

PRAJNA

From the 1992 T'ai Chi Chih Teacher Conference

by Justin Stone

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Before I give this earth shaking talk, I want to say a couple of words. It's like eating a sandwich before you go to a banquet. (You'll see what I'm driving at.) Originally, when it came time to give an informal talk, I said things off the top of my head. But then Carmen started taping the talks. And Connie started transcribing them. Then I thought, if somebody's going to read this stuff, it had better make some sense.

What I'm going to talk about today may at first not seem to be attached to T'ai Chi Chih, but I think as it develops you will see how it strengthens the idea of why you are teaching T'ai Chi Chih and that T'ai Chi Chih has more to offer than physical fitness or even the feeling of serenity. It's a very important task. You've heard me say this many times. The fact that you are here is not by accident. It's early in T'ai Chi Chih's 18-year history and you have been chosen. As Ramurti Mishra once said to me, when I asked him about a meditative experience I'd been having, "You've been chosen for introspection." And I wanted to say to him, "Chosen by whom?" In the same way, you are carrying out a very important task. It's not just a way to make a little bit of money (or a lot of money, as I think some of you will make.) There is something much deeper, and I'm going to get into that in this little talk.

So, we've finished the sandwich and now we're starting the banquet. I've prepared notes this time, so I'll be reading a lot of this because it's what I want to say and there is purpose to it.

There is within you *That Which Knows* and that is your teacher. That is the true teacher. Most people have read that, but they don't believe that. So they want to worship somebody who is alive; they want to have someone else do it for them. But within you is that which knows.

Then why do we act as though we are ignorant? Because that inner, innate wisdom – called *prajna* – is covered up by the *vashanas*. *Vashanas* are the habit energies, and they so cover the *prajna* that it becomes impossible for it to shine through to the conscious mind. But it is there. It is always there. But you don't know it's there if it doesn't come through to your conscious mind and to where you can act in the wisdom of *prajna*.

Now, all through religious and spiritual literature, we read "Know thyself." "The kingdom of heaven is within." "The Inner Guru..." But we don't believe this teaching and we look outside ourselves in the outer world. We have created for ourselves this world and we try to find someone to worship, someone to follow,

and so forth. There are many teachers who use this fact to their own benefit – what some writers call “spiritual materialism.” And the benefit is frequently financial in character. This is why Krishnamurti said the guru system is “an exploitation.” Not always, but very frequently.

I have often told you the story of the Sufi teacher who was approached by a seeker who said, “Teach me, master.” “Are you ready to learn?” was the reply. “Teach me how to learn,” earnestly implored the seeker. “Are you ready to let me teach you how to learn?” was the cold water thrown on the seeker’s aspirations. You can’t just teach anybody you pick up. That one has to be ready to be taught at a level where he or she can absorb what you’re teaching. And there must be a proper attitude. If the cup is full, you can’t pour any more tea in it; the cup has to be empty.

When Paul Reps met somebody, he didn’t say, “How do you do?” which is meaningless. He said, “Thank you for your life.” And that has deep meaning. When people asked Paul questions as to proper diet, whether they should have sex or not, Paul called these questions, “verbal delusionary.” This also has deep meaning, and relates closely to the reply of the Sufi master, “Are you ready to learn?” Unless the delusionary way of thinking is changed, no teaching is possible, and changing it can be painful. Giving up delusions, often recognized as neuroses, is not as easy as wallowing in them.

I have known several people who have had legs amputated because it was easier than stopping the tobacco habit. With such deep-seated habit energies, where is the possibility of shaking the delusionary way of thinking? This is the making of suffering.

Prajna, p-r-a-j-n-a, your great treasure, the innate Wisdom that you are never without, is often personalized as *Prajna Paramita*, translated as “the perfection of wisdom.” It is thought of in many places as a female. In spiritual experiences, I have been told, “She will take you where you are meant to be.” In other words, you are being led. Also, that lets you off the hook. “She will lead you to where you are meant to be.” You’ll go there because you choose to go there and if you don’t you’ll be taken there anyhow. This is why the monk, Senzaki says, “It is better to discipline yourself than to have life do it for you.”

One time, I told a young Yogi who was actively seeking to be free from bondage, “The thing that binds you is the feeling that there is a goal to reach and you have not yet reached it.” Actually, you are complete. If you have faith in *prajna*, this inner wisdom, you will do and feel the right thing. It will almost do the right thing for you. Every word spoken to you will be a signpost to guide you,

if you let it. But can you have faith in this guidance, instead of always trying to manipulate it?

It means you must “Let Go!” Every spiritual path simply asks you to “Let Go!” But this means to ignore your habitual thought patterns, your ingrained energy patterns. And that is difficult to consciously do. In some cases it is impossible. You’ve heard the story about the woman who stood next to me, and although there were 150 other chairs, she couldn’t eat unless she sat in the chair that I was sitting in. Up above there was a big sign that said, “Habit is the enemy of old age.” To change habits is hard. The circulation and balancing of these energy patterns in T’ai Chi Chih practice can do it for you effortlessly.

