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Insights



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Joseph Gates

The Powerful Energy of Tai Ji

Joseph Gates started his career as a counselor and physical educator, and now dedicates his life to shifting people's minds to accept and experience the mental, energetic, and soulful sides of themselves through Tai Ji.

I: I'm so glad to have you here. I just wanted to ask you, how did you get involved in the great work you're doing now? Tell us about your history.

JG: I was an athlete and a good performer but I had injuries, so I felt like something was missing until I started looking at alternatives to healing the injuries such as massage, deep tissue therapy, etc. My body adjusted; I had a better kinesthetic awareness not only physically, but mentally, emotionally, and spiritually—all of those things we talk about.

I discovered that integration of this in a movement form such as Tai Ji, is where we use the chi energy that we all have to connect. It works, and it's free-flowing. The more you practice, the more you internalize, and the more things connect for you. A premise would be energy follows thought. Positive thoughts generate positive awareness; we want to avoid negativity, and we all know the way to negativity. We want to release that from our bodies and breathe again. That's what it's all about.

I: That is so powerful. How did you actually discover Tai Ji? I know you said you went through some challenges in your own life, and Tai Ji helped you enormously.

JG: I started with the traditional form at a club, and that's great. It's great when you've got the group together and you're really disciplined, but it was too restrictive a form for me. I'm not knocking all those lovely people you see in the parks doing their form, because they've already got the essence of what the chi energy is, and all the Qigong masters, they stand, preferably by a tree, and they get the energy of the tree. That's a different mindset.

Because I was an athlete, I needed movement, and the Tai Ji form that I found was at Omega Institute, with Chungliang Al Huang. I've never met anyone as talented in all aspects of teaching his philosophy, so of course I started going to all of his workshops. It's helped to make Tai Ji so much a part of me that I want to share it. I lucked into a group of people who asked, "What's Tai Ji?" Now they're all doing it; it's great.

I: It is wonderful to share something that has impacted you. I had the extraordinary experience to study with you this morning and experience this form of Tai Ji. You seem to be a real master at being able to transition people that are in a highly mental place to the more spiritual, energetic aspect of Tai Ji. How do you think you're able to translate that in a way that they are able to understand it? I watched that happening, and it was really quite beautiful.

Joseph Gates continued . . .

JG: No ego. I'm just there for the other person. As a counselor, all I wanted to do was empower people—young people. My philosophy would be, "You are your brother's keeper." All those good principles that we have in all religions are all there. This is not a religious base, but it's definitely an empowering of people.

When I look at people, because of my visual awareness and because I'm a visual learner, I see a body and I see crooks or tensions, and I say, "Have a breath." People do not breathe. When they start breathing, they open up and become a flower. Some people have trouble aspiring to be a flower, but when you were a child, it was spontaneous openness.

I: It's really focusing on the breath—a commonality we all have to identify with—it brings into focus all of the aspects of not only Tai Ji, but of life.

JG: Yes. When you think of metaphor, which is the style of the founder, Chungliang Al Huang, that's what is all; it's organic metaphor. You are the sky, opening up to it. You are the earth. You are the conduit. You are the tree. You are the essence of it.

It goes to another level that we can't intellectualize, and that's what we have to do. I learned that a long time ago. Get out of your head and into your heart, and come through your heart; the yin and yang. It's total continuous movement, and there's always a flower.

I: I think it's so interesting, what you said earlier about children who come by this so naturally, because they automatically accept those things of wonder that can't be explained. They don't look for answers, but as we grow, we lose that.

JG: Answers, judgments—that's the other thing—there are no judgments. When I look at somebody, I don't make a judgment. I look at their body form. All I see is a way that they can breathe into it and open it up.

There's such great stuff happening today, and I've read some great books such as, *Evolve Your Brain* by Dr. Joe Dispenza; his is a great story. They're doing such wondrous stuff around having a heart center—a heart that thinks.

It's all out there now. We're in a great transition today. We're able to move into another dimension, and that's all out there. None of this is Joseph Gates. They are all things that are available to bring into your consciousness, formulate it, and then give it back. I believe that. I believe that you can heal yourself. My esoteric background says that we are responsible for everything that happens to us.

I: That is so beautiful. You refer back to living in a fairly physically-based world as a physical education teacher and an athlete, when you think about that being somewhat of a mental world, it must be wonderful for you now. We're living in a

world where the idea that total balance and acceptance of all of the other aspects of who we are is coming to the forefront; there's more acceptance of the concept.

