

TEACHING, A NEW WAY OF LEARNING

by Lucy Baker

I would not have understood the depth of Yi Ren Qigong practice without my teaching experiences. My teaching of Yi Ren Qigong has been divided into two time periods. The first period was for about a year, from the Fall of 2000 to the Fall of 2001. In the beginning of my teaching, I always looked forward to teaching. I enjoyed the teaching process. I liked being in class. I really enjoyed the students. I felt energized and content after each class. I did the refreshing exercise after class. I wanted to believe that I had finally found a talent to share with the world, as this was a practice dedicated to increasing personal health and healing.

But during that year, every morning, getting up was a struggle. No amount of sleep could dispel the fatigue and bone deep weariness I felt. I was used up. I even stopped participating in Dr. Sun's classes. I didn't know what was wrong. I don't know why I didn't ask for an evaluation from Dr. Sun. I asked to suspend my teaching.

There were two pearls of great value in all of this. I overcame what might be called performance anxiety. At the beginning of each class, as the overly self critical comments would start to thread their way into my consciousness, I found my self breathing deeper and sinking into my feet. I could be calm, focused. I could handle whatever might come up in class. This was a precious gift to me as I had always considered myself to be painfully shy.

The other insight was that the teaching of Qigong was not merely that of being a good technician. You were not a teacher simply because you had memorized the physical progress of the exercises. You were not a teacher because you had been a good student. Being articulate, organized and knowledgeable greatly facilitate the task of teaching.

The teaching of Qigong is much more personal. You teach not only with your intellect and your energy, but also with the entity of you physical body. I would like to give an example. Often in class we do exercises with another person. The purpose is to help activate the other person's energy center. If we were working on the kidney area, one student would stand to the left of

the person receiving assistance. The person who was helping would hold their right hand several inches from the other person's kidney area; the left hand would be several inches in front of the abdominal area, palm down. The "helping" student, in fact, was not sending energy to the other student. Instead, they were concentrating on their own kidney area, feeling and expanding their own awareness. To me, this seemed to be a property of resonance. By expanding and intensifying my center, it allowed the other person to be more aware of their corresponding center. Or perhaps, by increasing my awareness, it allowed the person's own energy to be amplified and reflected back to them.

It is one thing to use your body in a one to one basis. It is quite something else to do so with an entire class.

In my mind I had let Dr. Sun down. I regretted that. For the next two years or so, I didn't go to class and my own practice slipped. It seemed as though I would never recover. If I wasn't working, I was lying down or sleeping.

Sometime in 2004, I had a conversation with a dear friend who had been taking classes with Dr. Sun for several years. She told me that she had started taking classes on the Eastside and really enjoyed the energy of that group. She had called to invite me to go with her to class. Her description of the upcoming class especially piqued my interest. On the strength of my friend's urging, I decided to attend, as much to spend the hourly commute with her as to renew my Qigong practice. My renewal progressed as I continued with classes.

In the spring of 2005, Dr. Sun organized a formal teachers' training program for the Institute. When he had formed the non-profit organization, it had a three-fold purpose—to teach the public, to train teachers and to conduct research on the healing effectiveness of Qigong. In the first eight years most of Dr. Sun's efforts had been poured into teaching. Now it was time to develop potential teachers. I was invited to join the class.

Part of Dr. Sun's teaching in the public classes is about the history and culture of Qigong. I think part of the reason is to demonstrate the potential to which we can aspire. He often talked about how the personal energy of an advanced practitioner has a spiral pattern. That this was the "secret" to redirecting unwanted energy, ideas and events. It all sounded somewhat metaphysical and unattainable. Even though Dr. Sun had broken with

traditional teaching methods, he still used traditional language to describe the process. The message was cultivate the mind, cultivate the body.

In the introductory teachers' class, Dr. Sun explained how to use the Yin/Yang principle for teaching the Level I class, the Microcosmic Circulation, and related exercises. As I worked with this new information, I experienced how for the teacher, this allows a shield of protection from the scattered and erratic energy of the new students who had very low energy levels and had accumulated stresses. Additionally, it seems to ground the Universal energy for the class. It is the most simple of methods--employ the opposite. It is a most elegant and effective principle that is hidden by being in plain sight. It would take practice to execute but the seeming unattainable was in reach. It was a technique that could be learned, not something that had to be inherited or bestowed. This was the beginning of my return to teaching, learning how to balance and harmonize with the energies of the students and to guide and support the energy field of the class.

