

# **Martial Arts Principles and Techniques in our Daily Lives**

**By Ian Deavin**

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*Dedicated to my daughter, Toni*

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**INTRODUCTION**

*What follows comes out of the view that society offers us rules, but that Martial Artists train to exist where the rules break down. Like a structured climbing frame, society pressures people to stay on the frame but everyday real life breaks away from that structure. It is one of the evils of our structural society that it seeks to force individuals to act in ways that the governing classes decide are good for us even when there is no obvious "good" involved. People do not do what they "should" and events do not proceed as they "ought to".*

*Martial artists learn to exist in the interface between structure and chaos by generating their own internal "rules". These are generally based on principles of "how to live" rather than "what to do" and sometimes there is a variance between these internal rules and social ones e.g. as defined by Law. This is a conflict as old as tribalism, for even within the tribe we are sovereign individuals.*

*I was struck in the course of writing this by the number of times it seemed impossible to talk about one concept without reference to others. Suggesting that each is part of a single whole and just a different facet being revealed for example in the way that distance and timing overlap, since we achieve our distancing by movement which takes place over time and our timing by adjusting placement in space. If we increase our ability to move faster then this affects our distancing and timing, if others change their speed capacity, our distancing and timing are affected but our speed is in turn affected by other factors and so the whole web is interlinked, at the same time. None of this exists in a vacuum, it all only makes sense when two or more people are involved.*

*I am encouraged by this observation since it suggests a simple elegant basis, a common derivation with resilient strength - a sort of ordered chaos enabling us to deal with relationships where conflict is potential i.e. all of them!*

*Consequently, I would like to explore how the ideas strategies and techniques which we generate in martial arts can transfer across to be useful in daily life.*

## **YIN AND YANG**

The Taoist concept of opposites is particularly prevalent in eastern based arts but in fact comes from ancient observations of life, not specifically fighting.

By looking for opposites we can always find alternatives - where we see strength look for weakness, where we see aggression look for fear, where we see confidence there is also doubt.

In our interactions and communications things are rarely the way we at first observe and are often quite the opposite. A glamorous job may be in fact an empty drudge; the goal we set when achieved may not be what was envisaged at all. While the activities we fear may turn out to be enjoyable and successful.

At first reading this may sound negative, cynical even depressing, is this saying that nothing is ever what it seems? On the contrary it is a very positive view, for it means that there is always a way out of a difficulty, there is always an up after a down. In martial arts it is often demonstrated that by learning to yield (YIN) we increase our ability to put out our power (YANG). Likewise in business by yielding in one place we can gain elsewhere. It follows from this that by controlling the balance of Yin and Yang we can keep others off-balance - this may be important in negotiation where by constantly shifting ground one can gain an advantage. In Tai Chi for example we are taught to meet hard with soft and soft with hard. This implies that we must have the ability to encompass both.

Equally by being sensitive to yin and yang we can act more harmoniously and "fit" more comfortably in our relationships with others. An alternative negotiating strategy would then be to co-operate in determining areas where movement may be traded to mutual benefit.

By seeing both sides of the question or of the person before us we are able to see reality and act accordingly to our choice - harmonious action not unreal reaction.

We can also see from this that a fight or other process such as life or personal development is a whole package - we have to accept the good with the bad. It is not possible to pick only the positive. Without the negative there is less energy, less depth, less understanding, less solidity, less sensitivity, less strength. Positive and negative only become good and bad when we place value judgements upon them. If we can lose this judgement and instead choose moment by moment where we want to be then we have the opportunity to live positively (or negatively) overall. It is worth mentioning here that in eastern (Taoist) terminology "evil" refers to lack of balance, i.e. an extreme position of any sort. In particular I think this can be applied to the process of people forcing their views on others, whether in manipulation of personal relationships or in the political machinations of the state.

In fighting we have to accept being injured as well as injuring others and take responsibility for both. When we can accept the whole package of yin and yang then we can work with the whole spectrum of life and not restrict ourselves to just one little niche.

Openness in this way allows us to keep opening up our lives rather than closing them down as we get older.

### **YIELDING AND MOVING FORWARD**

One martial arts technique is to learn how to maintain pressure on an opponent so they can never regain their balance, so they are always reacting and never have the initiative - even when yielding it becomes a principle to direct oneself toward the opponent. When moving backward to exert energy forward.

One seeks to become like waves breaking upon the shore pounding and pulling, never quite within grasp. This is an aggressive technique but has a soft aspect since it can only work if carried out in a relaxed way being sensitive to feedback. It may not be a sensible way to live one's life but it has a place in certain situations and certainly we need to be aware when it is being applied us. The power based steam roller approach of some people and organisations can perhaps be broken by stepping aside from this unrelenting pressure, even allowing the inertia of the steam roller to go over us and then coming back at them from a different direction.

### **DISTANCE**

We learn in the physical relationship of fighting that different concerns and actions become appropriate at varying distances. This seems a truism of life - we communicate visually at greatest range, audibly as we get closer and also by smell and touch when even closer.

So too it is important to ensure that our signals are appropriate to our distance, being aware that a gesture or verbal signal at one distance may be quite friendly but too close and they could be regarded as threatening.

In the same way we know that someone we are emotionally "close" to will react differently to our behaviour than someone we are distanced from. There is a difference in understanding.

### **TIMING**

With distance goes timing, for simply if we are not at the right place at the right time then our partner in the relationship won't be there either and we miss. In a fight situation we try to work it so that we are in the right time and place whereas the opponent is not. We hit, they miss.

Timing then is relative to what is going on and when we are overwhelmed then things seem to speed up. When we are relaxed and acting in harmony then our internal subjective time seems to slow almost to a crawl so that others act in slow motion. Like replaying a car accident where everything seems very clear and slow, if we can harness this then our positioning in space and time can improve.

## **FOCUS**

Statically focus is to do with bringing all our power to one point; dynamically it becomes the concentration of power at a point which moves with time. So we can focus our power in an instant; and keep it moving with the point through time, or in another way we can focus our awareness in the momentary points of connection we make with others, or in those connections that dip in and out of our various communication modes.

Shifting focus is clearly important but just as useful is the ability to focus beyond the contact point into the person themselves. Emotionally we can then understand the person and put ourselves in harmony with them, physically we can direct our power into their centre. Complementary to this is the technique of "chipping away the corners". In fighting we attack limbs that come in range; in discussion we clear away trivia leaving the heart of the subject clear.

Focusing too tight can blinker us, so it must be coupled with the "intuitive", with a broad gathering of strength or of information. If the smallest signals have not been seen then our power will be focused in the wrong time and place. If our smallest muscles are not integrated with our body then we will not put out all the power we could.

## **PENETRATION**

In striking a person or thing many people focus on the surface, likewise in life how often do we look only at the presentation? When we learn to apply the concept of penetration we go through the surface and look deeper or strike so that our power is extended through the body of our opponent.

In study if we penetrate to basic principles then the rest becomes easy.

Penetration is about extending oneself into something else, it is a way of putting forth one's will and/or making physical an intention, it is a great aid to effectiveness.

## **COMMITMENT**

Often commitment is seen as simply a question of putting a huge amount of effort into something. In external arts, students are often encouraged to put more and more energy into an attack. This is a training regime that can work, by gradually exhausting the student so that they have no energy for anything else; they have only enough then to carry out the technique. In this state all their available energy is directed to the technique. This is the key, for commitment is not just about how much energy you put into something, it is even more to do with how much is held back.

For example if you are putting out 100% of available energy but for some reason 10% is directed away from ones main intention by some other intention, a conflict arises so that of the 100% only in fact 80% is effectively transferred. Where true commitment is achieved there is no hold back and the same effect could be achieved with only 80% output, or indeed with 100% output a 25% increase in results may be achieved.

This is the basis of Tai-Chi and other soft or "internal" arts where physically we try to integrate all our muscles so that none are holding us back. Clearly on this basis commitment can also vary with time, at any one instant we can be fully (or only partly) committed. By understanding the level of our commitment and clarifying it in relationships or business we can move one step nearer to honest expression of ourselves.

## **CHOICE**

When we are clear about our commitments and able to see the real issues then true choice is possible. In a conflict situation we must choose our actions carefully, especially in the non-contact preliminaries. There we have the opportunity to focus on the issues, penetrate to the reality of our opponents inner self, harmonise with their actions, align our commitment etc., etc., so that we can then make a free choice of our own actions.

What crap! In a fight (or an intimate relationship) you simply don't have time for all this, it all happens too fast and before you know it, 'its' over. If you think about it then you are too slow.

That is why we train our subconscious minds, bodies and emotions so that we clear out habits that are unhelpful like Ego maintenance and put in place automatic practices that are helpful. This means that we only have to choose the approximate level of response; our training can then deal with how this is achieved. By doing this we hope to be able to free ourselves so that we can live in a self-expressive way that is also effective as a way of surviving and increasing the fulfilment of our lives.

Free choice in conflict enables us to decide on how we live in a pressure situation, free choice in life creates the opportunity to open our lives out more and more, rather than shutting them down which creates a major conflict against commitment. Free choice in a fight or in life enables us to live with past actions without guilt or regret, so that without these holding us back we can fully commit to the future.

### **GROUNDING - (rootedness)**

Grounding, a sense of being grounded, rooted in the ground, connected to basic issues, of operating from basic principles, using solid ground to develop from and as a basis on which to exert our energies.

The sense of being grounded is developed in us physically because as land animals we push against the ground to provide a solid reactive base for locomotion, to support us, to provide an immovable back support for our power. Not being supported by water or air we act in an environment dominated by the law of gravity - it provides a context for our lives in the same way that natural laws, emotional and intellectual laws underlay our existence in those areas.