JG: Yes, it's tricky. It's a mindset. I was talking to a gentleman that came to the class; last time he observed but that day he was there. He's a martial artist, so he knows the physical, "yang" side of the form and he competes, so we talked a little bit. I was saying now he can bring in the, "yin" side. Yin is the soft, the feminine, and yang is the masculine. It's such a wonderful concept that we're never stuck. We're always moving one to the other. It's the flow, and that's what the Tai Ji form that I enjoy permits you to do; to do it at your level and grow with it.

I: Joseph, before you discovered Tai Ji, and for our readers, I was just wondering, is there anything that they could do to help with this balance and bringing in this energy if they don't have access to a master like you.

JG: Thank you. I don't consider myself a master. I just enjoy what I'm doing. Now that I'm conducting the formal classes to help with all these beautiful young people—they don't appear young, but they definitely are in heart—I just went on Chungliang's site, Living Tao Foundation. We're so lucky today, because we're all connected technologically. I pulled out some of his stuff. His form, his five elements, are right there. If that's where it takes you, just check out the telephone book; they're all over. He's famous internationally. He teaches classes, and his students are all over the world. You never know where they are—probably right in your city or right in your town. It's Tai Ji.

Let me say this, everybody that practices Tai Ji has their own style and technique. You have to keep searching until you find what catches you. Go with what your heart and how your own energy directs you—how it captures you—because it's all about you. I know how tough that is for someone to even say, "Me? Me? Little me?"

We need to embrace tiger return to mountain—a motif that is empowering. You *become* the tiger and *are* the mountain; what an opportunity for psychological growth. That's what we want. We have to accept the fact that we can't take ownership of that. We can share it, and if we share it freely—and I know monetarily sometimes—but if we share it from our heart, then we'll connect.

When I was a counselor and only cared about the young people or whoever the client was, I had no agenda other than to embrace and empower them. Whatever they said, we worked with. Now sometimes, there's a decision that has to be made if it's health-related or dangerous, but other than that it's just being there, offering whatever you can offer in service. I don't like that word, 'service,' by the way, but I don't know what else to say.

I: It's obvious you've really found your sense of purpose and area of contribution.

Joseph Gates continued . . .

JG: It's coming. It's always coming, and it's always growing, isn't it?

I had a wakeup call a year ago. I had a stroke, as I had refused to take blood pressure medicine. Now three little pills provide me with normal pressure. I know that the Tai Ji saved me from any disabilities. In ten days I was fine. What a wake up call; here I am!

I: Combining the very best of Western and Eastern medicine and philosophy in order to heal yourself and to heal others.

JG: Just a little. What I would say is that I'm a conduit giving others opportunities to change their lives.

I: Yes; creating that space for them to make it happen.

JG: There you are. Exactly; that's it right there. That's all.

I: That's very beautiful. Tell me, what do you hope for others? By creating this space, what do you hope for them?

JG: That they take charge of their life and won't let others take charge of it for them. I hope that they won't take in the negativity that surrounds them from people who are harsh—from people who are cruel with words. I hope that they will find it all within themselves and protect themselves from all; that they'll empower themselves.

If there's anything, that's what I love to see—and being an observer, I see all the other stuff that happens to people. Sometimes you want to go over there and protect them, and you can't, because everyone is in charge of their own life and their own being.

I used to say, back in high school and in some of the tragedies that I've witnessed, that we don't teach life skills to little people to protect them. They're very vulnerable to whatever situation they're in, and they have to grow with that. I know that's part of it; however, if we can do anything for them, from my point of view, it would be to emphasize that you understand. Sometimes it doesn't hurt to get down on your knees in front of little people so that you may see the world through their eyes. We want so much to be up here looking down.

Somehow we've got to get out of that mindset that, "Hey, this is the way it is," and transform into accepting the fact that we can discover ways that work for everyone. We have to encourage them to come forth, to embrace the tiger, and return to the mountain. That's why I love that—you embrace your tiger, and you return to your mountain, and that's an ancient statement. That's what it's all

about—empowering yourself.

