

The Dumbing Down of Our Instincts

In Tai Chi we learn to develop our sensitivity. We do this for a number of reasons. In partner work, such as adhering hand, we are looking for changes in muscle tension, lack of rootedness within our partners and the ability to respond appropriately to whatever is thrown at us. We do this *not* to 'win' (unless we are participating in a push hands competition) but to help our partner recognize these things in their own body, to teach them to let go of tension, relax under pressure and to remain strongly planted in their stance in the face of many distractions. In turn, they help us find this within ourselves.

Developing sensitivity with a partner helps us synchronize with him/her and eventually to synchronize our movements with a larger group of people, so that we may flow through the Tai Chi form as one, naturally and intuitively.

As an extension of developing our sensitivity we will become more self aware and more conscious of the changes in those around us. Being more in tune with ourselves helps us to take rest when we need it, nurture ourselves correctly and know our limits. It also reawakens intuition and instincts which may have become dormant or ignored.

Within all of us is an instinct for self preservation and an inner voice to guide our decision making. We may just have forgotten how to listen. In our natural state we sense danger before we are physically in danger. Danger can take many different forms, including attacks on our psyche; in the form of people, behaviours, jobs, experiences - anything that drains our energy, dampens our spirit, undermines our confidence and takes us further from our soul purpose. Unfortunately many of us have been conditioned or have learned to ignore our alarm bells. The reality is that we live in a world which dumbs down our instincts, and our psyche is becoming as sterile as our homes. The alarm bells are no longer ringing for a large number of people and our sense of community and sense of self is diminishing. We have become docile and lost, walking around in a fog. We are distracted by reality tv, technology and gadgets, while our natural habitat, the wholesome food and water that nourishes us and the arts that nurture our soul are all slipping away from us and the generations to come. We talk about conservation and protecting the environment for our native flora and fauna but we talk as if we are separate from this. Cities encroach on countryside but we are just as disastrously affected by the loss of the natural habitat as the badger and the otter. Concrete, polluted food, air and water are not natural for us either. The more we lose what is natural for the planet we live on, the more we lose ourselves.

Our modern way of living is teaching us to separate the mind, body and spirit, but we are sentient beings and cannot exist in a world where our soul is not nourished. That is why many people today feel a lack of joy in their lives, no matter how much they have: food, possessions, money etc. People are going through the motions of living, without feeling *alive*. When was the last time you felt alive? Do you remember when you were a child and it rained? You turned your face to the sky to feel the droplets on your skin, splashed in puddles and laughed at being soaked. You relished the squishiness of soft moss underfoot, picked pine cones, smelled flowers, and threw yourself down on a grassy patch because it looked so inviting. There was a time when this connection with nature was natural for you.

We cannot fix the world but we can do small things to redress the balance. We can take measures to be as green as possible of course, but we cannot wave a magic wand and make it all right when so much of society is on self destruct.

What we *can* do is fix ourselves. We often find it easier to 'fix' other people or help a cause, than to face ourselves. I'm not saying you shouldn't help others or good causes, but it takes a lot of your energy, and you can't keep withdrawing energy from the bank of chi, without making any deposits. Pretty soon you'll be overdrawn.

We are fortunate that we are learning an Art which helps us replenish our energy and reconnect with our inner wisdom. It helps us reawaken the 'newborn' within us. Turn off the tv and do what inspires you. Make time for yourself in your practice, experiment, close your eyes, look inward, be curious and uninhibited.

How can we regain the connection with nature and our inner self when we have commitments, responsibilities and demands on our time? We can start by using our senses and looking for the beauty around us, in the environment and in others. Smell the air, taste our food, be quiet and listen inwardly, as well as outwardly. Make eye contact, communicate, and don't get stuck in your own head. Open your eyes and embrace the world. Listen to your inner voice and trust your instincts. Remember what makes you feel alive and just do it. Nurture and respect yourself and you will be able to extend this beyond you, without leaving yourself depleted of energy. Start out with small steps and actions, like you did when you started learning Tai Chi. In the beginning you wanted to rush ahead and have it all right away because we are impatient and set our goals too high in our daily lives. Anything truly worth having takes time, patience and perseverance.

Just like in Tai Chi it is the principles in life that are important, not the distractions. If we are rooted in our stances we will be strong, stable and balanced. Stay rooted to this earth and don't allow ego, impatience or immaturity to uproot you. Stick to your principles and what is right for the nourishment of your mind, body and soul. Respond appropriately to what is thrown at you, for the good of you, as a person that matters in this world - for you as an individual that makes up a family, a community, a population. When you are happy and balanced those around you are positively affected.

Let's try to extend the sensitivity we develop in Tai Chi to our daily lives, our interactions with others and with the planet which supports us. Tai Chi is a balance of yin and yang, as is life. In this way, Instinct may be the counter balance of Extinct.