



# TIAN

## Taoist

Ronnie Robinson spend

*In late October last year I visited Germany for two days private training with Tian Liyang, a Taoist Monk, from Wudang Mountain, who was teaching a number of courses in the country. This unique and privileged opportunity was kindly arranged for me, by his host and translator in Germany, Marianne Herzog.*

*Having visited Wudang Mountain in April 2000, and having met 'monks' and seen displays by one of the many burgeoning schools around this sacred area I wasn't too sure what my two days of training would result in but I went with an open mind prepared for the new experience.*

Tian Liyang was extremely amenable and open in his teachings and conversations. On asking what I wanted to concentrate on I replied that I was very interested in developing my Tui Shou. Before proceeding he wanted to clarify the terms of our engagement in order to prevent misunderstandings and injury. In the past westerners were prone to trying to 'test' his skills when he understood their initial intention was to 'explore'. If this were my intention he would therefore react accordingly. I re-affirmed that I was there to learn and not to test or challenge him. We started with him gently pushing me to test my rooting and yielding abilities. Once he had the information required he then taught me a series of both soft and tough exercises designed to loosen and relax all areas of my body.

We worked from 9 – 6pm with a break for lunch and then talked until 12 that night. The next morning I woke early and tried to go through some of the more complex (to me – well simple things always are to start with!) exercises in the vain hope of familiarising myself with them. Like always I realised that many, many hours of practise would be required to perform them fluidly and smoothly.

After breakfast we started work once more with Tian Liyang asking Marianne to push with me. He felt that working with a woman might help to increase my softness and yielding abilities. He instructed Marianne to push me continuously and I was simply to offer least resistance, going with the flow.

After some time of pushing with Marianne the Master took over. What surprised or shocked me was that I had expected that once he pushed me over I would have time to compose and re-position myself for the next push – no chance! He just kept coming at me, pushing me around the room, bouncing me off the walls, applying Qin Na locks, pressing sensitive acupoints, pushing through his arms, shoulders, chest and God knows where! Fortunately I was also aware of the mischievous smile he constantly wore whilst I underwent this frantic encounter. Once my initial surprise was over I kept trying to neutralise or parry his attacks whilst remaining well and truly 'gubbed!' A very concerned Marianne kept looking for re-assurance that I was really okay with this. I was fine and really enjoyed working with Tian Liyang. His openness and lack of pretensions were strong illustrations of his Taoist nature. During the course of our conversations I decided to take some notes for including in this magazine. I hope you find these extracts as interesting and stimulating as I did!

*Taijiquan is a Chinese art rooted in Taoism which is a deep Chinese philosophy, can you help to increase a westerner's understanding of the relationship to Taoism?*

In both the West and in the East we all have the same simple common aims, that is to have a healthy happy life with good relationships to others. Taiji and an understanding of Taoism can help to achieve this. It is very important to realise that Taoism is at the heart of Taiji and a really deep sense of it will help practitioners to attain a good level of Taiji.

# LIYANG

## Monk

### Two days with Tian Liyang



In the Taoist principles we aspire to achieving a state of Wu Wei. This comes from a state of quietness and clarity which means yielding to, and not reacting to, or dealing with interference from external forces.

*The point of yielding to, and not reacting to outside sources are confusing to me. If a force comes surely we can, and do, make choices: we resist, we stay still and accept or we decide to yield. Each of these is a choice we make on a mental level. Are you talking about the idea of Wu Wei as being something beyond this, something which happens without the mind coming between the action (or non-action) by making the conscious decision on how to react?*

In the 1970's there was the famous Chinese master Bruce Lee who was working in America and Japan. He was referred to as the "Gong-fu King". He used the saying, "Face the limit with the unlimited and face action (wei) with non-action (wu wei)." This saying illustrates the point I'm talking about. I'm not talking about doing nothing, I'm talking about going with whatever comes. Or with other words: In action don't strive for anything, (and) don't be inordinate /excessive in your actions.

*Yes, but it is not something that is merely intellectual, physical or emotional so what is it in the human body or spirit that can bring this about?*

It is a combination of Shen (Spirit) and Xin (Heart). When they both come together Wu Wei can be found. When the heart and the body are in unity, and the outer and the inner are being cultivated together, and the appearance and the spirit come together at the same time, then unity with heaven and earth, with nature can be found.