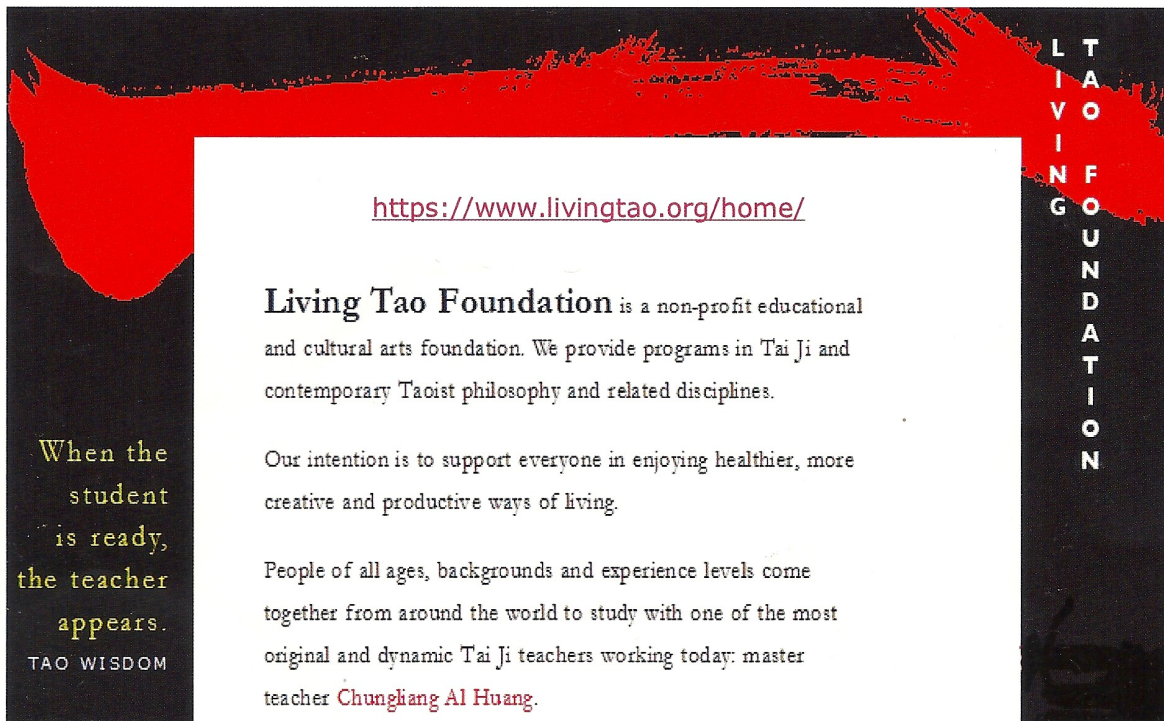
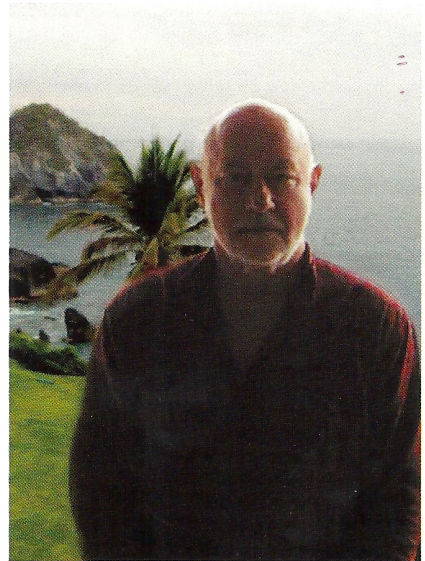
I: Tell me, what inspires you, Joseph? Obviously, you have this wonderful space that you create that definitely inspires me and inspires others. What inspires you?

JG: Life. I love to simply experience the day-to-day interactions and to learn more about my dynamic, my negative parts. I love to deal with my dark side, if you want, and to interact with it and to let it go. This is a great journey I've been having, and at seventy-three, I'm just starting it. It's just been interesting.

I: A journey of discovery and curiosity.

JG: And integration. Integrating all aspects of being—all of it—and recognizing our vulnerability physically, simultaneously with our spiritual strength. I would have to recognize the Tao aspect. I use those words because they don't have labels on them. Tao is Asian, so it's not a label—it's an opportunity.

I love the energy of the Universe and the connection. I want to be connected to the all, to the Tao, to grow with all, and that's what I'm doing. I always go back to



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Living Tao Foundation is a non-profit educational and cultural arts foundation. We provide programs in Tai Ji and contemporary Taoist philosophy and related disciplines.

Our intention is to support everyone in enjoying healthier, more creative and productive ways of living.

People of all ages, backgrounds and experience levels come together from around the world to study with one of the most original and dynamic Tai Ji teachers working today: master teacher **Chunghiang Al Huang**.

When the student is ready, the teacher appears.
TAO WISDOM

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