



Linda's T'ai Chi

Weekly Handout January 17, 2021

Telling Your Story

The story of T'ai Chi is steeped in truth, lore and myth. The story of Chang San -Feng is well known among practitioners of T'ai Chi. Some like to think of this story as a true account of the founder and the originator of T'ai Chi whereas others consider it a mere tale of the lore. As the legend unfolds, Chang San-Feng lived in the 13th century and early 14th century. He left his position as a government official to live a life of a wanderer and a hermit in the mountains. Until this time, martial arts relied on force, effort and muscular strength. One day as he witnessed a snake and a crane fighting, he noticed the deceptive movements of each animal to evade, attack, retreat only to attack again. He was mesmerized. What he came to believe is that each animal had the ability to adapt to change quickly, the ability to blend hard and soft movements, utilize strength and yielding. He also noticed the continuity of flow and the use of circular movements. Voilà! T'ai Chi was born. Or so the story goes. Whether true or myth, I really like this story.

As a people, we love stories. I remember as a child, I was the older sister to my brother by 7 years. He loved stories and I loved reading to him. His favorite book was "Go Dog Go." Published in 1961 "Go Dog Go" was written and illustrated by P. D Eastman (1909-1986) a prolific writer, illustrator and screenwriter. It describes the actions and interactions of a group of highly mobile dogs, who operate cars and other conveyances in pursuit of work, play, and a final mysterious goal: a dog party. I must have read that book to him a thousand times over. No, ten thousand times over. To make sure my memory was correct, I called Scott. He said indeed that was his favorite book and he has a copy. Did I want to see it?

We share stories at the dinner table, when we are out with friends and we each have a story of our life. We hold these stories in our conscious and unconscious memory. They form who we are.

We tell our stories to transform ourselves; to learn about our history and tell our experiences to transcend them; to use our stories to make a difference in our world; to broaden our perspective to see further than normal; to act beyond a story that may have imprisoned or enslaved us; to live more of our spiritual life.

Stories provide a sense of continuity to our life and our world. Stories connect us to who we are, where we came from and where we are going. Stories make us human and binds us to one another.

From Lissa Rankin, MD Psychology Today Nov 27, 2012

“Because telling your story—while being witnessed with loving attention by others who care—may be the most powerful medicine on earth. Each us is a constantly unfolding narrative, a hero in a novel no one else can write. And yet so many of us leave our stories untold, our songs unsung—and when this happens, we wind up feeling lonely, listless, out of touch with our life’s purpose, plagued with a chronic sense that something is out of alignment. We may even wind up feeling unworthy, unloved, or sick.

Every time you tell your story and someone else who cares bears witness to it, you turn off the body’s stress responses, flipping off toxic stress hormones like cortisol and epinephrine and flipping on relaxation responses that release healing hormones like oxytocin, dopamine, nitric oxide, and endorphins. Not only does this turn on the body’s innate self-repair mechanisms and function as preventative medicine—or treatment if you’re sick, it also relaxes your nervous system and helps heal your mind of depression, anxiety, fear, anger, and feelings of disconnection.”

In our T’ai Chi practice, each posture tells a story; a story about the peacock’s tail; the story of the clouds moving across the sky; the story of the ocean and the tides; the story of the white crane spreading its wings. These are mini stories but stories just the same, that is one of the things I love about T’ai Chi, the imagery and the connection to nature and the natural world. It is uplifting and spiritual. And, the fact that T’ai Chi is best practiced with other people. It is not an exercise that is best performed alone. It is fun to be with other people and to work together in coordinated and harmonious way.

At the heart of this narrative, I believe, we need to write our story, own story about what happened this past year. I am like you, probably, in that there is so much I want to forget. But that is impossible. Our psyche and our body never forget. Our experiences particularly the negative ones become buried and seemingly forgotten but are never forgotten.

So, what I propose should you decide to accept, is to write your story of this past year. It can be a narrative or just bullet points. It can be brief or extensive. It can be done in images or sounds or written words. Better yet, share your story with a family member or members or a trusted friend. You can go back and forth each telling your story out loud. Hearing the words make it more real and more memorable. But, like the stories of T’ai Chi, I believe we need to anchor our experiences in our conscious.

Here are some ideas but I am sure some of you will lots more ideas if you wish to share.

- High points
- Low points

- When you laughed
- When you cried
- When you were despaired and when you had hope
- Experiences that you want to remember and those you want to forget
- Moments when you thought you could not go on and what changed that
- What made you proud
- Who in your life made things better or made things worse?
- What made you angry and what was calming
- Who were the people that you counted on?
- What did you learn about yourself and others?
- What did you discover about yourself that surprised you? Scared you?
- What good came out of this?
- What sights, sounds, smells do you associate with this experience?
- Who did you draw closer to? Who did you pull away from?
- Do you associate an experience, a song, a movie, art work, poetry and story to this past year?
- Five or ten years from now, what do you want to tell your family, your friends, your grandchildren about these years?

Looking at 2021. I suspect we will need to do this again at the end of 2021 as the virus rages on and our society faces immense challenges.

If you choose to tell your story, I hope you find meaning in your experience that can carry you forward.

I close thanking all of you for your well wishes and concern.

In Peace and faith,

Linda