

in the
Summer Courtyard

With the return of warmer weather and light, gentle breezes often bring whispered voices... come out, come out and visit. It's the courtyard calling. Gentle. Insistent. Seductive. Let's play.

The calling is easier to hear in the quiet of dawn - sun just beginning to rise above the horizon. Playing tai chi to the accompaniment of this ascendant star feels magical bordering on miraculous, possibly heavenly. Stepping, circling, dancing around the bay laurel trees, slow even movements somehow match the internal rhythm of sunrise, tree, earth as we each find our way, separately and together, into the beginning of this day. Just this day, this moment, this tree, this breath, this indescribable conspiracy of light and movement and sky and water and feet planted in the earth. Hmmmm....



This morning there's another player, where typically it's a solo dance. Slanting sunrays provide a tai chi partner, shadow gracefully flowing across gravel, along dirt, even up the gallery wall. Amazingly fluid across uneven surfaces, different planes. And looking so familiar! A mirror doesn't come close to this.

Pause. Tai chi movement complete, breathing focuses on the center, returning to the core. Bubbling, gurgling fountain water flow becomes a simple musical structure on which the courtyard arranges itself. Insects flying intricate patterns in midair. Fish swimming graceful arcs in the pond. Birds swoop through, calling out their morning greetings, in search of food or just a sunny perch. The water music a consistent backdrop to an entire orchestra of morning sounds: chirping, traffic, buzzing, airplane, dragon-tiger breathing, leafblower. Monkey giggles irrepressibly in delight with the whole symphony of summer sounds.



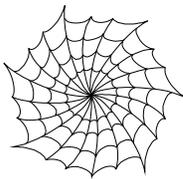
Standing tai chi gives way to tao yin, body on the ground. Not just the feet when standing, or the butt when sitting. The whole backside; the whole frontside. Arms and legs in full contact with earth. Chest breathing up against the ground. Being held, embraced. With such contact, postures spontaneously flow: bamboo swinging in the wind; river flows into the valley; dragon stretches tail. Ahhh... it is so good to be on the ground, feeling the earth energy spiraling up and through extended dragon claws - first right, then left, then again. Each inhale returns to center. Each exhale extending, spiraling, stretching. Dragons have it good in the morning courtyard.

Pause. Resting. Absorbing that chi of the completed movement, which includes the context, the environment: three protective cedars to west; three tall sentry firs to south; ivy masses enveloping brick wall to north; solid, old house to east; bay laurel trees with pond at center.

Winged dancers flow through: starlings, moths, sparrows, butterflies, bluejays, mosquitoes, hummingbirds, gnats and... crows. There is a crow's nest toward the top of a tall fir. It's a busy place at the beginning of summer. Lots of coming and going, swooping and curving, calling out loudly – CAW! Bring more food back! One day a small hawk brought its morning meal to a nearby tree branch. Intense raptor eyes following this funny creature playing at monkey, dragon and bamboo. Humans! Usually good for a laugh or two.



Monkey on his back, now resting with knees in air, the perspective shifts; sky between the branches. It becomes obvious how the courtyard extends upward as well.



Bay laurel limbs branch out gracefully in an overhead canopy. Sunlight glints off spiderwebs strung trunk to branch, their shape a reminder of the ba gua symbol of the eight forces of nature. Spiders naturally know this, designing, building, creating based on this fundamental pattern. Tree branches reach skyward, spreading green in all directions. Sun cresting house roofline, light and warmth begin replacing cool and shadow. At treetop, light joyously bounces around as neon iridescent green. In shade below, leaves are much deeper, darker, richer green. As the sun comes and goes, clouds a choreographed dance, the colors shift in a wondrous display of the process of change - transformation. So intricate and yet so amazingly simple. Always happening, always available, there for the

seeing - in the morning summer courtyard.

Between and beyond the branches and green is blue, with occasional cotton white clouds slowly passing through. Sometimes the blue is crystalline, so vibrant and deep that it seems without end. Endless blue. Forever blue. Spine merging with ground joins deep roots into earth, eyes and spirit follow endless blue sky wherever it may lead. Sky as a blanket, earth a pillow. This being human...ahhh!

Another shape shift, this time to frog and the perspective shifts to the ground. Close-up, common gravel provides a mosaic of intricate patterns and colors that could be explored all day. Ants intently moving, search for food, possibly truth - maybe enlightenment.

Hmmm... probably food. Forehead resting on cool gravel. A moment between inhale and exhale while the universe expands by another breath. The coolness of the ground, earth rises up as the warmth of the sun, sky flows down. The contrast, interchange, mingling - the thermodynamics of the macrocosm, the universe, playing out in this simple, physical body. Is it time to breathe? Is there a need? It happens and with a slow inhale frog raises its head, spine arching toward the sky. Appreciation for the cool earth at its belly, gratitude for the warm sky above. Peacefully at home here, whole and at one with the morning summer courtyard.



Appreciation and Gratitude: to Martha and Michael for providing this opportunity to share their courtyard; to the gambusia fish for their love of eating mosquito larva in the

pond; and to each and every one of you for the ongoing support that allows me such freedom in the courtyard... and to write about it. **Thank you!**

© *Fall, 2010 Kyle Cline*