Many people have found that unwanted habits have dropped away without any effort while doing T’ai Chi Chih, particularly during Teachers Training Courses. I remember one course in which a fine young man, who had many terrible habits, made a real breakthrough. At the end of the six-day course, he suddenly realized he had not indulged in any of these habits during the week. I doubt that he subsequently indulged in them, although it is not easy to break away from habitual thought patterns. In fact, after talking with him recently, I’m sure that that’s so.

So my advice is to trust your inherent, intuitive wisdom – these are just words – rather than the accumulated knowledge that we all pile up. People read Lao Tzu who says, “Lose a little each day,” and then they think that wisdom consists in being a computer and piling up facts as you go along. All you have to do is go out in the forest, which we’re going to do this afternoon, or live somewhere where you are closely in touch with nature, and you’ll realize how false that is. There is no end to adding facts and filling our heads with knowledge, and that serves a very real purpose in its place. Whether you call it God, *prajna*, your own true nature, my advice is to know it and listen to it. This means to come to know who and what you are.

Now I’ll give you a slight clue as to who and what you are. Many of you have heard it often. In the Buddhist Lotus Sutra, it says, “*From the state of emptiness, your body is a body pervading the universe, your voice is a voice filling the universe, your life is a life without limit.*” A beautiful statement, and the key to it is the first phrase, “From the state of emptiness.” The key is the emptiness. An empty cup can hold tea and a full cup won’t take any more tea.

Da Hui, the great Zen Buddhist teacher, is talking about *prajna* as opposed to knowledge when he says, “*The Great Teaching* must flow out, point by point, from within your own breast to cover heaven and earth; only then will it be the action of a

man of power.” That which flows out from one’s own breast, as he calls it, is one’s own beginningless present awareness, fundamentally complete in itself. As soon as you arouse a second thought, you fall into comparative awareness. “Comparative Awareness” is something gained from external refinement (that is, Acquired Knowledge). “Present Awareness” is something from before your parents were born. Now, don’t get hung up on *before*; don’t be literal. Just sense the meaning of that. I call this Present Awareness, the Real power, “*Prajna*,” or “*Prajna Paramita*.” The names we use are unimportant, and yet wars are being fought over them –Allah versus Jehovah, Krishna versus Jesus). If they all teach one omnipotent great power, how can they act as though they’re different? How many creators are there? Or how many omnipotent powers are there?

Da Hui goes on to say, “With strong power one can enter both enlightenment and delusion.” That is a wonderful statement. He says, “If one’s power is weak, he can enter the realm of enlightenment, but not the realm of delusion.” Of course this is merging sense with essence. You’re not only going to enter the realm of enlightenment. You’re in the realm of illusion or delusion and you have to function in both, which are ultimately seen to be the same.

I say: have faith in this power, this *prajna*, which is certainly related to *prana* or *chi*, and to let it function for you. Don’t let delusionary thinking dull or obliterate it for you. In an interesting book I have been reading, *Do You See What I See?*, the author says to have faith in life and let it function freely. Thus he equates “Life” with “God,” “Truth,” etc, and rightly points out it is all here now – not to screen it out, or gainsay it, or go against it.

Is it easy to tell people that this very moment is the transcendental and equal to the infinite? This moment. Not a period of time. Here is Da Hui’s answer to that: “In the conduct of their daily activities, sentient beings have no ultimate illumination.” (He’s talking about *prajna*.) “If you go along with their ignorance, they are happy. If you oppose their ignorance, they are vexed.” You know that’s true. So you have the choice. Do you want to be a good teacher or do you want to be a popular teacher? If you want to be a popular teacher, go along with everybody, don’t care if they come late, go out with them, do what they do, you’ll be a very popular teacher. Of course they won’t learn anything. And it’s true, as you well know, that if somebody disagrees with your views, you don’t like it.

So, I can make you happy by saying what you want to hear but I’m unwilling to talk down to people. That’s my weakness because Buddhism talks about expedient means –that you alter

your teaching according to the caliber of the listener. I think that's talking down to the listener. I would rather talk to 500 people where maybe three people will get what I'm saying. But what they get will be real and not something else. I don't want to use words that I don't mean so that people can nod and be happy. You can get that in church on Sunday. You go out with a good feeling and then Monday you'll be cheating again. So I'm unwilling to talk down to people. I won't use cliches like, "All is one." Do you live as though all is one or do you see others, some opposed to you? Do you live in the transcendental or do you have to pay the rent?

Zen Master Danxia said, "In the function which is identical to essence, holding still and letting go rest completely in oneself. In the essence which is identical to function, bringing forth and throwing away depend on no one else." Here we have a lamp; that is the essence. Here we have the light; that is the function of the lamp. You can't really separate the lamp and the light and you can't have function without the essence. The wise man, the sage, feels the essence in everything he does, in all function. This is merging sense and essence.

Now, Da Hui in saying this about the essence and function, he is saying that it is all there with you, in your actions and your thoughts. You are complete. T'ai Chi Chih is helping you uncover that completeness. I say learn to live with and in that completeness and have absolute faith in it and absolute faith in life.

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