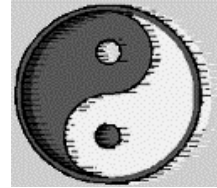


# Mastering the Art of War within the Self

By Timothy ©

## Section 1: Embracing the Art of War Within

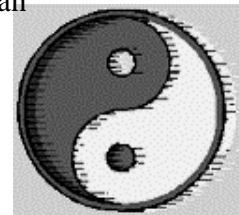
The most challenging war that any of us will ever have to fight (and fight it, we must) is the ongoing struggle to subdue our self-limiting and self-destructive patterns of thinking and feeling. It's an undeniable fact that whatever thoughts and feelings we hold onto with sufficient focus and determination will manifest themselves in our lives in some way. Therefore, unless and until we've consciously cleansed even the subconscious thought/feeling patterns that lie beneath every word we speak and every action we perform, we can't soar in the clouds because we're clipping our own wings during each moment of each day. In fact, unless and until we've profoundly cleansed our minds and hearts, we can't see our own true reflections clearly enough to know who we really are and what we came onto this Earth to do.



Johann Wolfgang von Goethe said, "Before doing, one must BE." Simply speaking, he meant that the key to being effective in whatever we undertake is to see and respond only to the truth that lies beyond outward appearances. Doing this requires us to master skills that will enable us to cut straight through multiple layers of illusion. That's why studying the thought process behind the art of war is so perfect for teaching us how to function effectively in any interactive environment. The material on the following pages will guide you to a deeper understanding of how to effectively apply the lessons of The Art of War to your experiences within any group setting.

## Section 2: The Art of War is the Art of Peace in Disguise

Sun Tzu Bing Fa, or Sun Tzu's Fighting Strategies, known to us as The Art of War, clearly isn't a manual for warmongers or bullies. Its author, an accomplished warrior and sage, knew all too intimately the many forms of devastation experienced by those who participate in armed conflict, as well as by those unfortunate enough to simply live in or near battle sites. Yet, Sun Tzu wasn't naïve about the need to fight when a determined aggressor confronts us. So resorting to fighting as a last resort was his perfectly balanced response to the nagging challenge of living in dangerous times in a place where a violent death could sweep a warrior away without the slightest warning.



Sun Tzu Bing Fa oozes the profound realization that in order to internalize the planning and execution skills illustrated in the 13 chapters of the author's ancient classic, a warrior must first come to intimately know the true Self. This Self is the unchanging foundation of the endless variety of illusions that constantly besiege most people's minds. This unchanging Self is also stillness or peace, and is our core essence. When the

warrior's mind enters the sanctuary of this stillness, the treasures buried within Sun Tzu's brief manual are released to flow freely into that warrior's psychological bank account.

The disciplined mind of a true warrior isn't at all inclined to initiate unnecessary conflict, and when confronted by inevitable conflict, consistently deploys what Bruce Lee called "the art of fighting without fighting". Thomas Cleary's translation (upon which the remainder of this analytical essay is based) supports this conclusion by firmly establishing the roots of SunTzu's teachings in the heart of the Tao. Cleary's introductory chapter, headlined "Taoism and the Art of War," sets the tone for a proper understanding of Sun Tzu's message by opening with the following story:

According to an old story, a lord of ancient China once asked his physician, a member of a family of healers, which of them was the most skilled in the art.

The physician, whose reputation was such that his name became synonymous with medical science in China, replied, "My eldest brother sees the spirit of sickness and removes it before it takes shape, so his name does not get out of the house.

"My elder brother cures sickness when it is still extremely minute, so his name does not get out of the neighborhood.

"As for me, I puncture veins, prescribe potions, and massage skin, so from time to time my name gets out and is heard among the lords." Pg. 1

As Cleary goes on to point out, the physician was indicating that his eldest brother was the most skillful healer because he could anticipate the path that imbalance and disease would take and then cancel their journey at its starting point. This, of course, is the essence and genius of fighting without fighting. It's also the key to injecting peaceful interaction patterns into human relationships.

We can reconcile this seemingly contradictory idea of fighting without fighting by understanding the true nature of conflict, which is a natural occurrence in the process of being in relationships with other people. First of all, it's important to note that living in peace doesn't mean we can avoid all disagreements with our partners in our various types of relationships and still expect to keep those relationships healthy. Rather, peaceful relations mean that all partners agree to function within relationships as if everyone's highest good is of the utmost importance. When this sense of serving others prevails, the participants can easily identify win-win resolutions for any conflict that arises. High levels of trust and compassion result naturally from such a peace-oriented approach to dealing with conflict.

Now that we've drawn a realistic picture of peace in action, let's turn our attention to understanding conflict more thoroughly so that we can use Sun Tzu's fighting strategies to activate this peace in our own relationships. The following excerpt from a communication textbook chapter that I wrote about interpersonal relationships will further highlight the fact that each conflict we experience really conceals within its bowels an opportunity for us to master the art of peace.

*Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals.*

By breaking down the terms in our definition above, we can see how all kinds of everyday situations present us with conflict, which in turn forces us to choose actions that either bind us to our relationship partners or separate us from them. Let's isolate the terms and discuss them one by one.

The idea of an *expressed struggle* refers to both parties' awareness that the total fulfillment of their personal desires at the moment will automatically restrict the other's fulfillment.