By being aware of these relationships we can be effective in our lives. Physically we learn to relax and sink, moulding ourselves to the ground so that we are stable and not easily uprooted. Sagging ground wards like a sack of potatoes or an unconscious person we are more difficult to move than a rigid board or a weight perched on rigid legs, like a tripod for example. In this way a martial artist is able to use his environment and using the same principle in general life, by remaining connected in a relaxed way to the basic realities of life we find ourselves less disturbed by day to day changes of fortune.

### **CENTERING AND BALANCE**

We have already touched on balance in discussing grounding and this indeed provides us with one type of balance but more specifically we may consider centering as a principle. Many martial arts consider that we operate best in a physical sense about a centre of action slightly below our centre of gravity. This is analogous to the roll-centre of a car or the centre-of-lift in an aircraft. In a vehicle these centres of action - conceptual geometric points - can be arranged by the designers to be in relatively stable positions. However in human beings this centre moves around dependent upon the balance of tensions in our bodies and this is greatly dependent upon our emotional tensions. (It is interesting to note that current engineering practices of "active" car suspension and aircraft "fly-by-wire" work on the same basis - that dynamic performance is greater with a statically unstable body where minute detail adjustment is made under computer control).

Tight shouldered, tight chested individuals are easily uprooted because they cannot achieve the leverage to resist. By relaxing and sensing a centre nearer to our physical centre this situation is improved. Likewise by relaxing and letting go of our rigid should's and should-not's, our tight adherence to unrealistic rules, then we can bring our emotional centre more "down to earth" and improve emotional stability.

When centred we can allow ourselves to create a continuum from being grounded at our legs and feet to floating with our upper body; and to move smoothly from one to the other, intellectually and emotionally.

## **FLOATING**

Grounding and ground based balance are fine but what of situations where the ground is taken from beneath us? Then we learn to float and again centering is vital since with nothing to ground on all our actions must proceed from our centre, whether it be physically or emotionally.

Floating can then become a matter of springing lightly over a problem not ploughing through detail by detail in a very grounded way, but ignoring the complexities and simply by-passing the situation.

Intellectually we may just deal with the immediate situation and move on where otherwise we could be tempted to "get to the bottom" of the problem. Floating means we don't have to sort out the whole system when a quick fix is good enough!

Like trampoline artists or tumblers we lift ourselves, emotionally we may be "high" but so long as we remain centred then we can float easily through problems and life itself will flow easily. In this state we can move quickly, lightly and with poise in a way that requires little effort to keep it going.

## **AWARENESS**

Not just a passive soaking up of signals but an active searching for information about what is going on around us and a knowledgeable interpretation of these signals. Understanding of the true intentions of those in range and of the effect our actions will have on them.

Often in martial arts this is best done by keeping quiet and still, being sensitive to events, allowing for the non-threatening and acting to deal with threats. In a wider sphere we busily get on with life but by cultivating inner calm we can try to put our awareness outward and still notice internal changes. This may be generated by meditation and by study of all things.

Being aware we will consider others in our actions, and be un-shocked by the actions of others. Creating less conflict and dealing with it more smoothly when it arises, we will not be "taken unaware"; we will be more empathic in relationships and better able to help ourselves.

We learn to notice detail and understand its significance.

## **ACTION - INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL**

The principle of action lies in freeing up a situation, in creating opportunities. At times when a situation is locked it may be important that something is done, this may be an external physical event or an internal one such as changing one's perspective. Possibly simply removing oneself from the arena temporarily or even action by non-action, allowing others the opportunity to act.

Otherwise action holds the initiative and keeping both going allows one to direct events.

Just doing something can often be important otherwise we leave a vacuum and have no control over what fills it. The type of action called for of course varies greatly and the appropriateness of a particular action will depend on our awareness etc., but we generally need to keep the flow of energy moving or a kind of communication gridlock may ensue. When this happens then pressure builds up and the hurdles to progress can get so high that rather than dismantling or leaping over them unharmed then an uncontrolled explosion takes place with instant escalation of events.

## **NO-MIND**

Existing with no-mind is seen in martial arts as being a state where one's own internal chatter does not intervene, being calmed one can exist mentally, physically and emotionally totally in the situation. This means handing over control to one's subconscious which is seen as being more capable than conscious mind.

To do this in a conflict it is important to deal with one's ego, even to eliminate it. If we consider an ego to be our own mental model of what we are and how we should behave, then where this does not match reality our ego will conflict with the subconscious - slowing down and confusing our actions while the conflict is sorted out. By removing the ego then the conflict is avoided and pure self-expression is possible.

Clearly this has benefits in all spheres of life where honest communication and natural behaviour are important to self-fulfilment.

On a daily practical level we learn to live in the moment and not operate a trip wire panic defence, we are able to act as we choose rather than re-act as we are conditioned.

## **SYMBOLISM**

The use of Symbolism is a process of integrating a particular symbol into ones subconscious in order to take on some of the meaning of that symbol - or of the use of a particular symbol that will bring forth from others desired associations.

Thus Richard the Lionheart may have both wished to present himself as Lion hearted and at the same time by virtue of this symbol to lead others into believing from their own shared subconscious that the label represented the man. At the same time this would work on Richard himself leading him to behave as he would expect a lion to act.

Brave, strong, ferocious animals are frequently chosen by martial artists as having desirable characteristics which they wish to take on, see themselves as having, or wish others to believe they have. This is a gross, although effective use of the process which we operate every day in various forms.

Symbols clearly stand for something and by taking them into our subconscious we connect with those meanings shared across our common memories. In doing this we may seek to change ourselves or the way we are perceived. For example in visualising oneself as a tiger one may endeavour to become swift, supple and strong in fighting but also soft, cuddly and protective as a parent. Symbolic connections are all around but we should be careful in their use since once invoked we have no conscious control over the connections that our subconscious makes.

However, this is an important area that is all too often left without conscious thought - would not a person scared to go out at night be less so with a positive symbol attached to their self-image? Conversely surely the rowdy gang has some symbolic connection with a hunting pack; perhaps there is room here for some counter symbology. The key is that symbols work with our own associations, even though many may be shared in common with society at large.

## **INTEGRATION**

It is considered in martial arts philosophy that a fighter is faster and stronger with mind, body and spirit, unified, one thought, one movement, one feeling. This follows through in detail as well - that all thoughts be integrated with each other, all muscles integrated so the body moves as one with maximum physical power brought to bear and all feelings tied in to the action at hand. It seems that action follows intention and true intention can only come from a mind and spirit without conflict. Without mind/spirit conflict the body can act without conflict also. Hard and soft arts seek to achieve this in different ways, but the ideal is generally the same.

This integration represents a smoothly working organic being where there are no conflicts holding back and each element augments the others. Such a being may apply power (yang) with maximum effect but also may yield (yin) in a true way also. Conversely yielding with conflict contains uncertainty, resistance and resentment, this limits our capacity to yield or soak up the hard yang energy being used against us.

Being integrated we will act as one so that others understand us clearly. Such honest behaviour is not easily manipulated and people who have achieved this to an unusual degree can be seen as solid, whole beings who are comfortable with themselves - they fit their skin.

Surely the relevance of this to everyday life is clear? In such an integrated state we can think more clearly, focus more easily, intuit in an unconscious way, retain youthful vigour into old age, be unconflicting in our emotions.

With mental, physical and spiritual consistency each element supports the rest, the body acts the way the spirit feels and the mind thinks.

The search to achieve this state has much to do with the philosophical content of martial arts where we seek intellectual and emotional paths of development that aid physical training.

Interestingly what we find is that those philosophies work best with our bodies that also work well in life, not too surprisingly really since our bodies are in fact the means by which we live our lives.

## **FLOW**

We can all admire the grace of a ballet dancer or gaze at the uninterrupted flow of a mountain stream and the martial artist too, seeks flow in movement. Lack of conflict in movement (no turbulence) and unified direction with smooth transitions when changing from one action to the next give maximum efficiency of movement and transmission of power.

This can be found also in emotional and intellectual life where seeking the flow principle leads us ultimately to being easier to get on with, less ruffled and panicked; more connected in our thinking. By ensuring that each movement is rooted in the previous one and connects easily with it, without rapid conflicting change, then we can smooth the way we express ourselves. Actions and emotions can open up rather than close down; our intellect will extend from each answer to more questions in a light easy way. Then when blocks do occur, answers do not come; we can deal with them gracefully with persistence, patience and focus.

By working with reality moment by moment and taking out superfluous, inappropriate reactions (often based on some level of fantasy not visible to others) then we can ease a way through life presenting a seamless whole to the world.

From this we can see that flow is only possible with integration, and flow in the real world can only be achieved by letting go of unreality in emotions or beliefs. In the same way that a martial artist takes out of his practice any unnecessary action, because it gets in the way of where he is going, so we can clear out unnecessary core beliefs, inaccurate theories, mental drivers and fantasy emotions (such as fantasy fear), because they get in the way of our expressing our true selves i.e. travelling on the path of our lives. Without this conflicting clutter then our personality and intellect can flow in a connected way.

## **DIFFERENTIATION**

It seems simpler sometimes to live our lives in pigeon holes, each aspect of ourselves neatly filed, each physical function macro controlled by our brains. We have seen that integration of this partitioned being is a major goal in martial arts and life in general; however before we can integrate we must differentiate. This is a process of carefully examining each pigeon hole and physically studying each muscle group function so that it works in the best possible co-operation with its neighbours. In doing this we optimise each action, skill or other tool (mental or emotional) in its own right and then ensure that it best fits (interfaces) with the others. By detail work of this nature when each facet is re-integrated then the performance of the whole is enhanced. For comparison we can recognise that a better tyre will improve the whole car but of course it must be the correct size and run at the optimum pressure to work as part of the suspension system and may then lead to development being possible elsewhere to permit even greater performance.

