



## Sacred Dance: T'ai Chi Ch'uan

By Lana Grace Spraker

T'ai Chi Ch'uan is a mandala in movement created in the form of a mystic spiral. "Mandala" refers to the principle of center, the origin of form and process. Center is a symbol for potential—the place from which all things emanate. The Center is God, seed, atom, awareness. From this center energy spirals out to spin the web of life. The basic structure of human life is the spiral, found in the double helix of the DNA molecule. Our breath is a spiral from out to in, our circadian rhythms, the evolution of the year through repeating seasons—all spirals.

T'ai Chi Ch'uan is a "movement meditation." The movements of T'ai Chi are one continuous circle, spiraling in their connection from the beginning move to the end. But T'ai Chi is also an effective martial art. To understand the nature of the universe and its spiraling movement is to understand: how to get out of the way, to be in the right place at the right time, to deflect an oncoming onslaught, to set a gentle yet firm boundary, to live in harmony.

Why is T'ai Chi Ch'uan a sacred dance? Because before there is the "outer opponent," there is the inner enemy: the busy mind filled with nagging judgments and critical comparisons that destroy our harmony to the world, to each other, to ourselves. Our greatest challenge as we enter the twenty-first century is Peace of Mind: how to find it, and maintain it moment to moment.

We all wish for a mountain top with no phones, no demands, no "maddening crowds," no bullets flying or cars crashing. *But* most of us are urban dwellers, and a few days on a mountain top will not balance our remaining busy lives for long, unless we have a way of bringing it all home.

T'ai Chi Ch'uan is the sacred dance of warriors of the spirit. In it, we take the sword of stillness in movement to our busy minds and find peace and rest from

the cacophony of inner and outer demands and voices.

How much time do you spend in prayer or in sitting quietly with an "empty mind"—without making out your agenda for the next moment when you will pop up? *We have lost the sacred space of our inner peace.* Our first and most important sacred space is Peace of Mind. It is more important than cathedrals, temples or quiet woods, for if our inner spaces are not available for God, Wisdom, Compassion to enter, then we make of our outer spaces places of confusion, disrespect, and calamity.

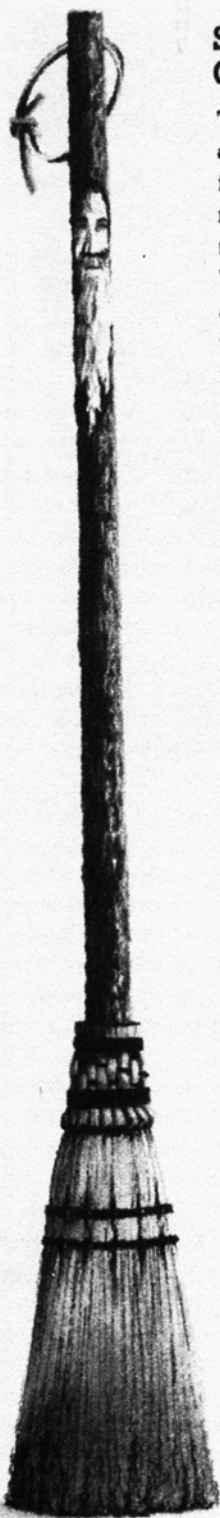
I could write about the graceful circles, poetic names, sustained and flowing movement of T'ai Chi Ch'uan. But you can read that everywhere. I would like us to come to a different place of appreciation and respect for this sacred dance, for movement that brings stillness and center. As Sacred Dancers, we need to remember that our dancing is first of all not a performance but a prayer—first of all not from our egos but from our spirits, seeking an expression of who we are originally, at center. To move and dance is to be a gifted expression of God's spiraling consciousness. We go beyond the natural dances remembered in our Old Brain and create new expressions of movement. As busy as the mind can be, so too can we find a stillness in which it can rest, even as we move. The form and beauty of T'ai Chi movement, originated in China, is a gift to us all, a universal language of movement in which to find peace, harmony, strength, openness.

Setting aside our limited idea of the way things must be, opening ourselves and letting go into the formal flowing silent movement of T'ai Chi, we receive. ☉

*Lana Grace Spraker, M.A. has taught T'ai Chi Ch'uan throughout the world. She has an instructional video and may be reached at (310) 479-3646.*

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