

By Thomas Downing (July 18, 2010)

Observation, Application, Internalization

Anyone can pass on assumptions and facts. What I seek in a good teacher is one who imparts knowledge, enhances understanding, and guides learning.

Kin always says “I can show you but I can’t do it for you”. This implies that the student must ‘do’ the Work. One can learn the form but within the Tai Chi Work there is an immeasurable sense of MORE that can be applied within the movements. The principle can be found in Observation, Application, and Internalization.

The keys to observation are watching and listening.

I watch what the teacher does. Sometimes as Kin is doing the form I make a slight pause to see if my body is correlated to what his is doing. When he makes adjustments to one student, I observe myself to see if my form needs the same adjustment and I make the correction. When he moves me in a certain way, I make the mental correction for my next movement.

I listen to what he says. The clearness of the instruction allows me to hear what the body must do. The repetition of certain principles points to those areas that are important. Those must be incorporated and applied.

Application means putting into use.

I take what is shown and do it. Suspend the head as an instruction means nothing until I actually sense the head being held by a string above me. That sense is developed by relaxing the neck and shoulders with the feel of the spine being aligned within. Relaxing the body means nothing until I actually feel where my shoulders have tensed up or my buttocks have clenched. Once I let that tension go, the relaxation allows me more control of my body during the form. Sinking my breath into the Dantian means nothing until I actually use my mind to direct the inhalation to that Point. It has to be a possibility before it becomes a confirmation. It then leads to internalizing the teaching.

The teacher cannot step inside and move us. Even if that were possible we would then be merely puppets. We must now internalize what we have learned and make

it our own. We use the form and the meditation as stepping stones to work with our own internal teacher. The work then begins to formulate the form from within. Our own breathing sets a rhythm for the Push or the Roll-Back. The Dantian dictates where the chi is directed. The mind corrects and adjusts the form and the cycle repeats itself.

An example:

Observation – Kin has used a particular analogy often. When placing the non-weighted foot down in certain parts of the form, he has suggested lightly touching it to the ground as if placing it down on the back of an ant. The implication is that the foot must have no weight and a sensitivity to feel the gap between it and the ground. As I have watched him it is almost like a ballet step.

Application – To do this correctly I have to reassert the grounding of the weighted leg, the pivot of the hips, the suspension of the head, the balance of the arms, and the sinking into the Dantian. **AND RELAX!!!**

Internalization – The mind sinks to the Dantian and I become aware of the gap between the earth and my toe. Figuratively, the ant is Atlas holding the world upon his back. The chi from me presses down and the chi from the earth pushes up and I begin to sense the circuit almost like an oval through me to the ground between my legs. One time I even felt a spark of static electricity between those solitary points.

Alas, I was not always able to feel that but the joy was that I understood and now was able to move the teaching within.