New skills or techniques are first encountered as "Different" and we focus on them individually until a stage is reached where we are sufficiently familiar with them that they can be integrated and become part of us. This augments us since we have added to ourselves and are able to own this new aspect as part of our whole being, so that it now forms part of the basis we bring to our lives.

In time we often find that it is necessary to re-focus on certain aspects or to focus more minutely than previously. This re-differentiation and reintegration becomes a constant cycle for as long as we seek to learn.

In martial arts this may take the form of a detailed breakdown of mechanical and internal components of even such a simple technique as punching. By this process we can eliminate the unnecessary, maximise the important and optimise the relationship of our muscles, mind and spirit.

Integration of everything, all at once is simply too great a task and working a little bit at a time is a practical route.

### **CIRCLES AND STRAIGHT LINES**

Sometimes the quickest route between two points is a circle, or series of circles.

The human body it seems works in arcs and circles and the most powerful way to move in a straight line is to approximate it by linking arcs. This is the art of the possible, within the constraints of our mechanics, which operate on hinges, and on musculature that is organised around our centre line.

In life too, straight lines are rarely possible - there simply isn't the leverage. Consequently we circle the mountain, scouting possibilities before attempting a path. Likewise circuitous manoeuvring may be used as a strategy to put us in the best position to attain a specific goal.

So where does that leave emotional honesty? Well we may consider that it only comes after a certain amount of circling both within oneself and between partners and that such "straight honesty" can be considered as an extreme form of arc, one with an infinite radius.

### **RELAXATION**

Relaxation as practised in martial arts is not a state of collapse! Rather it is a state of neutrality, minimal effort being expended to achieve the body posture or movement required. In relaxed fighting posture we seek to eliminate all conflicts whether mental, emotional or physical leaving ourselves in a state of poise.

This allows rapid, easy response without wasted effort so that maximum energy is directed toward our objective. Many posture based exercises seek to isolate the major muscles required for a particular action so that the others can 'let go' of their tension. With only those muscles tense which are required to stand up the others can hold that minimum tension needed for muscle 'tone'. This in time develops a body which is used to being in a state of unconflicting readiness each muscle having been differentiated and re-integrated so that a harmonious interaction results.

The same approach applied to mental and emotional states can aid in reducing reactive behaviour and promoting action by choice. Indeed learning to relax our bodies in this way can often be all that is needed to help us in these other ways as well.

When relaxed we do not explode with a hair trigger, we find there is time to clear our conflicts and choose appropriate action. In effect we can move smoothly from place to place (physically, mentally or emotionally) with our internal subjective time apparently slowed. The appearance from outside is often of much greater speed and decisiveness in action while others may be more confident of a measured response and so find us easier to deal with.

Relaxed posture then is not a lack of tension rather it is a state of minimal tension, lack of conflict - harmonious neutrality able to move in any direction at will.

## **SPEED**

To say that speed is about quickness sounds trite but somehow the word speed carries connotations of power and perhaps the idea that fast movement should feel powerful at the same time. In fact it seems true that if an action feels fast in these terms then it probably isn't and you are probably trying too hard. The true feeling of speed has more to do with effortlessness and 'flying' than with feeling "powerful."

So in a sense speed is not something to be felt, since it is external, (distance covered per unit time) then it just is; simply a measurement.

Indeed we generally find that by focusing on essentials then we can do fewer things with less effort and so reduce the time it takes to achieve something. So in fighting we reduce actions to a minimum which means for the same speed we are actually dealing with things faster.

A master barely looks as if he is moving but attacks pass him by and he strikes apparently effortlessly wherever he wants. By doing less he deals with his opponent faster often without greater speed. He simply doesn't do as much.

Clearly speed is connected with distance, timing and power, the first two being measurements of how we are placed relative to our adversary in a constantly moving (dynamic) way, the last (power) being connected with how we use our speed. Simple speed, distance and timing are certainly required, but unless our power is focused with intention then speed is just bulk on the move.

So in life, speed unfocused with intention has little power and dissipates energy. At the extreme, unfocused speed is a recipe for 'warp drive' reaction like a sci-fi space ship flicking in and out of existence but not knowing where it is or where it is going next and so lacking penetration.

Speed in our lives is often only seen from the outside, with the person observed being quite unaware of just how fast they are living. By taking careful observation we can begin to measure our own speed and create as much or as little as appropriate - we 'turn it on' or off as appropriate.

## **POWER**

The ability to work at a particular rate in mechanical terms can also be seen in the ability for example to break blocks, tiles etc. as in many martial arts films or demonstrations.

Focusing all our energies with total commitment in a specific way enables a great deal to be achieved in a split second. Here perhaps we can find a hint of how this concept can apply in wider areas - achievement. For the point about power in relation to human beings is that what we are really looking for is the ability to achieve, so direction in an effective way is essential.

In a sense power is the outcome of applying our basic principles and techniques rather than a factor in its own right. What we then have to do is to choose to what end we apply this power. Interestingly in following our principles we often find that the choice is already clear. Since personal power based on an open, honest, awareness of reality is actually diminished by manipulative, target oriented application. We achieve the power to live our lives the way we wish, and to create those things that we really want.

Demonstrations of power in martial arts can be seen as tricks, not "magic" but rather as party pieces that show only the very pinnacle of the mountain without the landscape in which it is set.

The paradox of personal power is that it is only achieved by not targeting too closely. If we climb a mountain by looking only at the summit we will fall, but by taking careful steps in the right direction we can eventually reach our peak - our maximum potential - the best that we may be.

## **RECOGNISING REALITY/FANTASY**

e.g. the intermediate state of social rules that constitute a game. Here it is not appropriate to operate in "prepared to die" mode. Here the game must be played out according to its rules and the players' resources. Each must decide the level of resources (the cost) they are prepared to allocate to any particular game and its outcome. Some social games of course can become life threatening, then the full martial arts philosophy applies. In between there is a continuum which can be likened to sparing where certain agreed "rules" are accepted; from very gentle fun where no harm is received or intended, up through more dynamic work where some pain is accepted as part of the "game". This is reflected in many martial arts where practitioners are referred to as "players" in the area of demonstration, competition and training.

In life as in martial arts these games may not be played with good will and then escalation, brinkmanship and outright rule breaking can result. Similarly discussions can develop into arguments, then into physical skirmishes and sometimes into fights. This is different to the outright violent attack where rules do not exist. This running up and down the escalation of confrontation covers the middle ground of existence where the game and its rules are constantly changing. At such times all one's faculties of awareness, centering, balance etc. may be required to deal with the transition from a game to a fight - or to handle one's own tactics for damage limitation or to gear up for a genuine fight.

The purpose of rules of course, being to prevent a true no holds barred fight while still allowing a contest.

Application of martial arts philosophy can enable one to play these games to one's maximum ability while retaining a "sense of proportion" about them.

### **TRUE UNDERSTANDING**

The ability to conceive of something does not confer the ability to actually do it, so it is with wisdom and I hope what follows does not sound as if this writer has both. Although I do believe that I have had the occasional flash of insight - windows on wisdom as it were and these have helped to solidify the concept.

If we consider that to have wisdom is to see reality and to behave from this basis then there are many parallels in martial arts and in life outside the training hall. So much of personal reality is tied up in our relationships with other people that it is important to understand what is actually being communicated - not what people want us to receive, but to actually receive all that is being transmitted.

So we find that in training many opponents hold an aggressive facial expression on a body that otherwise exhibits fear, often to the point of nearly falling over backward. So which communication should we believe? The wise fighter knows and acts accordingly. Thus we seek the true meaning of a person's transmissions over the spectrum of our senses.

This often involves redefining many things which we may have taken for granted as obvious. Key to this is the language for our daily communications, where words once learned as a child are rarely re-examined for adult usage.

Many words in all languages have unusually powerful connotations, for example

- Power
- Love
- Commitment
- Hate
- Trust
- Fear
- Time
- Good
- Bad

These make a good starting point and the section on commitment should give an idea of the process. This entails separating out the fantasy idea from the true meaning. The true meaning is a useful definition.

Thus with "Trust" people often classify others as I would/would not trust that person, and seek total reliability in their friends/lovers on the basis that less than absolute trustworthiness leaves them feeling unsafe. But how useful is this?

No-one can ever be completely trustworthy; everyone will let you down sometime. So if you do trust someone absolutely then you are bound to be "betrayed" and unsafe. Complete trust as a definition only sets us up. We are human beings and incapable of perfection so some sliding scale of trust is much more useful. When we can see the true balance of a person between their inner selves and their outer projection then we have some idea of what that degree might be for that person.

Redefining words in this way takes the conflict out of life, so too with actions. In fighting we seek to fight the person not their techniques. So we find their weakness and work on it like inserting a wedge in a block. The weakness may be small but their own fear will make it greater.

So actions reveal weakness and as we have seen aggression frequently cloaks fear, or giving may hide self-interest, often not, but a wise evaluation will lead to an understanding of the honesty of these actions.

Where do we stop with this looking behind words and actions - well with experience it gets easier, for the body cannot lie. However good a person is at covering up, the signals are always there if you can read them, although ultimately it may be that touching is the only way to really find out what is going on for someone else. Perhaps this explains much of our cultural touch taboo - we are afraid of others finding out what we are really feeling?

Linguistically there are many levels. A particular favourite of mine is the eastern saying:

"He who you would destroy first befriend".

