



Linda's T'ai Chi Weekly Handout July 5, 2020

The Birds

Dame Daphne du Maurier, Lady Browning, May 1907 –April 1989 was an English author and playwright. Although known for her romantic novels, some of her works are described as “moody” with underpinnings in the paranormal, like the movie “The Birds” The only aspect of the book that Alfred Hitchcock borrowed for the movie, “The Birds” in 1963 was the location, a coastal remote setting and the unprovoked attack by the birds. One of the themes of this movie is the disharmony between man and nature and as we know, harmony is the goal of T'ai Chi- internal and external. T'ai Chi is guided by nature and works in harmony with nature. T'ai Chi flows with the natural order of life and it is the harmony that we seek. If you have time, you might want to watch the movie. The technology is pretty good for the times.

Today I write about birds and T'ai Chi. Many thanks again to one of our students who brought this topic to my attention. All cultures revere birds for their strong symbolism. *Archaeopteryx lithographica* from the Late Jurassic period was considered to have been the earliest bird. Why do birds matter? Good question but from the perspective of a bird, why do humans matter? They have been here longer than we have. Birds are integral to our culture, history, our ecological system and life itself.

We can trace the importance of birds to our Native American culture. Birds move freely between earth and the sky (heaven) and have strong spiritual meaning. Bird feathers are considered sacred. Birds are ambassadors from the spiritual world and they represent freedom, courage, and strength and encourage us to aim high to reach our goals. They symbolize peace, transformation, and power.

In the Chinese mythology a Taoist monk Chang San-feng (**Zhang Sanfeng**) was disturbed by the sounds of a snake and a crane fighting in his courtyard. It was from this observation that Chang San –feng created T'ai Chi Ch'uan built on the concept of yielding in the face of aggression. This is the “go with the flow” approach of T'ai Chi which is as much a philosophy as a physical form. It is not surprising then to find postures in T'ai Chi named for birds: embrace the peacock's tail; white crane spreads its wings, flying dove, the owl looks behind, golden cock stands on one foot; I can fly and Phoenix spreads its wings and returns to the nest (Tung Set)

The White Crane

The crane is a popular image in Chinese culture because it symbolizes longevity. It is the second most revered bird in Chinese culture after the phoenix (“an immortal bird whose rare appearance is said to be an omen foretelling harmony at the ascent to the throne of a new emperor”). The crane carries the spirit of the departed to heaven. The crane brings energy and peace to humans and when the time comes, carries the human soul to heaven. We perform “white crane spreads its wings” multiple times in the Yang style slow set. It is a foundational posture throughout most forms of T'ai Chi. As you perform, “White crane spreads its wings “imagine the crane as it soars beyond the universe and carries your spirit and aspirations to greater heights.





You can see the crane in these pieces of Chinese art work.

Now we come to the peacock.



Again we perform “embrace the peacock’s tail” many times throughout the slow set. The peacock, touted for its beauty, has many different meanings and symbolic associations across different religions around the world. Its many colors and radiant feathers signify integrity, truth, honor, and ensuring that we love one’s self. Peacocks are confident, bold (not arrogant) and courageous no matter the circumstances. Grace under fire is the peacock. They also represent happiness, laughter and having a kind heart.

Why Birds Matter

Nature’s gift to grace the sky.

Flights of fancy, spirits high.

With cheerful song they greet the day

And gently ease our cares away.

—**Andy Mauro**, Buena Vista Audubon Society

As you practice T’ai Chi use your imagination to see the bird in flight. Your creativity is one part of the mind, body and spirit connection. And, remember, we strive for progress, not perfection. “The woods would be very silent if no birds sang except those who sang the best.” John James Audubon

In the true spirit of the peacock, may you find laughter; have a kind heart, making sure to love yourself.



Peace, Linda