

Angels & Swords

The Tao of David Fiske

The sun was on its way down in a clear sky as I drove to the end of Sills Bay Rd. The heat of the day was rising and an evening freshness was settling in as I approached the open gate of David Fiske's driveway. I was here to interview him and knew only that he had studied with Marahishi Mahesh Yogi, taught various forms of Tai Chi-like movement and was some kind of spiritual teacher. I parked and approached the charming blueberry coloured house. There was no one in sight so I hollered out. "David?" Two large dogs lumbered out and approached lazily, followed by David swinging through the screen door. "Hello, nice to see you."

He had an unmistakable South African accent and a pleasant smile to his eyes. "This is Sydney", he pointed to a bushy grey shepherd-malamute cross, sniffing at my knees "and this is McGregor", a border collie who seemed shy or just uninterested in me. "I'll be a minute," he said smiling, "I'm with the electrician."

I took the opportunity to wander on the property. I was drawn to a bed of brilliant Evening Primrose and Sweet Williams and to the spectacular view just beyond. There below was a shimmering Eel Bay on Sydenham Lake. I stood there absorbing the sheer beauty when David came up beside me.

"Marvellous view you have David."

"Yes, I know. I teach classes and, often, before I begin, I stand facing the bay with my arms extended, close my eyes (He took the pose and stood silently for a long moment.) until I forget where I am, who I am..... When I open them again, I'm stoked!" I laughed. He didn't seem to mind and joined in.

We walked over to the extensive vegetable garden, a plot of an acre at least.

"That's one hell of a garden David. It must play a big role in your life."

"Well yes, I consider gardening a subversive activity."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, when you garden, you opt out of consumerism, cut out the middleman and then of course there's the organic thing."

I nodded, "you cut out the petrochemical companies."

"Right."

As we strolled among the impressive assortment of plants, David handed me tastes of lovage, chocolate mint, orange mint and the most delicious, sweetest strawberry I'd ever tasted.

"You must come in August and taste my cherry tomatoes," he offered. "You won't be able to stop eating them."

"Do you believe in Angels?" was the surprising next words from his mouth.

"Not the heavenly winged variety, no I don't."

"Well you might by the time I'm finished with you."

“How about apostles?” he asked, turning to me with raised eyebrows. He pointed to the large black plastic compost bin. “This is my apostle. I have twelve.” He continued to make his way between the lush menagerie of plants and I followed along behind, trying to keep pace with the unpredictable twists and turns in the conversation. We then went to the screened-in porch. I was keen to begin the interview. “I’ll make us a smoothie”, he announced. “Great, thanks.”

Before heading into the house, he leaned over my shoulder and pointed to the Ironwood trees framing the view of the bay. “You see those leaves? Watch them dancing in the breeze and you realize, it’s perfection.”

I had to admit the dance of light, shade and soft motion was indeed beautiful.

“You know what’s not perfect?” He called out from the kitchen.

“No, what?”

“Humans.”

Then a blender whirred.

M.A.- David, you studied in India with Marahishi Mahesh Yogi who became famous as the Beatles’ guru. Did you meet them?

D.F - No, they were in India the year before me. It’s always bothered me *laughing* that they have associated Marahishi with the Beatles, but anyways, I was pre Beatles. I beat them by six years. I met Marahishi in 62 in Austria.

M.A.- He was also the guru who popularized Transcendental Meditation during the 70’s. For many serious meditators TM was considered an abbreviated, and simplified introduction to meditation practice. Having studied for 14 years with MMY you surely must have delved deeper into his teaching. Can you tell me about that?

D.F.- Well I suppose I’ll respond with... When I did my pilgrimage to Amarnath in the Kashmir Himalayas, I was talking about TM with a pundit who was being very...putting it down, so I said to him, my first year, my kundalini rose from the bottom to the head. I said, have you had that happen yet? He said no. I said, “well think about TM then”. I said, “I see the light”. I don’t know if I was lucky or how these things happen, but from that point of view it worked for me, for sure.

M.A.- What was MMY like and can you tell me something about your time spent with him?