On the surface quite crazy - I can't be friends with him. I want to kill him! But then if I do befriend him sneakily then I will learn of his weaknesses and be able to get inside his defences so that I can kill him more easily.

But then if I really do befriend him I won't want to kill him, he is my friend.

But also if I really do befriend him then in order to be my friend he will need to change and so he isn't the person I wanted to kill anymore.

But again, if I befriend my enemy I have to change as well, at least I have to let go of my hatred of him.

So then I regain myself and my conscious choice instead of allowing my hatred to drive me.

I get to see him as he really is and probably myself also; a process which changes us both in positive ways.

So now who do I want to destroy? In fact haven't I already done it? He who I wished to destroy is no longer. Do I wish to destroy the real person I am now aware of?

The answer may still be yes but I suspect only in very rare cases.

What are significant words and actions for you? How many levels do they have? What is real in your daily communication?

**ACHIEVING MAXIMUM POTENTIAL**

Survival and daily life are not a competition to be the best in the world. If there is only one winner where does that put the rest?

If survival depended on being "The Best" then there wouldn't be many survivors. Instead we see more and more around us each day.

All we can do is the best-we-are-capable-of and martial arts philosophy says that is our true path - to maximise our real self. Remembering that an excess in one area will always lead to a deficiency in another!

With this outlook we can be open to ideas that may help. To be the best father I can I will listen to others, listen to my child and listen to my own needs. I can exclude nothing and include everything. That is the best I can do, and if I keep on doing it I will achieve my aim.

When we are no longer in competition with others we can learn from them, relax, widen our horizons and take in all that life has to offer. Martial arts are not just about being the best fighter you can; they are about being the best person you can, since actually they amount to the same thing.

### **MAXIMUM EFFECT, MINIMUM EFFORT**

However strong, fast etc. a fighter is, we all find that there is always someone stronger, faster or whatever. If not today then tomorrow.

There is a limit to the purely physical possibilities of our bodies and so we seek leverage. In technique leverage is achieved through mechanics, in life we also seek leverage emotionally or intellectually.

However achieving maximum effect with minimum effort is not just about leverage, about knowing which buttons to push. It is about only doing that which is necessary. So if an opponent is committed to pushing forward perhaps I should step aside and give him a helping hand. In the meantime I need only provide enough resistance to prevent myself falling over; I do not need to push him backwards. Likewise in life we do not have to destroy our adversaries, only survive ourselves. Our adversaries are often quite capable of destroying themselves anyway. Equally to achieve our goal in business for example we should try the simplest things first, gradually increasing our efforts by building on sound principles.

### **ACTING AT AN ANGLE**

To meet someone head on is to deal with them on their terms and where all things are equal then an honest relationship may require this. But where problems arise or the energy required to operate head on simply isn't available then under the heading maximum effect for minimum effort we can often act at an angle as a means of gaining leverage tangentially. Energy is deflected while we gain time and space to bring our own focus to bear, indeed the deflection itself will form part of our focus but will break up that of our opponent.

On the positive side such deflections may exhaust an opponent into reconsidering their position so that an honest negotiation can take place.

### **FLEXIBILITY**

When the irresistible force meets the immovable object then something has to give. Too much structure with everything tied down too tight leads in the end to grid lock.

Every system needs a certain amount of "slack" to operate in the real world - to be without is to be robotic and even with robots then the more sophisticated we make them the more flexibility we need to build in.

Flexibility: at the extreme an ability to flow round the immovable object or to move out of the way of an irresistible force but without losing one's own intention. The willow tree bends in the wind but retains its intention to stay rooted and so survives. On a lesser scale flexibility allows us to work out solutions to problems within our own resources, to a result which is acceptable.

In martial arts flexibility is not just the ability to move one's body in stretching etc. but has more meaning in the sense of being able to keep moving within wide extremes even when put under pressure.

So flexibility is not just about physical articulation, or having a broad education, it has the vital element of being linked to a flexible use of mind/body in order that the interaction does not lock up and so become a head to head confrontation.

Where a confrontation is allowed to arise then a straight contest of strength ensues. Only when some slack is created can a true solution be found.

In mechanics we talk of having freedom in a system i.e. providing a direction of movement where energy can move, without this we have an inhuman and rigid structure which is dysfunctional both personally and socially.

Awareness of tension is clearly an important factor in achieving flexibility, so physically the clearing of emotional blocks to relaxation is a vital aspect. Interestingly these emotional blocks are the same ones that restrict a free and relaxed mind, so again we see a mind/body emotional triangle where each affects the other.

Relaxed use of mind and body does not mean lack of tension (as discussed previously) but suggests minimum i.e. appropriate, necessary tension over our limits, giving free, flexible use of mind and body. Flexibility coupled with strength will yield resilience and this is generally much more useful than the ability to lock in place.

### **HOLISTIC APPROACH**

If we apply to ourselves the ideas of Chaos theory regarding super sensitivity in complex systems - then we can get a glimpse of just how a holistic approach might work.

A pain in my neck for example, may come from tension at that point, but actually be the result of the way I use my whole body including my legs even when sitting down. The way I use my body in turn is probably to do with my internal emotional terrain - in some situations I 'feel' comfortable with certain patterns of use, generally for historical reasons retained in my memory. I think that this habit is helpful but actually it is not - it leads to a headache! So my intellectual mind can provide a way of analysing this situation in order to create a new approach.

To change one element we will have to change everything. It is of course possible that a single input or a mix of inputs will work their way through this system to effect the desired change and it is in determining this mix of inputs or new approach that requires skill and experience.

Nevertheless such a set of inputs (treatments or new practices) is likely to affect every subsystem that it uses in working through ourselves to the desired end. The input may be small but interconnectedness ensures that ripples travel throughout the organism - little is left as it was.

The relationship between opponents in a fight is exactly such a complex system and as skill develops then less movement and less strength is required to achieve our end. Our other relationships are similar - outwardly complex and often very sensitive indeed; by seeing them as a "whole" within their social environment then we can react in simple appropriate ways. Excess output of chaotic or dispersed energy will often confuse or mislead others with conflicting messages. While this may sound useful in a confrontational environment it also reflects our inner state and so reduces our ability to be effective.

The calm relaxed stationary approach of many fighters is holistic in this way as it allows them to absorb intuitively both their opponent and the environment in order to take the minimum action required for their desired end result. This puts a fighter in harmony with his opponent; a similar approach in daily life also allows harmonious relationships. The difference is that here a harmonious action may be chaotic childlike play!

### **TRUSTING SELF**

Often referred to as "trusting the technique" this really comes down to accepting that our subconscious is a major part of ourselves and is available to us. By consciously programming the subconscious in our training we are able then to let go of conscious control and "just-do-it". Clearly to step into any situation without knowing consciously what we will do raises significant fears. However if we can accept that we carry with us (in our subconscious body/mind) the accumulated abilities of a lifetime and that they are available to us when needed, then we can step forward with confidence.

Conscious work in the training hall enables us to learn techniques in great detail, much more detail than most people learning a dance routine for example. Detail work of the kind that sports people only receive from top coaches is vital to achievement of trust in one's subconscious abilities. Minute programming and paring down of a technique to its essentials allows us to then trust our own abilities so that when we consciously choose to fight we can do so to the very best we are capable of.

So how does this relate to daily life - simply by recognising that whatever we do repetitively programmes us in some way. Habitual responses created because they "worked" once, possibly in extremes may not be appropriate as general behaviour. We react daily in ways that add to the burden of programming that our subconscious has accumulated over the years. The older we live the more complex, confusing and entrenched these habits can become. We need to take responsibility for clearing out these patterns that perhaps have arisen unawares. By working with these reactions in the training hall or in therapy (or elsewhere) in a conscious way we can ensure that we can trust ourselves in the office, the city traffic or the domestic environment.

By looking at our fears and our defence mechanisms, our wants and patterns of success then effective life techniques can be placed in the subconscious from our own choice. We can then trust ourselves in life and "just-do-it" "minute by minute, day by day.

Similarly in bringing up our children we need to take responsibility for passing on effective life skills. While children are not really a "clean slate" (being already genetically prepared) they do not initially have the complexity of conflicting habits that adults tend to accumulate, but nature of course abhors a vacuum and so it is important we fill it with positive patterns rather than negative ones. In this way our children can learn to trust themselves at an early age and move confidently through life.

### **REALITY, HONESTY AND TRUTH**

Much of life including a good deal of corporate and social interchange is based on games and these often have a useful purpose. By defining areas of human relationship within artificial boundaries then political structures can be created. This enables certain individuals or groups to persuade others and for those others to partake in the process.

However, whether in business or social politics it is all too easy for the players to become taken-up in the game. Then the game becomes reality - all of it - and we lose track of life. Political games played in this way are dependent upon power and manipulation.

Games theory tells us that the most productive outcome is created by co-operation (a universe of Doves) and this requires honesty and truth i.e. an openness about what is really going on. This is clearly not the world we live in, where Hawks often prosper but even so to be a successful Hawk requires an understanding of what is really going on. There is a personal price to pay though.

To act appropriately we must understand what is really going on as well as the fantasy, otherwise we act only within the fantasy and are vulnerable to others. In martial arts therefore we are careful to study an opponent and learn to read his body language which reflects his subconscious self. Thus we seek the truth about the conflict and the degree to which there is a difference between the body language and conscious signals shows us whether he is "together" or not i.e. how much inner conflict is present and how honest he is in his conscious actions.

In social relationships many play games and while everyone knows what is going on this may be relatively harmless fun but since part of the game is often to fool the unwary and "trick" them into a disadvantageous position then there is a fine line between fun and pain.

So in business and politics we find that generally there is an assumption that the way to play the game is by manipulating others to gain an advantage. No one seems to notice that this is counter-productive with more energy going into the game than to creating an end result.

