

## Qi Gong and the Still Mind. – Jennifer Goard

A while back, I stood on the grass in my backyard, looking at my surroundings ready to practice my Tai Chi forms.

My yard harboured a few choice trees, a bird bath, and the odd gnome hiding among the potted plants, safe behind the paling fence bordering my suburban property.

“Not so different to other peoples’ yards” I thought to myself.

My feet were bare and the grass felt cool, soft and luxurious underneath them, ‘twas quite nice really standing outside under the shade of the sprawling Tea Tree.

The sun blazed down from an azure sky and fluffy clouds scattered themselves on the horizon, feeling a little embarrassed about turning up on such a sunny day. It had been a long while since I had attempted Tai Chi in my yard, and the morning was ripe for practicing.

I started the “Beijing 24”, safe in the knowledge that this particular form would be easy enough to remember, which, to my utter amazement, I managed to clumsily complete the exercise from go to woe.

The gnome behind the plant pot however, watched on aghast as I stumbled and cursed the whole way through the form. He no doubt thought it was laughable to see the snake that creeps down crash blindly onto the grass, and the abysmal attempt at kicking; well I’m not going to repeat here what was said to that gnome.

There was no inner flow of energy, no inner peace of mind as my thoughts were all over the place, from what move came next in the form to next week’s shopping list. I felt disheartened and had failed the ancient art of Tai Chi miserably.

The reason for my dismal performance was that I hadn’t been to Tai Chi classes for a number of months due to other life consuming issues raising their ugly faces and just not practicing, so completing the Beijing 24 in my backyard on a beautiful sunny day, was a bit of an achievement I thought. I think basically I’m a glass half full sort of person, but I was however really dissatisfied with myself and the result, especially the crashing to the ground bit, not a good look, luckily for me I was alone (except for that pesky gnome).

It seemed to me that I was in a bit of a pickle, my forms were abysmal, as I have said, so I gave up on “Forms” and just stood for a while, closed my eyes and thought of nothing.

Thoughts of the shopping, washing that needed doing, what to get for dinner, and other stupid mundane, ordinary day to day things that entered my mind, were banished to the boundary of my brain.

In a strange way this helped, I relaxed and felt the warm fingers of air caress my cheeks. As I breathed in, I imagined the tendrils of air flowing down into my lungs. I could “see” the air passing through my lung’s capillaries and into my red blood cells where the oxygen molecules were greedily sucked up. In one huge pump the blood carrying the oxygen was pushed through my heart and was now on the highway of arteries, destination my extremities.

It is an amazing set up of biological systems that inhabit creatures on this planet. Without the oxygen in the atmosphere produced by trees we would not be alive. (Lucky for me I was standing under a huge tree, lots of oxygen there). The breath is life, and there is no way the body can stop breathing until the end. Even on deaths’ door, we struggle to breathe, right up until the final moment when life leaves the body.

We cannot stop breathing!

So with the breath circulating around the body bringing with it oxygenated blood there is an energy which flows within us it lives within our cells, the very essence of life itself.

The Chinese method of Qi Gong is one way this energy can be harnessed and used to enhance health and vitality it can also improve strength within the muscles.

At this point in time, standing still, listening to my breathing, I could see (in my mind’s eye) the glowing energy, produced by the breath, circulating around my body.

Now this is where I should have started my Tai Chi practice. Planting myself in the yard, sending imaginary “roots” down into the soil for stability, my feet firmly connected to the earth, not just the grass on the surface. Feeling and connecting with the dark, solid, earthy, energy which slowly “breathes” and has a rhythm of its own, going on below us.

The strong earthy energy felt “heavy” in my feet, like I was anchored to the ground or something and it seemed impossible to break free. As I breathed in it travelled up my legs, the energy spiralling around my body, making my leaden limbs tingle with electrical like signals. At this point I let gravity help and bent my knees to “gather” the chi from around them, breathe in the wonderful oxygen surrounding me and push it up towards the radiant sun with my outstretched arms. Look first to the left hand then to the right; bending with gravity and exhaling the breath, my body sinking with the weight to the left, only to push up again with the inhaled breath then to further sink with the pull towards the ground to my right. This is the first movement to the **“Taoist 1008 Drill Qigong (Qian Ba Zuan)”**.

Let me iterate here: I do not claim to be an expert in the Chinese Qigong arts. I am not writing this piece to be seen as a “master” of this practice. I am explaining my thoughts on this form as I have found this to be, in my yard, in the sun, for myself. I am a humble student. There is plenty of material on the internet and published works on the subject and according to [www.ziranmen.com](http://www.ziranmen.com) the “Taoist 1008 Drilling Hands”

*“.....focuses on uniting internal and external energy (qi) to create what is termed ‘the ultimate unity force. The aim is to open and strengthen the three major chi fields –“*

*.....” Taoist 1008 Drill Qigong (Qian Ba Zuan) was created and passed down by Master Liu to stretch tendons, open all of the meridians to stimulate and harmonise the flow of blood and Qi in all directions, transferred one’s body into a moving sphere in which not only just in physical but in qi and shen. This will then lighten the body.”*

I have quoted from the Ziranmen Kung Fu Academy website which gives a brilliant description on what Qigong is and how it can affect the mind and body if practiced regularly.

In my experience, it pays to focus on the energy and what you are doing with it while you are practicing. For instance, as I have said in this article, I started my “practice” on that beautiful sunny day, in my yard, thinking about how bad I was moving whilst performing the Tai Chi Beijing 24. My mind did not focus on the wonderful flow of energy circulating in and around me; consequently my dissatisfaction affected my demeanour and everything about my Tai Chi form resulting in failure.

There is a wealth of conversation about how best to perform your Art, but unless your mind is in tune with your body and the energy circulating within and around it, well you may as well go back inside, consider your shopping list and what’s on the telly.

I continued through with the “Taoist 1008 Drilling Hands” whilst outside under the sprawling Tea Tree in my yard. I could picture my fingers trailing coloured energy as they grasped the Red Pheasants tail. The White Tiger and Black Turtle were my companions, throughout the form culminating with combined Tiger and Dragon energy dancing in front of me. It was beautiful!

I didn’t complete the form 1008 times however, I only completed about 10, but those ten repetitions were concentrated and afterwards I felt light, stable on my feet, energised and ready to tackle the Beijing 24 and any other Tai Chi forms which I thought to have a go at.

