

What Makes Tai Chi Good? Caroline Demoise – October 2003

During a break a student new to Sun style tai chi asked me about another student in class, “What makes his tai chi so good? “As I thought about his question, I realized that it wasn't simple to answer nor is good tai chi simple to achieve. But you recognize it when you see it. His posture and alignment were relatively good. He wasn't struggling with the shape of the movements, coordination or the sequence of movements, and he was developing a smooth, steady, connected flow. And yet this is only the beginning of what makes tai chi good.



If you taught a scarecrow and a human the shape and sequence of tai chi movements, you would notice the absence of qualities in the scarecrow's movements that are present when you recognize "good" tai chi. A person can put "life" into the movements. The process of animating "the form" and the qualities of expression that you choose to put into your "form" are the exploration of the depth of tai chi.

This exploration begins with focusing your awareness on how you are moving your body in space and expanding your awareness to include every aspect of movement (foot placement, alignment, coordination of upper and lower body, breathing, moving against resistance, flowing, etc.). To achieve this, you must develop the quality of "feeling," which is different from thinking about how you move, breathe or flow. To develop deeper levels of feeling in your body during tai chi, it is helpful to quiet the mind and cultivate the attitude of silently, without judgment, observing yourself.

According to creator Sun Lu Tang, Sun style should have the feeling of "flowing in water." This quality has also been described as moving against gentle resistance. Hours devoted to practicing that quality, results in people recognizing that you are developing depth and beauty in your "expression" of the tai chi movements. Deepening your tai chi would not be complete without increasing your awareness of breathing while moving slowly and practicing abdominal or reverse abdominal breathing. The movement of "open and close" in Sun style is deepened by allowing your breath, with intention, to initiate movement. Open and close follows the breath and follows intention.

These are some of the aspects of internal development that require years of practice to develop to a high level and which are instantly recognizable as good tai chi. Developing depth in tai chi begins with your intention to improve. Energy follows intention. The more passion you put into that intention, the more passion you have in your practice. The more of a priority you make tai chi in your life, the more people will be touched by the beauty, grace, and depth in your tai chi.

For information on Sun style tai chi classes in Chapel Hill visit www.innerpathtaichi.com.