"New-age" corporate structures are often aimed at reducing the benefits (to manipulative individuals) of game playing and at promoting productive co-operation. To achieve this requires a commitment to and understanding of truth which is exemplified by internal and external honesty.

From martial arts we can find that truth is simple, it is about knowing whether or not one hit another or got hit oneself. So in good martial arts training it is important to be honest about how real the training actually is, intimidation and serious levels of conflict are important to ensure that our reactions are honest.

It has been said that instructors owe it to their students to hit them, and at first sight our safety obsessed society may recoil from this, but how else to get across that this training is for **REAL** and to push people to deal with violent reality? Untruth here is to deny the reality of pain and in macho fashion to tough it out, - a different matter to recognising the pain, internalising it and removing it so that it is not externally apparent.

Ego led macho behaviour creates internal conflict and loss of control whereas internal adjustment is an integrative acceptance leaving the fighter still under control.

Likewise in business someone who is dishonest leaves themselves open to control by others who will either do business only on a limited basis or avoid them completely.

Honesty carries with it the fear of handing over control, but also the reality of continued "self-control".

Honesty with oneself in a fight situation means that reactions can be quicker, commitment greater, and effectiveness enhanced. So we seek to understand our own motivations, fears and reactions.

Honesty with an opponent can be a problem however! But in training we co-operate with partners who can tell us what they read and suggest alternative approaches. Likewise co-operation within a company can lead to a more cohesive presentation. Ultimately this use of honesty as a strategy leads us to display a relatively neutral stance until it is clear whether this is a co-operative or a manipulative relationship.

In conflict honesty equates to "walking quietly but carrying a big stick". Our honesty allows our opponent to fill the vacuum with whatever he chooses - given enough rope most will hang themselves. Indeed we find that few fights are won, most are lost, some given away.

### **LEARNING - A CONTINUOUS PROCESS**

A major factor in martial arts is the commitment to learning on a continuous basis. We recognise that anything useful is grist to the mill of martial arts and a satisfying life.

Frequent physical training is a forum for learning about ourselves and others. Training in different areas changes perspective and allows us new options. Each time we learn a new principle or new application then our possibilities are increased for survival and for self-expression.

This is an important aspect leading to a constantly fresh mind which is open and flexible. A person aware of their own learning needs can be creative in new situations and so move forward. One who does not learn is condemned to repeat past mistakes and not even be aware of them.

### **SENSEI, SIFU, GURU AND THE TEACHER WITHIN**

Seeking the unknown is scary, most of us prefer to do it in company and generally to follow someone who has been that way before.

This is the function of a teacher, or some other leader. At the extreme whole nations give up their self determination to individual dictators and in business empires we sell ourselves for the security of a chairman or managing director who can pilot the corporate ship to a profit in which we share.

This is an often painful lesson in martial arts since students frequently "give themselves" to an instructor who can then manipulate them. Indeed most are seeking this in a vain hope that their teacher can "do-it-for-them".

A responsible teacher will create relatively safe situations where their student can experience their own mistakes, situations which often force the student to succeed in spite of himself. This teacher knows that as with good parenting the aim is to enable a student to stand on their own in any circumstances. Such a person can then be a strong member of a community, passing beyond the need for someone to follow slavishly and onto an ability to teach themselves, learning in time from many teachers.

The fair and honest exchange of effort for learning replaces the sell-out where a master is put on a pedestal or denigrated to the status of prostitute teaching customers only for money. A delicate balance for teacher and student.

Our heroes and heroines the "big" people whose images influence our lives may be seen in this way, often more insidiously.

For many the umbrella of religion is an irresistible siren voice urging them to give up free will in return for promised (if illusory) certainty.

The urge to hand over personal responsibility to another is strong and recognition of the place of teachers in our lives is a major developmental step.

So emotional is this student/teacher bond in martial arts that it can provide a turning point for all training. When we finally see our "master" as the human being he of course is, then this opens up the world of reality in terms of all the other people we grant power over us and we can direct our own lives based on our "teacher within".

### **RESILIENCE**

The martial artist seeks an ability to absorb and spring back as a major aid to survival and as a sort of physical shock absorber, letting him ride a blow relatively unaffected. This also becomes an advantage in the springiness used by fighters who can alight and act instantly.

Physical resilience also carries through to the emotional and intellectual areas; in seeking to cultivate a sense of elasticity within ourselves we cultivate the ability to keep moving under pressure in a relaxed way. Being aware that there is always somewhere else to go we do not "lock up". When squeezed in one area we accept the pressure and pop up somewhere else.

Resilience like speed is the result of using basic principles like relaxation, focus, flow etc. and so is achieved by work on the principles rather than specific concern over resilience itself. As a desired attribute however it is well worth keeping in sight and considering such questions as "How well do I function under pressure?" "How well do I bounce back?" By noticing reactions that leave us emotionally locked or intellectually entrenched we can follow through and check just how valid our thoughts and feelings really are.

Resilience is about taking what is thrown at us and using it, or about reaching out and elastically returning to another position if our outreach is rebuffed. This is not about rapid fire re-action but rather about smooth co-ordinated flexibility, maintaining connection.

### **NO FIRST ATTACK**

Or to put it another way "he moves - I move first".

The one who first commits to action makes themselves vulnerable in a fight or a fresh social meeting. The commitment may then be used either against an attacker or by manipulation in a social/business context.

When we see someone is committed then we can arrange to change our posture to negate their attack and put ourselves in an advantageous position before they can become uncommitted again.

This explains the unwillingness of people to act first and perhaps also explains why people still like to be introduced by a third party who can act as a sort of buffer.

As a strategy this approach entails letting the other person take the role of attacker, possibly even encouraging this by displaying an attractive "weakness".

Being uncommitted ourselves, we are free to act in any way we choose whereas our opponent cannot - he is committed and the more committed he is then the more vulnerable, if we are able to shift ground fast enough.

In a similar way panic reaction is a sort of driven commitment that lacks initiative. The purpose of a feint (or un-real/uncommitted attack) is to panic a defender into inappropriate commitment thus creating vulnerability.

It therefore becomes important that we can "read" other peoples' intentions since we need to know just how committed they are. Often this can only be seen from their actions but with better understanding it may be read before they act, then we can act first.

### **BEING WEAK IN ORDER TO BE STRONG - INVESTING IN LOSS**

Apparently a most unattractive idea, in this society that idolises strong winners, but one of the most important ideas in martial arts.

We find that only by making mistakes can we learn to understand - if our actions work is it by chance? Or are there other ways that might work better? But by failing many times we learn the way things work and the gaps in our ability so that we can then take appropriate action with confidence.

But to allow ourselves to fail we must allow ourselves to be vulnerable and sometimes get hurt. This is to be weak, resisting the temptation to make something work by bringing greater power to bear, so that by learning we can become stronger.

In martial arts practice we encourage others to find our weaknesses and exploit them. Constant repetition allows study of why a particular weak pattern of behaviour exists and gives us the opportunity to change it. Clearly a good measure of trust is important in this type of training since it involves constructive destruction. The process of constructive criticism in other spheres is analogous and can be just as rewarding and just as scary!

The idea is that in order to improve a company for example then complete honesty is needed and that in this context strengths are not important. By investing in being weak we can build sensitively at new levels and so notice the weaknesses of others as well.

By allowing ourselves to loose not only have we gained more strength but also greater awareness of others.

When training with a partner we may practice moves we find difficult, allow them to hit or push us over and ask for their observations as to how and what we are doing - and how we might do things differently. Crucially it is important to allow ourselves to feel weak since only then are we receptive to the idea that change is needed.

### **ONE OPPORTUNITY, ONE CHANCE.**

This opportunity, this moment, only exists once and we get one chance to make use of it.

When we have taken that chance then things move on - maybe we will get another similar opportunity but not the same one.

Therefore we should be careful in understanding exactly what the opportunity is, in preparing for it and in seizing it wholeheartedly when it appears. We can then be committed appropriately when we take our chance.

In many Japanese arts - calligraphy, flower arranging, origami there are actions that can only be done once, the brush can only make a single stroke, a stem can only be bent once, a paper fold must be right first time. In fighting, a punch can only be thrown once - you cannot say "hold on

I'd like to go back and do that again". Once the action has been taken things have moved on - maybe you will get another opportunity, but that is in the future.

So what will you do with your present opportunities? To act on them or not that is the question.

If we prepare ourselves well in training or in personal development, once the choice is made then the actions will follow smoothly and naturally.

It is said that action follows intention. If we prepare for action, when the opportunity arises then our intention will call forth appropriate action.

This is not to say that we must behave in an all or nothing fashion - rather deal with this moment now the best way you can and the future when it gets here.

So of course, we train and plan for the most likely future occurrences in line with our inner intentions, but should not commit our lives to them ahead of time. If we do, then this is living in a fantasy and we are unable to act successfully in the present.

### **ECLECTICISM**

The vacuum cleaner of life, a martial arts approach is one that sucks up anything and everything in its path, absorbs what is useful and spits out the rest.

**Will this help me to survive better?** is the only yardstick in any arena. Of course surviving better may mean physical exercises to run away better or it may mean a new psychotherapy to enhance emotional survival - equally it may mean just intellectual play to exercise the mind and loosen up the brain.

Most martial arts principles and tools have been pinched from elsewhere on this one founding principle.

It is this, coupled with a great adaptive sense that ensures martial artists have a never-ending path ahead of them, and it is this which makes it such an appropriate approach for people in all walks of life. We do however need to be clear and flexible in our definition of the word survival. Too tight a definition and all we do is learn to fight, too slack and we end up justifying anything we want to.