D.F.- I was really fortunate because in the time I met him he was very amenable. He was an awful lot of fun, very relaxed, giggling away and was sort of fond of me. I remember one night they were going for a moonlight drive. I was meditating. I was pretty dedicated and he said go and fetch David and then I went in the car with him. It was sort of nice. In fact the very first time I met him, he didn’t very easily touch people, but my father was dying and he’d been tipped off about it. He called me to see him and he put both his hands around

mine and he said. "How is your father?" and he was very solicitous. But he would make lots of funny jokes. I remember we were going some distance in a car with him and he said "ohm it's not far to the border". He said, "I could walk it." So Jemima said "ha it would take you more than an hour." He said "Jemima, do you want me to suffer defeat?" *laughing* That was a pun...*laughing* ..a lot of fun.

M.A.- What border was that?

D.F.- Denmark. Germany and Denmark. When I toured with him.

M.A.- Do you think the role of guru or teacher is a crucial one on the spiritual path?

D.F.- Maybe once in your life and then you've got to learn that you've got to become your own teacher. Too often you project everything you want in life on to someone and he becomes your guru and I think that is probably fundamentally a very unhealthy relationship. My experience is that no one can tell you what to do, you have to learn to tell yourself.

M.A.- During the nineties TM made the news in Canada when the Natural Law Party ran in the National elections. As one of their mandates they sought to implement Yogic flying as a means of creating national harmony.
What actually is Yogic Flying?

D.F.- Well, I know about it about as much as you probably because I parted ways with the TM movement in the late 70s. It's allegedly a way, a technique where you do samyama on something light like white cotton wool and try and make yourself lighter and you do some hopping.

M.A.- What do you mean by samyama?

D.F.- A meditation technique. You try and become one. I've never done it. I heard they hop around. That's why I say I was really lucky meeting Marahishi as early as I did when the movement was small. It has suffered all the pangs of any large organization.

M.A.- Is there a central focus to your teaching?

D.F.- Yes, my central focus is self knowledge. I have to backtrack from that. We start with the body so my focus at the beginning is the body and that's the first rung of the ladder to get to salvation. You get your body healthy, you have to integrate its energies. The body has within it, everything you need for enlightenment. I teach my students how to expand the energy, how to circulate the energy and within the body there are doors that you can enter and get to different levels of perception.

M.A.- I noticed that some of your techniques are Chinese. Where and from whom did you learn these?

D.F.- Just before I left South Africa, I started aikido which is a Japanese self defence martial art and I really liked the philosophy. When I came to Kingston there was a course in Tai Chi offered with a very similar philosophy to aikido so I started that and I met Master Moy Lin Shin who is a Taoist monk who lived in Toronto and I immersed myself quite deeply in Taoist internal alchemy

M.A.- Did you have any other teachers?

D.F.- I smile because where I'm at now, life is a teacher. You know what they say, if three people pass you, you're going to find at least one of them can teach you something, for sure.

M.A. Your classes seem to stress the body mind connection and achieving self knowledge through movement. Why have you chosen this approach to teaching?

D.F.- For a number of reasons, people who have embraced meditation and philosophy sometimes in fact, are not fully in their bodies, for a start. If you want to be here now, first you have to at least be present in your body and rather being forced to do that through illness, which makes you VERY present, you might as well become present through health and radiance, and also physical exercise is a wonderful way to turn the attention inside and you start to feel how the energy moves in your body. Through physical movement, you start to become aware how you can allow the energy to flow, direct it. It's in many ways a safer way than just trying to do it mentally.

M.A.- Can anyone benefit from these practices?

D.F.- Yep, Obviously you get occasionally a few failures. The people who find it the hardest are those people who can't remember one thing from one day to another and therefore Tai Chi has a hundred and eight moves and some people just struggle and can never learn the repetition.

M.A.- Can you explain the tangible results one can expect to achieve from these methods?

D.F.- First of all better health, better sleeping. Once you've got that going for you, we use a lot of meditation techniques and that gives one a perspective. Most people, well all of us, some of the time, lose totally all our perspective about our life. I call that getting caught up in our dramas. In order to have perspective you have to stand aside from your drama. I liken it to if you're in your bathtub and you can't find your soap, you splash around with your hands. That's being caught in your drama. The way to find the soap and the easiest

way is to stand up, which is to raise your perspective and you see it. So meditation techniques are another way to gain another perspective on your own situation.

M.A.- Was there a particular event or moment in your life that inspired you?

D.F- Well my kundalini experience, yes, that was sure because it came out of the blue, I didn't know much about it, I thought I had... every single cell of my body became satiated with satisfaction and the very first course I was on with Marahishi was like the beginning of a love affair with what I call the Other. And like all love affairs you start to get courted because in a sense I think the "Other" courts you too. As much as you're seeking It, It is seeking to seduce you. The beginning of these things, the wonderful passion and romance and excitement and something totally new, yeah that inspired me.

