



Tai Chi, Poetry and Meditation

White Crane Spreads Wings

About the retreat

A retreat opening to the wisdom of the body, integrating our heart and head, and expanding our horizons through language. Each move in Taiji is a metaphor. The structured forms provide an inspiring springboard for the creation of rhythmic patterns with words. Taiji, poetry and meditation have much in common: form, structure, sensitivity and a striving towards essence.

This week we will trace our intimate relation to the dance of the elements: Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Space and Consciousness – acknowledging the flow of impermanence. Whatever arises from our practice we will use to play with the experience of our interconnectedness, write about it, from it, and share our stories. The combination of reflective and creative writing, meditation and Buddhist teachings will give the opportunity to refresh ourselves, re-evaluate and re-commit to our truest values and to celebrate life in all its wonder and complexity. Whatever the weather, some activities will happen outside, allowing us to feel our bodies interconnected with nature. There will be spells of writing based on close observation of plants, trees, birds, hills, water and whatever moves through us.

Is there anything special I need to bring?

Find a handful of earth from somewhere near your home and write about *your earth*. We'll begin by sharing our stories – and our offerings of earth.

Please also pack:

- A notebook for journalling
- Writing/drawing materials
- Binoculars and/or a botanical hand lens, if you have them
- Poems, stories & songs you might like to share
- Loose comfortable clothes for movement and tai-chi
- Warm outdoor clothes and sturdy footwear
- An openness to being present, inside and out

What can you expect from the programme?

A space for solitude and sharing. Ideal conditions for paying careful attention. A chance to learn and connect and grow. To allow for deeper reflection and time for writing, there will be periods of silence overnight and for shorter spells after each meditation (3 or 4 each day), leading to one full day of silence.

Please take some time to reflect on the extract from U.S. poet Gary Snyder's essay *Language Goes Both Ways* on the next page of this letter.

About the retreat team

Larry Butler Taiji teacher, writer, poet, editor, convenor for Lapidus Scotland (creative words for health & well-being). www.playspacepublications.com

Linda France Poet, tutor, mentor and editor – lately with a particular focus on ecology. www.lindafrance.co.uk

Ratnadevi is a mindfulness teacher, trainer, transformational coach and writer. She has a PhD in Creative Arts. www.livingmindfulness.net

Ordinary Good Writing is like a garden that is producing exactly what you want, by virtue of lots of weeding and cultivating. What you get is what you plant, like a row of beans. But really good writing is both inside and outside the garden fence. It can be a few beans, but also some wild poppies, vetches, mariposa lilies, ceanothus, and some juncos and yellow jackets thrown in. It is more diverse, more interesting, more unpredictable, and engages with a much broader, deeper kind of intelligence. Its connection to the wildness of language and imagination helps give it power.

This is what Thoreau meant by the term ‘Tawny Grammar’, as he wrote (in the essay *Walking*) of ‘this vast, savage, howling mother of ours, Nature, lying all around, with such beauty, and such affection for her children, as the leopard; and yet we are so early weaned from her breast to society... The Spaniards have a good term to express this wild and dusky knowledge, *Grammatica parda*, tawny grammar, a kind of mother-wit derived from that same leopard to which I have referred.’ The grammar not only of language, but of culture and civilization itself, comes from this vast mother of ours, nature. ‘Savage, howling’ is another way of describing ‘graceful dancer’ and ‘fine writer’.

The twelfth century Zen Buddhist philosopher Dogen put it this way: *To advance your own experience into the world of phenomena is delusion. When the world of phenomena comes forth and experiences itself, it is enlightenment.* To see a wren in a bush, call it ‘wren’, and go on walking is to have (self-importantly) seen nothing. To see a bird and stop, watch, feel, forget yourself for a moment, be in the bushy shadows, maybe then feel ‘wren’ – that is to have joined in a larger moment with the world.

In the same way, when we are in the act of playful writing, the mind’s eye is roaming, seeing sights and scenes, reliving events, hearing and dreaming at the same time. The mind may be reliving a past moment entirely in this moment, so that it is hard to say if the mind is in the past or in some other present. We move mentally as in a great landscape, and return from it with a few bones, nuts, or drupes, which we keep as language. We write to deeply heard but distant rhythms, out of a fruitful darkness, out of a moment without judgement or object. Language is a part of our body and woven into the seeing, feeling, touching, and dreaming of the whole mind as much as it comes from some localized ‘language center’.

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Surrounded by Wild Turkeys

Little calls as they pass
through dry forbs and grasses
Under blue oak and gray digger pine
In the warm afternoon of the forest-fire haze;

Twenty or more, long-legged birds
all alike.

So are we, In our soft calling,
passing on through.

Our young, which trail after,

Look just like us.

4.IX.87, for the teachings of the wild turkey flock

Gary Snyder