*How can we achieve this through the practice of Taiji?*

First you need a good teacher who has a deep understanding of the Taiji principles and theory which he or she is applying on a physical and intellectual level. The teacher must also be of high character /have a high level of (personal, moral) cultivation and have a good technical and artistic level.

*How many teachers do you know have this?*

There are many good teachers, who have also attained a high level of personal cultivation and if one is fortunate one can find one.

(At this point Chiang Liang adopted a Taoist approach and said that he couldn't talk about it. (The mutual feeling between Marianne and I was that he felt it improper to discuss the character of others, particularly in print.))

*So if we feel we do not, or cannot have access to such a teacher are all our efforts then not in vain?*

Firstly, no one would say they had this, if they did, then they don't have it. Normal people can't reach this. To do so they would have to ignore everything else to pursue it. A teacher can only help you to achieve a basic or mid-level. It is not only a matter of your ability in Taiji, but also your state of mind and character. You should just try to develop what you can with a happy mind as you work along your path or way. To really deal with, or consider this question we need to have a long time in a quieter place. The intellect gets in the way of things. It is very difficult to translate into words and it is of an extremely high level, but ultimately very simple.

(It seems he is suggesting that long periods of meditation are really required for us to achieve any real sense of what it is).

Learning a form is not really learning Taiji there is much, much more to it than that. Whatever the style we must always understand that the movements all stem from the basic 13 postures that Chang San Feng created on Wudang Mountain. There is a well-known saying in China that illustrates



this point, “10,000 changes won’t ever leave their root.” In the final analysis the higher the level, the greater the simplicity.

**If everything stems from the basic 13 postures why create 108 posture forms of 24 and 48 postures etc. If everybody really practises and fully understands these 13 postures wouldn’t they gain most of the information that was required?**

This is only a basic exercise routine, not the art as such.

**How do you feel about the development of Taiji in the West?**

I’ve seen Taijiquan in many countries. To me it is of less importance to talk about the level of Taijiquan. The most important thing is, is that Taijiquan opens the muscles and bones, helps to let Qi and blood flow freely and that it makes the spirit happy\* (*jingshen yu kuai*). Moreover one can make a lot of friends through it. In these times, currently the world is relatively in peace and people are relatively cultivated so the current focus on being able to strengthen ones body and attain good health is a very good way in which to practice Taiji. However, if you want to reach a high level you need good training from a good master. Taijiquan unifies the aspects of health and self defense in one. From its early origins to the present day masters of Taijiquan have had, in the main, both very healthy bodies together with an extraordinary level of martial ability.

**You say we all know that it is good for our health but do we? We all believe it has very strong health benefits but in Western culture we like to have strong scientific evidence.**

First of all: Life is dependent on movement and the slow and soft movements of Taijiquan suit people of all ages. Through these kinds of movements, you can feel the flow of qi. For example the push hands in Taijiquan uses the [scientific] principles of mechanics and leverage. But concerning content on a deeper level it is impossible to use modern scientific methods and language to explain the results clearly.

In the Ming Dynasty a doctor called Li Shizhen said that practising Taiji, with an inner aspect, and the use of Yi opens the channels and promotes a healthy flow of Qi and blood, which in turn, helps to prolong life. By bringing the mind, body & spirit together you will also develop and improve your immunity.

**What is the ultimate aim of Taiji for you?**

Three things:

1. A healthy body.
2. Cultivating my character, inner nature and life force.
3. That this culture of Taiji will serve me and mankind.

Many thanks to Marianne Herzog for arranging my visit, translating, feeding and accommodating me in her home.

Marianne Herzog, sinologist, has been organising trips to Master Tian Liyang in the Wudang mountains for many years. Moreover she coordinates and translates his workshops and seminars in Europe. She can be contacted at:

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The photographs were kindly supplied by Loni Liebermann who has produced some beautiful artwork on tai chi and internal arts. To view her posters and photographs visit her web site at <http://www.qigong-aachen.de/n>