M.A.- Your ad has the words powerful, peaceful vital. Can you elaborate?

D.F.- Yes, a lot of people jump on the word power and it worries them, they see power as something that is abusive and manipulative and then I ask them, can you give me any good reason for the value of weakness and they get a little stunned? There is nothing I can see that is valuable in weakness. Power, for any change in your life you require power, so I put the word power because what I try and teach is how to transform energy into power and they are not the same thing. I've known many people who are highly energetic and just as well because they are so incredibly inefficient. They need twice as much energy as anyone else.. *laughing* to accomplish half as much. So the power comes from knowing your own power, knowing your place in life, not feeling frustrated and comes also from being peaceful. Peace comes into that and to being vital.

M.A. -The curriculum in your classes encompasses so much, so many different techniques, Indian, Chinese, Tibetan and North American, a virtual spiritual smorgasbord. How does one even know where to start?

D.F- Well of course that's the nice thing being the teacher, the students start where I put them *laughing*.. which makes it easier for me. It seems like a lot, but it has one theme, which is self knowledge, gaining awareness of the energy in your body, how to enhance that energy and how to change it into power and how to use that powerful focus to turn it inside and discover who you really are. If you have a theme like that then all these things aren't disparate. It's like people who sometimes collect techniques like matchboxes and therefore they never get to the kernel of any of them, having got to the kernel, most of my teaching focuses on this one simple thing, how to know yourself.

M.A. - There's an allegorical saying in India that if one wishes to dig a hole, then it is not wise to continually change the location, that if the goal is to dig deep, one should remain

digging in the same place. So by continuously changing techniques, isn't one moving the focus?

D.F. - No, if the techniques all have the same focus, it's doing the same thing from different ways. In my experience with a lot of people, is that you vary the technique and you've got their interest again and I use that interest for them to delve deeper into themselves because that is the common denominator in all these things, it's the same person doing different things and therefore you want to find out who is that same person.

M.A.- There is also a saying that it can be dangerous to try riding more than one horse, that practicing more than one technique at a time can cause conflict and be harmful. Do you think this is true?

D.F.- In theory, possibly. I find all the techniques I teach are very complementary and they're things I do myself and I have come to no harm. And in many ways, sometimes, you know it's like looking at anything from a different view, a different perspective, you can see different things. When I pick peas I can go down a row and I think I've been very thorough. When I come back I'm amazed at how many different peas I see that I haven't picked so some times from a different angle, you see a different perspective and what I try and teach in my classes, is that what works for you in the class, that's what you practice at home.

M.A.-You have an extensive and beautiful garden. Can you explain what role gardening plays in your life?

D.F.- Well, it fulfills in many ways one of the philosophies I have and that is: humans have lost contact with the soil, our bodies were formed by the earth so when I first started my garden it was a way of trying to redeem myself by putting my fingers in the soil. Secondly, the way food is produced commercially, who knows what you've got into the food, so I can't control the rain, but I can control everything else that goes into that soil and I'm really glad that my children grew up eating the organic food I produce. Secondly, it complements Taoism, you realize that there is no such thing as perfection, there is no such thing as a balance that is static and constant. In Taoism you've got to find your balance through all the challenges of life and gardening is exactly the same. Some years one thing works, some years it doesn't. You learn to have a harmony with all the things that live, all the weeds and try to find your balance. What I'm trying to do in my garden, I told my children, is to create my heaven on earth, here in my few acres.

M.A.- Do you think gardening can be a form of spiritual practice like meditation?

D.F.- Yes, in that it teaches you. If I for instance, unfortunately pull out a plant rather than a weed, I apologize. I feel a great affinity with my plants. They're like my little children. When you pick peas you're on your knees which is like praying and what I tend to do when I pick and harvest is I feel gratitude for the bounty. It's an amazing feeling to know that at the end of a gardening season, not only have I filled three freezers and a root cellar, but, that one acre garden is the better off for my having been here, and that is, at the end of the year, the soil is richer and lot's of little creatures have benefited from that garden. In that sense it's spiritual.

M.A.- I understand you kept bees for many years. Do you think there are lessons to be learned from bees?

