



By Barry Jessurun

## Tai Chi and the Practice of Business

**Tai Chi** is an internal Chinese martial art that many people practice for health and wellness. It is a soft style of martial art that requires the muscles' complete relaxation to the greatest possible extent. Many practitioners use Tai Chi as a form of meditation in motion. Tai Chi has gained in popularity over the last 20 years, and its reputation for alleviating the effects of aging has become more well-known. Communities around the world (hospitals, clinics, community centers, and senior centers) are all hosting Tai Chi classes. As a result of this popularity, there are many reasons that people practice Tai Chi. Some practice Tai Chi primarily for deepening their martial arts in fighting, others for its aesthetic appeal, while many practice for achieving personal benefits, mental and physical.

Researchers have found that long-term Tai Chi practice has had favorable effects on the promotion of balance control, flexibility, and cardiovascular fitness. Other studies have shown that it reduces pain, stress, and anxiety in healthy subjects. While all this is well-substantiated and the health benefits of Tai Chi have been well documented, there has been little written about using the basic principles of Tai Chi in the practice of running an effective business.

There are three elements of Tai Chi that I have incorporated into my life and my business. These elements are Ground, Center, and Balance. Ground is the story from which I act. Center is the place from which I act. Balance is that which I work to achieve and maintain through my actions.

The 'Ground' from which we practice Tai Chi is the story that gives the movements and postures meaning and purpose. The Ground represents the martial application of each movement along with the health and wellness it promotes. My Ground for acting in business is the tradition or story of business itself, an existing story that I couple with my own reasons for doing what I do to produce purpose and meaning. My Ground is essentially the story I tell, a story that becomes the offer that I create and allows for the growth of a business from which other people may benefit. I too benefit, since I earn an income that I use to take care of the other concerns I have simply by being human (i.e., shelter, food, clothing, etc.).

'Center' in Tai Chi is the powerful place from which we move and act. It is referred to as the *dantian* (dan t'ian, dan tien or tan t'ien). It is described as an important focus point for internal meditation and refers specifically to the physical center of gravity located in the abdomen. If a person is not centered, their form loses power and effectiveness, and the practitioner becomes unbalanced and compromised. My Center in the practice of business

is produced by My Ground or story that includes my reasons for all that I am doing. I avoid wasting time, energy, or resources on issues or situations that are not a part of what I am working to achieve. I avoid what I call ‘time bandits,’ people who waste my time on meaningless situations and keep me from working in a timely and effective manner on what I do care about. Staying centered or mindful of My Purpose helps me to avoid or spend less time with these ‘time bandits.’ Staying centered is also important when dealing with employees and customers. I work to understand what they want and/or need as I perform to fulfill their needs while staying true to myself and my business. I also find that moving from the *dantian* in my daily routines helps to keep me focused and balanced, even when conditions become stressful.

‘Balance’ in Tai Chi is the somatic balance or the balance of the physical body. It is also the balance of yin and yang, the balance of softness and stickiness with hardness and force. In the practice of business, it is very much the same. Using force in business may yield short-term gains but comes with long-term consequences. Moving softly – building long-term relationships that work well for many – can be much more effective. Questions I often ask include: ‘Am I fulfilling my offers without doing more or less than I need to satisfy the customer(s)?’; ‘Do I work effectively in stressful situations, without over or under exerting?’; ‘Do I tense up and react without being mindful?’ And most important: ‘Am I appropriately taking time away from business to keep my whole life balanced?’ For example, ‘Do I spend time with family and friends and take time to exercise?’

Tai Chi’s martial aspect relies on sensitivity to the opponent’s movements and center of gravity for dictating appropriate responses. In the practice of business, I pay attention to current trends and my rivals to see where the marketplace is moving, and I engage in appropriate responses to meet those changing conditions. I attempt to avoid tensing up or reacting to every little change in the marketplace or to every situation I encounter daily. I am relaxed, and I move in a grounded, centered, and balanced way to take care of myself, my business, and my future. In so doing, I also help to take care of my health and well-being. As I continue to practice Tai Chi and the principles thereof, I find that I take better care of whatever it is that I am presently doing whenever I am mindful enough. The longer I practice Tai Chi, the better I get at incorporating its elements into my life and my business. ☯

Barry Jessurun has been practicing Tai Chi since 1999.

