

# The Essence of Movement

BY IAN CAMERON | ISSUE 10, AUTUMN/WINTER 1998

*Ian Cameron was another early practitioner of Tai Chi Chuan having opened the Five Winds School in Edinburgh in the 1970s. Ian began his training in Hong Kong in the early 70s and found his teacher, Cheng Tin Hung almost immediately. He never turned back once he began his study. 'The Essence of Movement', appearing in issue 10 of the Journal, reveals his understanding of the art. It was excellent reading in then and remains so today.*

Over a fairly long period of time, something has become of increasing interest to me, is the idea of getting to the essence of movement. Just the movement; not what it is for or how it looks, simply the experience of moving.

It is a very liberating experience to really feel this moment-to-moment action. The slow, fluid movements Tai Chi Chuan are a wonderful medium for moving towards developing this awareness. I think that this can only happen after many years of practice. When you can drop all extraneous ideas, you can clear the way to get in touch with essential movement. There should be nothing but movement, and a relaxed focus on the particular moment/movement. This clears the ground for a wider appreciation of the essence of Tai Chi. The mind is freer. If the mind is occupied with thoughts of the application of each technique, as you go through the form, you'll be caught by that thought. I feel that to be overly attached to these thoughts is to be limited by them. Of course, it is important to understand the martial aspects of Tai Chi Chuan, but don't stay there. If you know them, you know them. It isn't necessary to carry them around. This is a process that we are within and there was a great deal of learning to come through. Eventually we see that this training leads us to a greater sense of freedom in whatever we do.

What I feel tai chi training is ultimately for is the liberation of the individual. Only when we drop all our notions – just to do it, can true spontaneity come forth.

It is a matter of being in the moment with nothing to spare, just the essence. The mind is not more capable of responding to any situation. This is carried through in every aspect of Tai Chi. We continue the pairing down of everything to the simplest expression. That expression is the totality of the body and mind in harmony, giving us the physical and mental focus needed for good Tai Chi. Everything is full but at the same time

empty and fluid, always changing but alive with never ending potential.

When the body moves, it must move as one unit, from the ground to the fingertips. The same is true in every aspect of Tai Chi. For example, when using a sword, any movement of the body is reflected in the weapon. The soft connection of the hand, between you and the weapon makes this possible. The very fluid and subtle movements are more likely to be achieved when the body is relaxed and sensitive. Although each weapon has its own expression, the coordination is the same. It is important to get yourself out of the way and not overly try to influence the weapon. Holding a weapon too tight is the same as choking the life out of it.

If too much emphasis is placed on application, there is a danger of sacrificing the aesthetic of the forms. I believe a great deal is lost if this is the case.

Why not have both? I always believe in quality of movement. If you have this in the application it will be all the more effective. The whole body must be used to transfer energy through to the very tip of the weapon. Staying with the sword as an example, it is a very refined weapon. It should be performed lightly and smoothly. This form should resemble the weaving of the dragon and the movement of undulating waves. My teacher said, "Tai Chi should be felt and should not be just a technical exercise."

It is opening up a space that allows you to move freely and become much more in touch with the essence of your movement. Being acutely aware of your movements, you can see how your whole body is coordinated. Through the sensitivity of the body, you are acutely aware of the smallest movement. My main focus now is to distill everything down to its most essential and not burdening practice with anything other than the art itself.