D.F.- I still keep bees. Yes I love walking around the garden and seeing my little bees pollinating. I regard them as my tenants and when I take off my honey at the end of the season, that's their rent they pay. They're extremely hard working. People have no idea that a teaspoon of honey, in a good year, has cost eight bees their lives and when you know that you appreciate these little creatures. People who eat honey have absolutely no idea the value bees do in terms of pollinating.

M.A.- I noticed you teach one form of movement using a sword. What is that?

D.F.- Well that was partly just for the fun of it. It's a Chinese broad sword. The advantage of using a sword in a move is that it allows you to utilize your waist to move your arms to turn the sword. It requires more consciousness of your waist and the way I teach it, when you lift the sword, I use that as a way of lifting the energy inside the body from the belly to the heart.

M.A.- Do you use any other weapons?

D.F.- No, just my voice.

M.A.- Don't weapons inherently imply violence?

D.F.- Probably, except all my students have wooden swords *laughing*. It's like a play thing. It's a martial art, amongst other things and people who sometimes stand askance at that, I say look, if you had an infection, you're going to take an antibiotic and kill absolutely millions of bacteria so don't tell me you're a pacifist.

M.A.- How do Falun Gong and Chi Kong differ?

D.F.- Falun Gong is a certain number of exercises that the founder has taken from Chi Kung exercises or discovered himself. Falun Gong also has a certain

cultish aspect to it. That's the group, but their intention is the same. It is hard to cultivate your own internal energy without discovering yourself.

M.A.- In 1999 China banned the practice of Falun Gong, affecting an estimated 70-100 million people in China. Jiang Zemin announced Falun Gong to be the "No. 1 enemy" of the Communist party. Mass arrests, beatings, and unlawful detentions of thousands of adherents were verified by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the U.S. State Department. Can you make any sense of this and explain why Falun Gong could be considered such a threat to the Chinese leadership?

D.F.- Well it's very curious. I suspect it was a threat because Li Hongzhi claimed to have 70 million followers, more than the communist party had. Secondly, the relationship he had with the followers, which is part of the cultish aspect, they did what he said and that when there were problems in China, the Falun Gong people were quite prepared to sacrifice themselves by their own protests. He also tells all his followers not to see any doctors and that probably would be quite a good reason for why the Chinese government wanted to crack down on them, but basically I think the Chinese government was scared of having such a force over which they had no control.

M.A.- There are so many methods, teachers, paths to self- knowledge, to spiritual and physical health being offered. How does one decide which is best for us?

D.F.- I don't know if one can, I mean I guess what happens is one has to hope there is a certain destiny in your life and the right thing comes along. I would suggest, you know, meet with a teacher, have they had genuine experience, are they just teaching book knowledge or are they teaching from some things they've experienced? It looks like I'm teaching a lot, but I'm passing on forty years of life experience.

M.A.- Recently there's been more than enough cause for stress in most people's lives. There's SARS, West Nile, Terrorism, turmoil in the Mideast, the poor economy and on and on. What can we do to avoid feeling stressed, depressed and pessimistic?

D.F.- I think first of all acquire a perspective on one's situation. You know when you're in your drama, that's all you can see, no matter how undramatic it is to others. If it's your drama, it's your drama. I have a theory that there's likely two layers in life, the one with all the things we happen to see happening around us, and the other is that silent layer that most people never touch. If you can touch that silent level which is the level of Being that gives you a perspective on the level of movement. As Marahishi would say it was like the depth of the ocean which is there ever present in all the bouncing of the waves, and the waves are the dramas.

M.A.- What did you put in this drink? It's delicious.

D.F.- There are berries from my garden, yogurt, flax seed ground up, almonds ground up, milk and chocolate mint.

M.A.- One more question - Do you believe in angels?

D.F.- I've seen an angel and I do believe in angels. It's wonderful to believe in something even if you don't know it. There are so many forces in life and people don't open themselves to the mystery of life. I was walking to my bees one day, pushing my wheelbarrow and from out of little pine trees that I planted many years ago, a light suddenly came, into my heart and I went "Aaahhh". And I said, "I love you too" and I thought to myself, those pine trees saw me going there and they thought, there is the guy that rushes around looking after everything, let's say hello to him. There are all sorts of forces in life and angels are one of them.

M.A.- Thanks David and thanks for the smoothie.

D.F.- Thanks Micky *laughing*.

The above interview was conducted by Micky Absil for Complete Health Magazine. An edited version article based on it was published in the Dec 2003 edition.

For information about classes with David Fiske see www.esotericarts.org or write fiskedavid@hotmail.com