

## **Tai Chi as Transformation by Caroline Demoise, April, 2005**



Tai chi is an inward journey. It blends external movements with internal focus and awareness and feels like a transformational process on the physical, mental and spiritual level. Tai chi is a process of gradual change from stiffness to flexibility and from a deconditioned state to better fitness. Over the months and years, you will see a gradual transformation from disconnected body movements to coordinated, fluid, full body movements.

When I was in college, I took golf as one of my required physical education credits. What I discovered was that my coordination left something to be desired and on the final exam, which was to play 9 holes of golf, I was the very last person around the course. I was surprised at my lack of coordination. Forty five years later, I moved into a golf course community and was asked by my new friends if I wanted to play golf. I decided to take a lesson with the golf pro to see if there was any hope at all for me and the sport of golf. The lesson was very revealing. I was pleased at how well I was able to hit the ball following the pro's instructions. His comment to me at the end of the lesson was that I should be able to learn to play reasonably well in a relatively short period of time. Was he talking to the same person who took golf 45 years ago? Why was the experience so different? Then I realized it was the 20 years of tai chi, of having learned to focus and follow the arm movements with my eyes. Tai chi had helped me become more coordinated and my golf game improved without ever playing golf.

On the mental level, we can observe the transformation from mindless movement to moving with intention directing our body. In tai chi you shift from the computer functioning mode of the mind to awareness mode and focus on how you move and how the body feels as it moves. Another transformation you experience is from a noisy, cluttered mind to a quiet, calm, still, focused mind giving you the benefits associated with more meditative states. On the spiritual level, you can pursue the transformation from an ego/judgment based reality to a reality of clarity, awareness and compassion. Many people are focused on the effects that tai chi has on the body and do not let tai chi work on the mind and spirit in this way. But it is my experience that the deeper levels of tai chi take you into the territory of spiritual practice. With practice, you notice the transformation from unconscious movement to being “present” in the body, fully aware of the many nuances of feeling and movement.

During the practice of tai chi, it is possible to shift from primary awareness of the material world to being grounded in the spiritual world. The first time I experienced this state was in an outdoor tai chi class. Suddenly, I had popped through the veil and felt myself in the spiritual world where I experienced absolutely no separation from nature, from trees, from clouds, from people. The remarkable thing about this state was that there was no agenda in my mind. The computer functioning of the mind had transformed into “being”, a state very different from thinking. Anything related to time or living in society had taken a back seat to just being in the pure joy of awareness and experiencing connection with nature.

No one taught me how to shift beyond the veil. It just came as part of the benefits of regular practice following tai chi principles. Over the years, as I have stumbled upon this state again and again, the process feels more like one reality dissolving into the other. The transition between realities is slower and more seamless. Developing the internal is a gift you are giving yourself through the study of tai chi. A teacher can show you the movements and provide feedback on your process of learning. A teacher can give you technical corrections, guidance on the internal components of tai chi and see the results of your practice, but you are the one who must have the desire to pursue the internal. When you have the desire to improve your tai chi and diligently follow tai chi principles in your practice, you can experience many transformational changes in your body and in your life.

For more information on tai chi visit [www.innerpathtaichi.com](http://www.innerpathtaichi.com). Caroline teaches Sun Style Tai Chi classes in Chapel Hill and Tai Chi instructor workshops around the country.