

PERFECTION

I recently attended a Taiji workshop where quite a few of us were teachers. The person running the workshop asked a very experienced teacher to demonstrate a movement. She then commented that it was very good, very technically correct. It was just the kind of movement that would be really good to have as a series of photos in a book, or as a DVD, for people to learn from. However, she said, that's all it was: technical correctness; it had no life, no energy, no expression. So, in other words, it wasn't Taiji.

So where is the perfection in Taiji?

Let's start with where you look from... Everyone is at a different level of ability and understanding, and of course this is constantly changing. An optimist would call their level ability, a pessimist inability. It's the same place viewed and labelled from different angles, so notice which of those labels you would naturally use. If it's negative, invite yourself to use the positive where there is room for expansion.

If a movement or posture is technically correct, it is often stiff, held, controlled, lacking in aliveness. The very nature of aliveness is vibrancy, variation and change. So to strive for technical perfection in your Taiji Form is a mistake. I spent the first few years of my Taiji journey looking for technical correctness mistakenly thinking that was the aim, and where I would find perfection. So I've 'been there, done that' and I came up empty. Of course there is a 'correct' way for the postures to be expressed - they have to follow the principles and fulfill their function.

There are different layers of function – Health, Meditative, Martial; so for example, what is externally correct for health is not necessarily correct for martial application.

As an example, let's take a function of the Attention posture. The heels are together to minimise the stance making it easier, more obvious, to physically feel a balanced alignment and relaxation without collapse; the mind relaxed into the centre; awareness of the structures - physical, mental/emotional, energetic (inner and outer). The function of this posture is to pay attention (hence the name) to all of the above which brings you into a place of potential, a place where nothing is happening but from which anything/everything can arise.

Complete beginners often appear stiff or even wooden. This is the natural perfection of where they are in their Taiji journey. Some people have 'better' natural posture than others. Life's experiences shape us for good or bad and within those variances there is always a place where perfection (as opposed to technical correctness) for each individual exists.

What really makes a posture correct is wholeness and integrity - the integration of the principles. This is a place where your level of ability and understanding meets your idea of technical perfection, where you come into your wholeness, your natural perfection in that moment. This natural perfection is always present and constantly changing as you progress. So perfection is not something to be strived for, rather something that is always present and can be relaxed into.