I began to incorporate the principle in my personal practice. I volunteered to assist classes. It wasn't that I was aware of any specific change in my energy flow or direction. In some ways, it felt that I was strangely isolated, while being totally involved with the class. There was still total awareness of my energy and the separate energy of the class. I realized that the energy flow around me was different from before; the energy flow pattern was spiral. I did the refreshing exercise after class; this time there was no fatigue, no bottomless pit. I experienced that teaching Yi Ren Qigong is not only teaching gentle physical movement and the relaxation of mind and the body, but also directly working with the student's healing process. Every Yi Ren Qigong class is a group healing session.

As I continued this practice, I began to notice differences. Over a period of a few weeks, while working with a specific exercise, a change in breathing would spontaneously appear. For some time, I wasn't aware of the change. At some point there was a change in my mental awareness, as if a deeper level of awareness was activated. This deeper me, was watching and commenting on the physical me, and I could hear that voice. I told Dr. Sun about the breathing variation. I don't know if Dr. Sun had previously taught this method in class (and I had forgotten about it) or that I had just tapped into it in a deeply relaxed state and this was new information I had received. In a few weeks, Dr. Sun was incorporating this method with many of the exercises.

This deeper level of awareness showed up in other ways. One evening while doing dishes, I overheard my voice commenting about the African violet that was blooming in the kitchen window. It had been several years since it had last bloomed, and now was coming to an end of its blossoms. I heard the thought that the plant was so lovely, the delicate flowers so precious. This deeper part of me hoped that it wouldn't take the plant another two or three years to bloom again. In the next few days I had to trim the last of the withered flowers. I forgot about the conversation.

A week later the plant had two new flower stems. By the end of that week, there were three. I relayed the story to Dr. Sun and the class I was assisting in. Dr. Sun had often spoken of how we can influence the physical world around us. He said this was an example of that affect. The plant had responded to my deep gratitude by producing another set of flowers.

When this deeper awareness is activated it seemed at though I am listening in on someone else's thoughts. There is something very familial about the voice, as though it belongs to an older sister or an aunt. At the instant I realize that I am hearing the conversation, it starts to fade out. I need to learn how to keep a soft mental focus so that my waking state is less obtrusive and the voice continues to comment.

While teaching a Level II review class, I had been concerned with how to help the students be more grounded and feel more strongly the energy and meridian flow of the Organ exercises. In a short conversation, Dr. Sun had explained how to use the Five Element theory with the Level II classes, but I had not developed that ability. While mulling over this problem, the voice had been activated and was making a suggestion. I am doing some research that will allow me to implement this advice.

There can be a great seduction in being a teacher, especially of something as intimate a process as transformation, which is at the core of Yi Ren Qigong. In class, the concentrated focus of the students on you makes you feel exhilarated. This has been immediately balanced for me by conversations with the new students. Often they develop strong feelings of the Qi in the first lesson. Over the eight-week course, their insights and observations are very profound. I am in awe of how rapidly they advance in their practice. It is humbling to think that I will be their guide. I am grateful in knowing that the practice is the true teacher.

Over the years, Dr. Sun has modified the techniques and order of the exercises to make them as accessible as possible to a new practitioner. There is a deliberate progression to the program so that the energy centers are slowly opened and developed in a methodical manner. This allows the student to experience the Qi in a non-threatening yet direct application of the teaching.

In the past year and a half, Dr. Sun has added a new element to his teaching. He is seeing us as having the potential of surpassing our own expectations as a practitioner. He truly believes and expects that we can depend on our inner guidance and practice to investigate what he doesn't teach us. He is preparing us to answer our own puzzles. He wants us to explore but also test and validate what we experience to discipline our own Bio-Energy-Information System and to hone our skills that help us to use our internal guidance and intelligence precisely and appropriately.

Latin died as a spoken language because it was felt that it must be kept "pure and unadulterated." The Qigong that we are taught has its' roots in 5000 years of experience and evolution. In truth, I teach for me, to teach me. I have taken to heart the old admonition, "If you really want to learn something, teach it." I will share everything I learn.