

ALWAYS BEGINNING, NEVER ENDING

I struggle with the short form. I feel like a strong wind could topple my root. My movements feel like the flickering motion of a silent movie. My breath doesn't last deep or long enough. I see a new move and it looks like a confusing mess of twisting hands and legs. My mind wanders out the dojo door "Don't know" want to attach to knowing. Clear mind turns to mud.

Sound like a first session beginner? No, I've trained for six years. Beginner and advancing student. Same or different?

Shouldn't I soon feel always fluid, rooted and balanced? When do I stop being so very ordinary? When is this going to be effortless, perfect and familiar? When is the edge going to turn into a safe and secure harbor?

The layers of the onion are endless. Six sessions, six months, six years, six decades, or six lifetimes. It seems we are always beginning and the training is never-ending. I still feel awkward and bewildered. Only now it is with what holds the form together. Perhaps my edge is not as obvious to the beginner, more clear to those further down the path - in my breath, the movement of my wrist, the quietness of my mind, and the depth of my roots.

And so we are all always beginners. The practice is filled with the spirit of beginning again. This spirit is a faith in the knowledge that growth occurs only when I am willing to go back into what I "know and do it again and again. Moment to moment I am different. Moment to moment my relationship to the form is my teacher.

The more I train, the less I "get it." If the truth be told, I've now lost any desire to know. Wanting to know wears me out. Being empty fills me up. In fact, my Tai Chi practice has become about the process of unlearning - of letting go of what I think I know, of my expectations, and my considerations. Just when I think I might "have" something, all it takes is being asked to "teach" and I am face to face with "Parting Wild Horse's Mane" once again.

So what am I left with if there is nothing to know? Only just train. Only just come to the mat with a willingness to engage the moment with everything I have - my curiosity spontaneity, patience, commitment, desire to keep going, sincerity and unfolding openness to the moment. And a trust that change is often happening but invisible until the moment of its arrival.

The Tai Chi path only requires that I set one foot after the other and continually begin again. The path may always wind, curve, and twist around obstacles, but by using the Tai Chi principles of yielding, bending, and flowing, I always go straight. It is the process of moving that is important. Always beginning and never-ending.

What a relief. There is really nowhere to go. Only right here, right now. What a gift! There really is nothing to get. Only just train. Frustration, bliss, confusion, anger and pure, unadulterated joy. No matter. The moment is always complete.

Perhaps when I have unlearned everything and finally know nothing, I can truly begin my training in Tai Chi.

May 2005