I do not argue that we should not do what we want simply because we want to (even if it is not in any way useful), but that we should be clear about any real, imagined or potential use or lack thereof; e.g. drug taking may be a survival learning experience, equally it may be self-indulgence. Both may be enjoyable or otherwise, but especially because of the inherent possibilities (long term and negative), then a martial arts approach would lead us to consider the survival implications. The choice is still ours.

Will it help me to survive better? can be applied to many options in life - a new training approach, a new piece of equipment, a new toy, a meal, a relationship. Equally - what can I learn from that (experience) that is useful for my future survival?

So our worst experiences provide rich sources of lessons about ourselves and our world.

The philosophies of Zen and Taoism have been plundered and adapted by martial artists as survival aids to the extent that sometimes they are inseparable - a good martial artist also being a significant philosopher and vice versa.

The vacuum cleaner approach is voracious and detailed, ever seeking the useful and on finding it then persistent in seeking understanding. First differentiating a new technique, thought or technology then assimilating it as an integral part of the ever growing person.

Interestingly while this approach to life leads us to being open to new ideas etc. it also seems to lead to an understanding of the similarities and differences in the world. The filtering system created only retains useful i.e. real life related, information, a true martial arts practitioner is consequently the ultimate realist. He may also be a romantic dreamer, but if he is, then this too will be turned to use since dreams are a powerful source of information about ourselves and visualisation (conscious creation of "dream" visions) a likewise powerful way of symbolically addressing the subconscious which allows us to consciously direct inner change physically and emotionally.

Eclecticism as a principle then says anything may be useful; anything may give you an edge in the right circumstances. Other (borrowed) philosophies reduce each lesson to its minimum and so allow integration without increasing our burden of baggage (e.g. Zen Buddhism).

How much of the technique we retain is up to us - in a technology environment we may need all of it for full benefit, in business perhaps an overview will do, in a relationship maybe only part but in detail, in martial arts just the basic principle.

### **READING ONE'S OPPONENT**

Before committing to a significant move most people make preparatory movements - few are ready to go instantly. In fighting we learn to look for signals of small movements, changes in leg tension, hand position or shoulder tension, everyone is different. The trick is to get the preparation over before the confrontation; in fact to do it all in the mind so that being prepared inside there are no outer signs to give us away. Since these outer movements are generally based in some sort of emotional conflict then if we can reduce the conflicts then we reduce the movements and hence, stop telling our opponent what is going on.

Poker, negotiating, fighting - reading ones opponent is much the same. However in fighting there are more signals to be considered and stress levels are always high, with severe potential consequences.

Body language then is important and here we can begin to understand an opponent's emotional state. Often it is said that the body cannot lie and indeed the way a fighter holds himself is key to the

emotional/intellectual conflicts going on within the body. Shuffling feet, waving arms, tight throat, head position - back or forward all have meaning.

A strong fighter for example will move off the back foot, a weak fighter will try to pull from the front.

Is their back held off the upright, does it tilt back or forward?

Dissipated energy, lack of focus and power are suggested from frequent weak gestures. A leaning one way or the other way indicate a pre-commitment to going forward or back or use of a particular leg.

Do kicks come from the front leg or the back? only a strong fighter can kick effectively off the front leg, and done well this is much faster than with the back leg, also often not so well in view.

Look at the muscle tone, how does he move, is it smooth and resilient or hard and jerky? Check for signs of groundedness - does he come up on the balls of his feet for attacks or settle down?

Does he hold himself open or closed? But more important what do you see in his eyes?

Fights it seems are not won but they are definitely lost, even given away. In Sumo for example the eyeball contact is vital and some fighters are known for periods of self-doubt when they cannot win even against physically inferior opponents. We can see this in their eyes.

When looking an opponent in the eye we can try to intimidate them with ferocity and this may work - look for their fear, when you find it they don't have to blink, it is all over. If you do find it, don't catch it yourself! You could try feeding out a little false fear of your own in the hope that they will catch this and magnify it within themselves, but this too carries risks.

The fear put out by others can catch a resonance which can easily grow if allowed to. We need to learn to recognise which are our own emotions and which belong to others.

If you do not find your opponents fear, then perhaps he is too lacking in imagination or he is sufficiently good that he actually is not afraid. Then you have to decide how good you are, but if you play psychological games with a master then he will know how good you are, since if you were better than him you wouldn't need to!!

So ultimately the games are self-defeating, probably the best approach is one of energised neutrality. Giving nothing away, observing everything and poised to act with complete inner trust the moment an opponent is committed. Zen mind, empty mind achieves this.

Eye contact of this intensity can be very intimate and, to some people, very threatening so its use in social/business environments needs to be tempered until sufficient skill is achieved to carry it out in a relaxed way. To go around peering into everyone's innermost being all the time could get you a strange reputation.

So harmonise, using this type of body reading/eye contact we can "project" a little of ourselves into the other person, creating a mental link if you like that enables us to tap into what they are feeling and thinking. This is more common than we think - cold reading magicians (mind readers) do it all the time, as do tarot readers, fortune tellers and psychotherapists. It is a skill based on training and sensitivity.

The ability to harmonise empathically then gives us the choice as to what to do because we know what the other person is likely to do - not necessarily specifics, but general directions at least and sometimes specifics as well. Acting in this way we can be in harmony - which is an active condition, of fluid change but certainly not passive.

**INTENTION IS EVERYTHING**

First there is movement, then there is movement with thought, then there is only thought.

Ultimately it is the clarity of our thought that limits us even in fighting. Some people would talk in terms of determination but this is a word with overtones of struggle and tension whereas the person with clear and solid intention sees only forward movement, in an easy relaxed and powerful way. So, I believe it is in life.

A person with clear intention has literally cleared everything else from their mind and can then let their subconscious and physical abilities take them toward their conscious objective. The difference between two people - one with and the other without clear intention is quite dramatic. Without intention every action is incomplete and lacks power, with intention every action is focused and directed. Fighting such a person leaves no doubt, it is as if they are saying, with their whole being "I'm coming through - you don't even exist".

When intention is present then we can "become" the technique and our whole being is integrated.

Obviously this intention is rather more than "I'd really quite like to ..." when the thought is strong enough then everything else follows and we do not need to concern ourselves with movement - it will happen automatically. Emotionally we are not even involved, on a conscious level there is simply a job of work to be done dealing with whatever or whoever stands between ourselves and our survival.

In the wider sphere of daily life such totality of intention is rarely appropriate but the concepts hold true. If we can be completely clear of where we want to go in life then not only does everything we do start to move in that direction but we also start to attract others with similar interests. This leads to a synchronicity of meetings and events that adds momentum to our direction.

Strangely we may not even be aware of our objective as a specific goal, and only have a vague idea of direction, but subconsciously we are working in a way that will lead us to something that we can recognise as being what we want.

This subconscious intention is extremely powerful; being the unified will of our inner selves and may only gradually become clear to us over a period of many years.

Intention is about directed commitment and when you have learned the techniques, done the training and thought about your situation it is only thing that matters.

However we should be careful, the old saying is true "The road to Hell is paved with good intentions".

If our motivation is clear and true then the actions that flow from harnessing our intention will probably also be good. But if we seek, for example to make ourselves look good, by "doing good" then our actions will be true to this intention not to the declared one of doing good. This means that we may well not achieve either aim and because of the conflict of interests inherent in this thinking we may in fact achieve quite the reverse of either intent.

Our stated "good" intention has been destroyed by the ulterior motive, which being manipulative and covertly selfish is in reality quite negative.

So our outer good intention has been dropped into the hell of our true inner motivation.

This is frequently a problem when people start doing things for money and is a problem that many martial arts instructors face - how to make a living without selling my soul? How to teach out of true intention rather than teach for money. It is my experience that the best instructors are not concerned with money, they will often teach good students for little or no money. This is a question of "right mind" on both sides, otherwise put as "honest intent" and is the defining facet of an honest person.

Such people are rare but it is one of life's joys to meet and work with them.

Intention then *is* everything, in individual actions and in life; honest intention is the most powerful human attribute and the only real defence against manipulation physically, emotionally, politically and socially. Without it we cannot help but get taken up in the games people play, but with it we can see the games and be true to ourselves.

### **THE OPERA ISN'T OVER 'TILL THE FAT LADY SINGS!**

Never, ever, give up. Martial arts fighting spirit keeps the spark of one's inner intention glowing however bad things get.

The concept is simply to keep dealing with reality as it comes at you, and remember it doesn't stop until you die. So unless that has happened you don't give up. Simple as that.

Applying it can be tricky though. Fine in a life or death struggle keep the intention and the action going but as we move down the scale of conflict into everyday life it becomes clear that the intention once again becomes more important. While involved in business for example it is valid to "give up" one fight if it releases resources to maintain our central intention.

Once again it is vital to be clear what our true intentions are, so that we can chose which can be given up and which cannot, which can be shelved tactically and which are central to long term existence. Perhaps too it is valid to say "OK, I can accept defeat on this front but I will start up my activities elsewhere".

Whatever, even if it looks to others that you have given up, the important thing is not to do so inside and to be ready to exert your will when the opportunity arises.

Most interactions in life it seems are covered by social rules or laws of some kind making up a complex game. This leads to a measure of conflict limitation where trade-offs and resource allocation are important.

Effectively we chose to allocate a certain level of resources to a particular event, decide the probability of success and go ahead or not. If the result is not successful we may cut our losses, console ourselves we gave it our "best shot" and move elsewhere. This is a game we chose to play as a pragmatic means of damage limitation without putting everything on the line every time a problem arises - such is the structure society offers us.

