. It's *your* t'ai chi chuan.

Embrace Tiger, Return to Mountain

— the essence of T'ai Chi

Al Chung-liang Huang