

An Insight into Internal Arts Through Autism

BY NICKY FAWCITT

Within Tai Chi, Bagua and Xingyi Quan there are many different styles. Reacting and responding to how the movements make you feel, following your own direction and rhythm can be very similar to listening to music and tapping out a beat or a groove. But in martial arts your body responds to your own internal rhythm. In autism and other associated sensory conditions, I sometimes struggle to make a connection through communication and giving what is deemed as a correct response to individuals.

This can be so frustrating and can be soul destroying leaving me feeling frustrated, angry, lost, isolated and disconnected. However, through the beautiful form of Tai Chi and the twirling waves of Bagua's song it all becomes so clear and unblocks my pathways and channels. I have always been autistic and my brain functions differently especially in social situations and communication. The movement allows me to completely let go of the constant missed signals to my brain. I do not know what it is to be a non-autistic entity. It does not mean that I am slow or stupid, it just means that I communicate in a different way to others. So when I am performing the form, whether it is Tai Chi, Bagua or Xingyi Quan, my internal pathways clear and relax and let go.

My mind, body and spirit unfold quickly and softly, or slow and graceful like weaving an untold web or a rainbow of dance, groove and rhythm. No matter what size I am or what injury my body has, I become unbroken, unhinged like a butterfly through a world of cosmos and unimaginable grace. Different environments also contribute massively to my mind's connection to my body and spirit. If it is stormy and gusty, my movements are fast and precise, unpractised and practised, flowing like clear running water into a stream, river or ocean. Riding and surfing the powerful waves of an unchained melody of sequences and movements. The soft graceful flowing touch of Yang Cheng Fu's Yang style Tai Chi, its raw step by step integrated movements



of beauty or Wang Shujin's smooth elegant whirlwind dance of Bagua Linked Palms enables me to strip away my stress, anxiety, anger, worry and isolation. I become focused, determined and centred, separated from any autistic frustration and disconnection.

After attending a social event and experienced lots social interaction I often feel tired and drained. When I went to Hong Kong last year with Ashley James Cheeseman, friend and Sifu, along and other friends from our Tai Chi school, we would go out during the day full of adventure and thought. Then in the evening most people would want to go out for a meal and explore the beautiful night sights of Hong Kong. I spent several evenings in my hotel room resting away from others. Not because of I wanted to be away from my friends but because of the sensory overload of the humidity and heat of Hong Kong. As well as the massive journey I made from the United Kingdom to a such an amazing city that touched my heart in more ways I could ever explain. It opened my autistic

mind even further to create Tai Chi Simplicity and develop my teachings of the internal arts and Qigong to people who have learning and physical disabilities, sensory associated conditions, mental health problems, dementia and autism. To be able to build a bridge between two worlds. To give people the knowledge and opportunity to learn something new, magical, ancient and wonderful. To bring the internal arts and autism, disability, mental health, dementia, sensory associated conditions into an equal world of kindness and wonder. Some my friends and students would often say to me I did not know that you were autistic and many people would say it only affects you very mildly. My reply would be that is because I have worked so hard for my autism to only affect me mildly. But that is what it appears to be on the outside. On the inside my brain can go into overdrive, especially in social events. And I often do not give the correct social responses. This may seem like I am being rude or uninterested, but this is not the case. my brain functions very different to others. I am often trapped in a mind bubble of isolation and awkwardness due to my poor response to social and intimate situations. Through Tai Chi meditation and relaxation, I am able to invoke a relaxed reaction through stillness, mindfulness and physical movement to prevent me from being overloaded with a sensory emotional and environmental response.

When I went on a day trip to Lantau Island I remember feeling so drained and tired due to the heat, sensory overload and social discomfort but I was driven on by wonder, adventure and



support from my friends. Being surrounded by the iconic beautiful mountains and views of the old buildings and magical ways of life, my travels took me up to Po Lin, the world's tallest Buddha statue. If I wanted to get closer and join my friends at the top I would need to climb two hundred and sixty eight steps in extremely hot and humid conditions. This was then in my mind I started to build the bridges of two worlds coming together. I managed to get to the top of Po Lin and saw such a wonderful, beautiful touching site. I stood by three smaller Buddha statues and looked out across the mountain peaks and I thought to myself 'my chains are unbroken and an autistic mind in Hong Kong is seeing the world differently'. A place what had touched my heart and made me understand so many things including my connection with the internal arts and qigong. Ashley stood next to me like a teacher would his pupil and he said as a friend 'I am so proud of you and the journey you have lead and what you have become and for what you are about to do'. That moment I felt whole, proud and complete. My friend, Richard, has also stayed and supported me along my hard, long journey never once doubting my teachings Forever loyal, both men and friends gave me hope in being accepted by society as an autistic internal martial arts instructor and able to accept by myself as more than an autistic entity but as a teacher, friend, student and most importantly as Nicky.