Our best shot may be a great deal more than we think. How hard do you fight to save the life of your child - when do "allocated resources" run out? There are still some cases when you don't give up. Ever.

### **SURVIVAL NOT WINNING-THEN SURVIVING BETTER**

A martial artist's main concern in fighting is to survive, the desire to win being an aberration which could too easily get in the way of survival. Winning may be beyond our resources, and experience tells us that we cannot win every time - there are indeed few winners but many survivors.

Survival as a concept then is basic to fighting and so "surviving better" is basic to living. This in turn gives a better chance of survival to our offspring and of continued existence for ourselves.

Once our continued daily existence is dealt with what then? Having dealt with our most basic needs clearly we would want to extend up the hierarchy, and so meeting those needs becomes a matter of addressing those factors that will be most effective in prolonging and enhancing our existence.

This is not greed, rather a focused approach based on appropriate need, both physically and within our on-going social structure.

The survival approach suggests that we consider our lifestyle in terms of the quality of our survival rather than simply that "the one with the most toys when they die - wins".

Clearly the one with the most toys - dies. Survival quality is about enjoying life and positioning oneself in order to best continue that enjoyment.

### **THE MIND, BODY, SPIRIT NETWORK**

Often referred to as the bodymind, with spirit seen as the emotional aspect of our being.

"Fighting spirit" in martial arts relates to the inner fire at our emotional core and much of martial arts training is aimed at nurturing and channelling this in effective ways. In order to do this, as we have seen elsewhere, an integrative process is used with the intention of linking our intellectual mind, our physical body and our emotional spirit.

The concept of a network seems particularly useful here when each aspect of our being interacts with the other two in so many varied and complex ways. Our mind for example encompasses both conscious and subconscious which interlink with the physical via our direct control of actions and via the autonomic nervous system, then linking again with emotional behaviour in fight/flight/freeze or in our caring and growing phases.

Many approaches to life skills concentrate predominately on one or possibly two aspects but neglect the other only reaching it indirectly. Thus philosophical study tends to be mental/emotional with little physical content and this is exactly the situation supposedly found by Bodidharma the Indian monk who introduced martial arts to the Buddhist Shaolin temple in China.

Internal meditation over many years had led to such physical neglect that the monks could not meditate properly. Bodidharma is credited with rectifying this by introducing Indian martial arts practices for fitness and so established as it were a vital third leg to a two legged stool (without which the stool would fall over!).

We must remember that without any one of these three aspects adequately balanced with the others then we are like this three legged stool with one leg short or missing, unstable and limited.

Better to have all three a little shorter but well balanced than one over developed or missing and so reducing the effectiveness of the whole.

The necessity of physical development is quite obvious in martial arts especially in the "hard" or "external" arts. "Soft" or "internal" arts are in turn perhaps less obvious about physical development but do in fact seek to build both the emotional and physical together. Which brings us to the mental where apparently less importance is placed. However we find that this is more than adequately addressed through the writings and philosophy of martial arts, indeed ultimately it is the intellect which allows us to analyse and understand consciously what we are doing and so to progress. Interestingly this training also shows us how to then let go of conscious control so that we can more wholly exhibit our integrated nature. We learn to trust ourselves even when not in conscious control by allowing our subconscious, physical and spiritual selves to work together as a single team.

When we step into a physical confrontation each time it is new, unknown and out of our control. This is clearly analogous to many experiences in daily life (if rather more extreme). But we learn that we can handle it and survive. Martial arts training teaches us also that we do this best by allowing all of us to work together - each element carrying out its own most appropriate function.

Thus crudely : our body observes a threat which our mind recognises, our emotions gear up body and mind for action, the mind then directs what is appropriate leaving the subconscious and our body to effect the chosen course.

Take one piece out of the network and the response will be less effective and less appropriate. Panic for example being emotion and body without mind. Indecisiveness stemming from unclear emotion and ineffective technique resulting in an inability to actually do what mind and spirit believe is necessary.

We experience externally via our bodies, internally we live our lives with our emotions and in our minds. This three way feedback system needs to be finely tuned to work at its optimum and we neglect part of it at our peril. For example it is now recognised that stresses and unexpressed emotions are fed back into our bodies in the form of tensions which over a period of years become habitual if not released. These tensions can then build up to create clinical diseases. Cancer and cardiovascular problems now often being seen as developing in this way.

Better linkage with our bodies permits a free flow of emotional expression and freer use of our bodies in everyday tasks. In martial arts the release of such blockages to smooth operation is seen as vital to our performing most effectively at all levels of confrontation. Recognising real and fantasy fears, separating them, dealing with them, and maintaining optimum activity under high stress conditions is an ability of value everywhere from public speaking to appearing in court, or addressing a grievance to a neighbour.

Martial arts practice aims to deal with emotional blocks by going through the body with specific physical exercises and we often find that in this way we allow our subconscious to work through non-verbally many issues that are too complex or deeply embedded to reach with a conscious approach.

The mind, body, spirit net is shaped and moulded as a steel sword is forged in the fire of confrontation and cooling introspection. Martial arts teachers take on the role of a trusted facilitator in this exercise where we learn to understand our own, and others, body-mind.

The "safe" environment of a training hall is used in learning how to deal with confrontation, with others, often partners or teachers and with ourselves.

Here we find that issues have to be dealt with one way or another and only by facing them, recognising them and working with them can we pass on through to the other side. Issues not dealt with follow us forever like an intimidating opponent or a school bully - if we run there is always another one waiting round the corner. So in martial arts we learn to feel our emotions, to think clearly about the situation and to act decisively.

Ultimately we seek to be sufficiently integrated so that all we are aware of internally is thought, all others are aware of externally is action.

Being so integrated our emotions are fully in tune with our actions and so tensions and restraints on commitment are minimised. We can exist wholly in the moment, living in complete reality.

If we can achieve such a state then we do not of course, need to live like this all the time since many daily tasks require more from one part of us than others. What it does mean though is that information of different types will pass smoothly through the network and that independent operation of say the mind, on an intellectual problem, will take place in such a way that negligible conflicts arise. The result is supportive teamwork within a (relatively) seamless organism.

Such a person in martial arts is often referred to as a Master - not because they are the master of others but because they are considered to be master of themselves.

### **IRON FIST IN VELVET GLOVE**

The image of gentle power is an attractive one in romantic fiction but is also entirely appropriate to a martial artist, a business person or a parent, to name but three possibilities.

Indeed the great Tai Chi master Yang Cheng Fu is said to have felt to his opponents and training partners "like a needle in cotton". We can see from the idea of yin and yang that where there is hardness we will also find softness and that this increases effectiveness.

So we find that some martial artists seek to cloak hardness in softness while others cover softness with a hard exterior. The debate over which is better will probably go on forever but the point is that

we can choose by our physical training, our emotional make up and our mental approach just which mix we want.

This choice may be taken automatically and unconsciously or it may be quite deliberate. So if you want to be a hard person on the outside, difficult to get to know but soft inside for those able to stay the course, that is available to you. Equally if you would prefer to be warm and open on first meeting but with a hard core that too is possible, as is any state in between.

Perhaps the most desirable option is to be able to change this presentation at will as appropriate to the situation. Then we can indeed meet hard with soft and soft with hard at all levels - first being sensitive enough to judge which we are being offered.

Clearly sensitivity in judging an approach coupled with a varied range of response levels is advantageous in any relationship, personal or business - (and by the way how true is it that business isn't personal?) All it takes is to think about our actions and notice the effect, which is exactly what martial arts training is all about.

After that, with the confidence of knowing about our iron fist we can soften the outside a little with a velvet glove, this camouflages the iron and allows us to be easier to deal with on a daily basis. The thickness of the velvet is our choice.

The Taoist concept of yin/yang teaches us that this is a complete package, we must accept all or nothing and even if we don't then it keeps working anyway.

Many hard artists and business managers practice being hard all the time. Training the body to feel no pain, barricading the ego so that no emotions are available and with an intellect concerned only with material practicalities. This is the approach of a fighting robot and is a highly successful one in many areas. But these people cannot escape their soft centre which becomes super sensitive surrounded by an ever stiffer armoured shell. This can be an important way-of-being in high conflict situations but takes a great deal of effort to sustain for long periods. Its relevance perhaps lies in being able to switch into this role when needed.

The soft "needle-in-cotton" approach, by contrast suggests that we be open, receptive and sensitive on the outside i.e. aware. When appropriate we can then reveal a hardened core. In this way we can lessen confrontation on our passage through life, but with the necessary abilities to deal with it when it occurs. It also implies that we can choose how soft our "cotton wool" actually is. A resilient rapid healing coat may well be more useful than a hard shell which once cracked is much more difficult to heal. We can learn to trust the outside world and accept we will be hurt occasionally, rather than trusting no one at all.

Physically we can be aware of pain and heal quickly passing on to the next experience. Emotionally likewise - the next experience we have may be pleasurable and intellectually we can accept new ideas into our minds for testing rather than instantly rejecting. So we can have fun, resiliently interacting with the outside world but retaining a firm and stable central core.

## **VISUALISATION**

An early technique picked up by martial artists seems to have been that of visualisation. The primary use of this is in solo practice, for example in forms or in shadow boxing. Here an opponent is visualised as the movements are performed, then the feeling of contact is imagined. Varying types of opponent, size and so on or multiple numbers may also be visualised.

This is carried out by using the memory and the imagination to create a picture of the opponent in our minds that corresponds to our senses. Consequently it need not only be visual but may include sound, smell, touch (and even taste!)

Use of this mental model enables us to work out what is going on and what we may do in response. Timing, distancing etc. can be greatly improved. Indeed with a little practice we can start to see what many subtle forms are actually about, simply by putting an imaginary body in position.

