



茶和靜坐課程

Tea &
Meditation
Retreats
2017

TEA & QIGONG RETREAT



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We were very excited to host our first themed retreat in Taiwan last year. It was a herald of many more to come, as we plan on hosting topical retreats throughout the year once Light Meets Life is built, including Tea & Qigong, meditation intensive, various levels of gongfu tea, bowl tea and other linear courses as well. Dave is a great teacher, and we plan to incorporate some Qigong into all our ten-day courses this year!



✪ A: **Connor Goss**

Standing as the Mountain

Last September I had the great honor of participating and serving during our first Tea & Qigong retreat here in the mountains of Taiwan. Wayfarers from around the world journeyed to undertake a retreat from the world, to clear away the clutter of their minds, receiving inspiration and fuel on their journeys, and learning many wonderful things about tea and Qigong. They each received the opportunity to deepen their tea practices, and for some receive the first few bowls to begin their practice. Each day flowed around meditation and Qigong—creating the space for cultivating a balanced way of life, between stillness and movement, tension and relaxation. It was a profound period of transformation for everyone. Where we rooted ourselves strongly in the ground and said enough is enough—in this moment, I am free.

Surprisingly, this was the first retreat I have undertaken. It illuminated how profoundly beneficial these periods of quietude and meditation are for beginning or renewing one's practice, as we all need fuel for our practice occasionally, so that we may continue on with strong determination and discipline—to serve all beings.

An important part of any balanced life is undertaking retreats into the mountains—journeying away from the city and into the quietude seeping from the veins of ancient mountains. You do not even have to journey up into the mountains; while romantic, such an undertaking has become diffi-

cult for many. Periodic retreats from the world are beneficial for clearing away the clutter of our inner world—that place which we often forget amidst the busy-ness of daily life, of the unending tasks begging for our attention, of the countless distractions that disrupt our focus, of the unimaginable amount of information and mental stimulation that has neither end nor beginning. We can too easily become lost in the world of the external without turning our gaze inwards, focusing, even momentarily, on the inner world—on the place where strange creatures lurk, threads of thought flowing through the unconscious mind, habit patterns that have taken root within the most impenetrable of places. When we first turn our gaze inwards, what we see can be overwhelming and slightly terrifying at first. We do not have the capacity initially to face all of these areas that need to be nurtured. We, then, avoid turning our awareness inwards, favoring instead external experiences and a world that numbs our awareness. This is why retreats are profoundly important for our wellbeing. They offer us the inescapable space to focus on the inner world, on the places cluttered and overgrown by weeds.

As we participated in the retreat, we were actively attempting to clear out our mind and body, purifying the internal spaces, letting go of what no longer served us, through long hours of meditation. This was balanced out wonderfully with periods each day focused on movement, practicing

Qigong each morning and evening. Alongside healthy food, that nourishes the body and soul. I spent much of my time serving in the kitchen, receiving insights through direct service.

The retreat offered everyone the space to strengthen their meditation and Qigong practice or begin their practice. There is no place more inspiring to begin, or to continue, a meditation practice than the fertile space found within a retreat. One is surrounded daily with fellow meditators, each going through their own inner challenges. Meditating with a community or group is something I find great joy in. It gives me the chance to show up more, encouraging me to stand steadfast against all the enemies of my meditation practice—or rather the greatest enemy of all, my mind, and its incessant seeking.

We had the honor of welcoming a dear brother, David Melladew, to teach us Qigong. Almost everyone had no formal experience with Qigong, inhabiting the beautiful space of beginner's mind. It was my first experience practicing Qigong too. Halfway into the retreat, the realization emerged, that this is something I must bring into my daily practice. I must create space for Qigong, just as I create space for meditation and tea. Each of these practices is fundamental to a well-balanced life, filled with joy and calm focus. They all flow harmoniously together, aiding each other in cultivating the mind. Qigong for me became the bridge into a more balanced practice.



It has allowed me to cross the abyss that had until then seemed impossible. It allowed me to bring movement into my practice.

Now, allow me to try and express the deeper threads of my experience during the retreat. Writing this article has led me to many unfamiliar parts of the mind, into dead ends, and into places that make me feel uncomfortable. There are threads from the retreat, which may take months or years for me to understand, parts of the mind glimpsed that cannot be concisely expressed within the language and words I have by my side now. These are the brightest threads to surface, and, as I write they come further to life—animated by my focus and awareness. And just like how great writing should make us feel uncomfortable, so do

retreats; they bring up to the surface what challenges us. They act as an invitation to become who we want to be, free of unconscious habits and all that causes us untold suffering.

Purification

Meditation is a way of purifying the mind, deep purification of the body, mind, and soul. Purification rituals can be found in every human culture. I have found great joy and lightness. During the retreat, we journeyed deep into a space of purification. At the beginning of the retreat, Wu De gave a profound discourse on the importance of purifying the mind, clearing away the internal debris, through the Japanese concept of “*osoji*,” which

is a deep New Year cleaning. In practice, we focus on cleaning and clearing away the clutter of the mind and our physical space. If there is any culture in the world that embody purification the most deeply, it is the Japanese. Purification flows through the breath and rhythm of their culture and its soul.

Throughout the retreat I found great joy and lightness as I journeyed into part of my mind I had never seen before, clearing away the debris and many cobwebs. You can sweep ten thousand times and there will still be leaves left. The same is true of your mind. As we begin to purify the mind, we vow to take on the impossible.

We say enough is enough, and stand steadfast against the endless distractions of the world. We choose, in this moment, to face the jungles of the

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mind, and begin clearing away all that no longer serves—of practicing *osoji* in all its fullness and vastness. We clear out our hearts, lightening the weight we carry around unnecessarily. We empty ourselves. Purifying the empty spaces within. We focus on sitting with what should be placed back inside again, and what should be left for the elements to reclaim. It is through these periods of deeper purification that teachings and insights can be more skillfully woven into our souls. Ultimately many humans fear this space that arises when all external stimulation dissolves and we are forced, whether we like it or not, to face the internal layers of our being—those countless layers of conditioning that have resulted in who we are today. It is important to be gentle to oneself during the process of observ-

ing these layers of the mind and not to be too hard upon oneself over one's past actions and ways of engaging with the world. Practice compassion and forgiveness for all beings, especially for yourself.

The Interplay Between Tension & Relaxation

In many of the lessons and teachings Dave gave, he spoke about the importance of tension and relaxation. A balanced life must have the constant interplay between inhabiting states of relaxation and states of tension. It is somewhere in between these two that one experiences growth through the friction the two states creates, and this

friction offers great fuel for one's spiritual practice. It creates the conditions where one learns whether what has been cultivated on the cushion or in the space that peacefulness and compassion naturally flow, actually have roots deep into the earth—otherwise those qualities dissipate immediately. They evaporate into nothingness once exposed to the flames, leaving only echoes behind.

I will be the first to admit that I am incredibly tense, as are many humans in the world today. We live in a world that has created the conditions for extreme states of tension to emerge. We constantly inhabit a space of rigidity, clinging tightly to an impenetrable fortress into which the world cannot enter. Thus, there is an overemphasis on relaxation in some techniques.

This can be taken to the extremes of numbing the body and mind through external stimuli. We spend our moments of relaxation fixated on intense, dazzling lights—numbing our senses. We sink too deeply into relaxation, finding it then difficult to effortlessly change states and inhabit tension, inhabit the space of doing.

Married to the Ground

Something that is often spoken about in our tradition is the idea of being “married to the ground.” This surfaced quite often throughout the retreat, with many of the discourses and Qigong lessons touching about the essence of this sentiment. Parallels were observed between the teachings Dave gave and those by Wu De, each coming to the same meeting place from a different path; expressing truth through their Dao.

I find this idea of being married or connected to the ground, to the earth, to be particularly meaningful for me. It touches upon experiences I have had of the times when I have been too far in the heavens, dancing alongside the celestials, and the times I have been grounded—rooted into the earth. It reaffirms my own practice of cultivating a deeper sense of connection to the earth and those energies that help to balance us internally. There is often the tendency when on a path of cultivation and spiritual growth to focus too much on the spirit and the heavens, forgetting that we are part of this earth and that we must maintain that connection if we are to be balanced human beings. Otherwise, we find ourselves unable to navigate the world, unable to go about daily life and its worldly affairs. Wu De often touches upon this during his teachings—the importance of balancing the heaven and the earth in your life and in your practice.

Death as Teacher

Perhaps one of the greatest, most penetrating experiences during retreat was a profound internal shift in my understanding and orientation towards death. At the time, I did not quite understand the internal changes, as I lacked the tools and language

to integrate these new threads of understanding. However, death was the undercurrent throughout the entire retreat for me, showing itself in each moment and each breath. Not really the death, which we know in the Western world, that must be feared and avoided, rather a death that is transformative. The death of what is no longer needed, that only serves the part of us that wants to remain the same and not face our habit patterns—not strive towards cultivating a practice or more skillful ways of navigating the world.

This is the death that I met during the meditation sessions, when I rang the bell for each period during the day, even when I prepared lunch—the chopping of vegetables becoming a physical embodiment of internal experiences.

At the time, I did not realize this, and it has taken a while to unpack the experience, to learn the language required for communicating something that we are deeply conditioned to fear and repress within our lives and society as a whole. In the purest form, I learned how to be with death, to feel comfortable and open to what it has to teach me. We, must, as we do in life, approach death with joy and lightness of heart. It is not something to feel heavy or a great burden weighing one down. It can become one of our greatest teachers if we have an open heart and compassion for what arises.

Movement & Stillness

It was a profound experience for me to observe how gentle, physical movement such as Qigong can move energy, promoting clearing away of stagnation and tension in the body. I have often experienced the ways seated meditation acts as a way of purification, so, to see the parallels in movement meditation was transformative. It offered me the chance to find deeper reserves of motivation to practice, and to cultivate positive habit patterns oriented towards bringing movement into my daily practice—something I have always found challenging. Though, if I am to take anything away from this Tea & Qigong retreat, it is the great importance of balancing stillness and movement. This harmonizes our lives with Nature—micro and macro.

These two practices aid each other, offering insights and wisdom that flow parallel. They work together, enhancing and strengthening one another like a dance.

I invite you explore your relationship to meditation and movement, and may you find the space to deepen your practice, so that you may clear away the clutter of the mind and cultivate emptiness.



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