Visualisation also has its uses for internal purposes and these are of interest for general health etc. In the same way that symbology works with the subconscious mind using existing symbols, we can create our own symbols internally which will have the desired effect.

For example, a stiff person may have trouble doing the splits but by visualising their legs as soft, pliant, elastic and their hips as soft and relaxed they may get a picture of themselves actually doing the splits, and feeling what it may be like to be comfortable in that position. Gradual practice with this visualisation will generally lead to an improved stretch.

The technique is well known also in other areas and the martial arts method of visualising oneself facing an opponent, looking into their eyes and defeating them has its parallel with the public speaker afraid of an audience. In this case the would-be speaker visualises themselves on stage speaking confidently to a responsive audience with warm applause. By visualising the success they are able to carry it through and create it in reality.

Similar techniques are used to deal with headaches or as a therapy in the case of some clinical disorders. In all cases, the process focuses our whole being and enlists the powerful subconscious in conjunction with our body to learn how to deal with a particular situation, gain an understanding of what success in that situation feels like and then to re-create the success for real.

Visualisation using symbols can also be a useful technique at times of great stress, for example when feeling overpowered, weak and vulnerable. In this situation focusing your mind on a symbol of strength and power (just lightly while continuing to operate) provides a centre for the subconscious which will then pull together the feelings and behaviour associated with that symbol.

So be careful! In a fight the symbol of a ferocious bear or tiger may be appropriate but in a socially stressful environment such as an interview or a court appearance something more measured may be called for, perhaps a sword or a calm and powerful person that one respects.

Ultimately you may find that the image required is simply oneself being strong, powerful and unruffled.

### **CONNECTING WITH THE DARK SIDE**

Covered to a large extent under the headings of yin/yang and integration it is worth dealing with the Dark side (yin) on its own, since western society does its best to deny this aspect of humanity.

The rebellious angry, chaotic, anarchic, destructive tendencies within us are part of our humanity.

By seeking to lock them away and deny them as we are generally encouraged to do they simply come out somewhere else either in our behaviour or our bodies in the form of tension or dis-ease.

A policy of honesty means that we also seek to be honest about our dark side in order to deal with it, to allow its expression creatively and positively, rather than destructively and negatively as so often happens otherwise.

It is obvious that aggressive, violent and sexual drives to name but three are extremely powerful and normal. Martial arts training seeks to contact these energies and allow them out in safety so that we may channel them into positive and useful patterns of behaviour that work for us in society.

By recognising the dark drives exemplified in our worst nightmares and being prepared to own them for ourselves (indeed where else do they come from other than our own minds?) we can bond them to our creative, loving selves and choose freely how we wish to be.

So when social/business confrontation arises we do not need to react by throwing our dark side into the attack as an ego defence. Instead we can take measured and appropriate action based on our emotions and thoughts at that time rather than tapping into an ever present pool of lurking blackness which we may seek to hide but which fights constantly to get out.

It's like having a boiler with no outlet that finally explodes or at best survives by blowing off steam through the safety valve. We would be better off creating an outlet for the energy to drive a turbine or other useful engine.

Connecting with our dark side may be achieved by noticing and becoming aware of our thoughts, emotions and behaviour patterns. This can be done by meditation and by physical training (especially partner work) again with inner awareness. Additionally partner work offers the opportunity for another input (from a partner/teacher) who can highlight limiting patterns for further meditation or practice.

Having the opportunity for example to legitimately hit others in training or competition may alert us to pleasure in causing pain, destroying others, manipulating or otherwise harming others. Similarly patterns such as talking big and acting small or similar dishonest behaviour can be seen by others and oneself (if we are prepared to see).

We can then seek to make changes to our internal landscape which will be reflected externally in our actions.

### **RHYTHM**

It is entirely possible that the first musician was a martial artist so fundamental is rhythm to both aspects of life. Indeed the whole universe seems to operate on the basis of all matter, from sub-nuclear particles to gas turbines having its own natural frequency. It is a basic principle of life and so is important everywhere.

A fighter's natural rhythm affects his timing and the speed/power with which he moves. Consequently we seek to harmonise with an opponent's rhythm in order to catch him at the weakest part of his cycle. Waiting until he is committed in an action we know that he is limited by his internal timing and there will be a certain amount of time for us to make a move before he can re-focus on the changed situation, we seek to harmonise in order to disrupt his timing and seize the initiative.

We also find in a wider context that we have cycles of tension/release, learning/consolidation, sleep/waking and that these cycles each have a rhythm at which we are comfortable to work. Finding this rhythm and learning to use it is an important matter for each of us. We can then take advantage of our natural harmony with life, this control of ourselves may be likened to control of an opponent - not by forcing oneself or the opponent to do something but by encouraging and enabling ourselves to do what we have already decided to, or in the case of an opponent we can augment his action while ensuring we are not there to receive it.

So we can learn to recognise the beat and rhythm of our lives, matching ourselves to them and grasping what is in our reach rather than reaching beyond our grasp. To mix metaphors - but then so much of martial arts and life is about mixing things up in a way that works for each of us. Like learning to dance we have a basic structure from the music and the steps, after that it's up to us and our partner to make of it whatever we want.

### **YOU GET OUT WHAT YOU PUT IN**

O.K. not specifically a martial arts principle or technique - but how many of the others are exclusive either?

Yes, yet another common principle "you get out what you put in" means practice - physical practice in a training hall with the best instructor you can find, where emotional and mental practice will also

be called for. Then afterwards outside the training hall - mental and emotional practice on a daily basis preferably with physical practice, either solo or with a close partner.

You can achieve many of the benefits of martial arts concepts without going the martial arts route - meditation for example may lead to some and psychotherapy to others, but not all, particularly not the physical and integrative benefits.

You can go to those places that martial arts has lifted its ideas from, but then you only get part of the story and you will still need to practice those disciplines.

There is no getting away from the need to serve an apprenticeship, to do the time, pay the entry fee or whatever other phrase you care to use. A related maxim - "no pain, no gain" also applies since change generally seems to have some conflict attached to it. The key is in how we manage the change and associated pain, and we should be wary of the extremist interpretation that "more pain equals more gain", this is not the logical statement it appears.

Martial arts practice is a long and often difficult path but you get to be the way you choose. No one can do it for you, there are no short cuts or machines but you get to be how you are permanently, 24 hours a day every day. No need to switch on, plug in, shoot up, light up or drink up.

Those who travel this way find it takes a lifetime - even if they stop training it never seems to leave their psyche and many return after a time away. Related paths e.g. meditation work on the body through the mind but I believe the martial arts are unique in that they offer the opportunity to train all aspects of mind, body and spirit together often using the body to reach the mind and emotions. This makes their study suited to people of all intellects and abilities.

Only one thing is necessary - practice.

## **POSITIONING**

The art of taking up a position which has leverage relative to an opponent, positioning, includes posture, posturing and stance, it is always relative to the other person. In Tai Chi for example, this is all-important, and one seeks to move from one position to the next without losing this leverage. We become aware of possibilities for our opponent - how they may put out their power and aim to be in a position where this is minimized or at least easily dealt with, e.g. by absorbing and neutralising.

We should be careful that this is a dynamic state since a too rigid posture in life or negotiation of any sort creates vulnerabilities. Taken one step further the strategy of posturing may well be to take a position which is apparently vulnerable in order to lure over commitment. In relationships however, it may be important to 'come down' from such a strategy and reveal genuine vulnerabilities in order to develop trust with others.

On the other hand, the Tai Chi principle of 'being previous', i.e. acting before the action of others, can set up a position which in itself is sufficient defence, e.g. a big reputation is a posturing mechanism which 'sets up' students into belief of the unassailable qualities of a 'master'. Thus potential challengers are dissuaded by their own expectation of failure. The master has acted even before the student considered acting, and is thus already defeated.

Such mind games are played out daily in the power struggle of life. For large institutions it is a way of life, also for governments, each of whom set themselves up as unaccountable final arbiters when dealing with individual citizens.

Such positions are not just a defence, but also a passive attack in that they set up the playing field and the rules in advance of a conflict, with the pure intention of self-protection.

We can therefore see that positioning is not just about leverage relative to one specific individual, but takes account of the whole environment. A good example is that an obviously defensive posture is a commitment already in place. Often therefore the best posture may be one that is completely

open, sensitive and aware, and able most quickly to accommodate any approach, whether positive or negative.

This is particularly the case when entering unknown territories where one does not have a pre-established position.

## **STRUCTURE**

Chaos theory tells us that even in chaos there is order and we find that even in the most rigid mechanical structures a degree of freedom or compliance is needed somewhere. The structures we find in life are about change and their flexibility (or ability to accommodate chaotic events) is determined by the amount of change they have evolved to accommodate. These structures are constantly being broken down and reformed - some have very short lifetimes, others rather longer.

It may be argued that monolithic structure - large and solid - is also a good way to survive change, and so it may be, but little real life takes place in this way.

Physically we find that static rigid bodily structures do not serve us well, whereas flexible ones do. These are not locked at the joints, but involve balancing the muscle groups and are constantly reforming their tensions to achieve dynamic structures, i.e. instantaneous linked order states, each ideally matched to the forces in play at that instant.

The same seems true within a business context - each new structure growing seamlessly out of the previous one and each optimally suited to the situation at that time. Our ability to change structures quickly is consequently a major factor in dealing with new situations.

However, it is no good just being able to change quickly if the structure is less than the best we are capable of - fast change from one poor structure to another results in a fighter being pushed around or a company lurching unstably through disruptive cycles. As an individual in a team we may experience this as over-reaction or panic.

Physical exercise - posture testing.

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