If you're in any type of relationship with another person, then you're *interdependent*. This simply means that your personal growth and development is influenced in some way by the nature of the energy that you exchange with that person.

The issue of *perceived incompatible goals* boils down to one of two kinds of scenarios. (1) You and your partner want the same item and you both believe that if one gets it, the other won't. (2) You and your partner are moving in different directions, and each of you wants the other to go where you're headed. In either case, you both perceive that someone will win and someone will lose.

*Perceived scarce rewards* means that neither of you believes that both of you can completely get what you want from the situation. For instance, if there's only one muffin on the table, and you both want a whole muffin, then splitting it may at first feel inadequate for each of you.

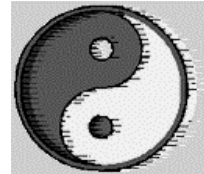
*Interference* in the context of natural conflicts doesn't mean sabotage. Rather, it refers to how your complete fulfillment may interfere with your partner's total fulfillment in the conflict situation. Pp. 13, 14

As you can see, types of conflict situations can range from extremely minor disagreements that arouse no anger responses in either partner, to major fights leading to broken relationships, physical harm, or even death. Conflict itself is nothing but the existence of competing interests, which are neutral per se. Our motives and our level of skill in the art of conflict resolution, then, are the main factors that determine how much emotional intensity we demonstrate in our responses to conflict situations. Therefore, the more capable we are of "seeing the spirit of sickness and removing it before it takes shape," the more skillfully we can control our emotional reactions and adapt ourselves to the weather, the terrain, and to others' actions in times of conflict. In this way we demonstrate mastery of the art of "using the sword as a scalpel" to neutralize the spirit of dissension before it forms. This peacemaking gift is truly the art of war, as practiced by the authentic peaceful warrior.

When, with still minds, we use this understanding as a beacon to help us follow our paths to peace through the forest of conflict, then Sun Tzu's wisdom can guide us accordingly.

### Section 3: Living the Art of War Daily

A true peaceful warrior understands that the ultimate purpose of every human relationship is to teach us about ourselves. This statement may sound relatively naïve, but the deeper we go into it, the more powerfully liberating we discover it to be. This doesn't mean that the key to understanding relationships is pumping up our egos by believing that the world revolves around our personalities, no matter how engaging they may be. What the statement really means is that all of our relationships are outward expressions of our inner states of being, so by understanding the patterns of our interactions with others, we can come to understand the areas of our lives that need to be balanced.



Our family members, friends, and work associates are really just mirrors for us, channels by which the great Law of Correspondence can operate in the physical world. But now, instead of “as above, so below,” we get “as within, so without.” Since our internal states of being are necessarily always reflected back to us in the form of our external circumstances, however we think and feel will determine what kinds of experiences we attract to ourselves, as well as determining how we perceive and respond to those experiences.

The factor that allows our relationships to teach us so much about our own lives is the act of opening our hearts to the dance of human interaction. Only a heart that's open to the subtle and obvious messages expressed by the people in our lives is free to connect directly with the essence of life and practice what it truly means to Love Thy Neighbor. This love shows itself in the form of unconditional acceptance of others, flaws and all.

So the real function of having people in our lives is for them to reflect back to us what we project into our life space, and for us to reflect back to them what they send us. We all consciously engage in this reflecting activity according to our levels of spiritual (Self) awareness. It's the process by which we grow into mature adults. It's also the process by which we come to understand the true impact that we have on the energies operating within and around ourselves. The beauty in all of this is that the better we understand how to work with -- not against -- these energies, the more adept we become at bringing forth (consciously creating) consequences that support and match our vision of life.

Realizing what relationships can do for us and how conflicts naturally arise within them helps us to understand deeply when to compete with others, and when to cooperate with them. Competitiveness, for instance, is most appropriate and effective when applied during participation in activities designed for competitive involvement. Some obvious examples of appropriate competitive settings are: negotiating contracts, arguing a case in a court of law, and playing a sport. In these types of situations, trickery and deception are highly valued and admired as long as the participants execute their competitive strategies within the agreed-upon rules that govern the game or process. Comparatively, trust and emotional safety tend to play relatively small parts in the relationships between competitors.

Our personal relationships (including work team members) are very different, however. They can't sustain long periods of competition between the participants because, unlike competitive activities, they thrive on trust and emotional safety. Also unlike competitive activities, the appearance of conflict in personal relationships intensifies the need to withhold judgment in order to activate the healing powers of true compassion. In short, our personal relationships with family members, friends, and work team members are designed to function as forums for perfecting the art of creative cooperation.

Sun Tzu Bing Fa obviously focuses only on strategic conduct within the competitive activity of war between enemies. However, any peaceful warrior with a sophisticated understanding of the principles taught by the ancient master can also use them to confront and eradicate potentially destructive conflicts in relationships that are based on trust and emotional safety. Since the main purpose of this paper is to arm the peaceful warrior with a basic foundation for tapping into the creative potential offered by personal and work relationships, I've focused my attention on some of the chapters that appear to be most conducive to adapting Sun Tzu's teachings to the creation of cooperative outcomes. Specifically, then, I'll apply selected verses from the following six chapters to my discussion of how I practice tai chi as the art of peace (chapter titles from the Gagliardi version; translations from the Cleary version):

- Chapter 1: Analysis
- Chapter 3: Planning An Attack
- Chapter 4: Positioning
- Chapter 5: Momentum
- Chapter 6: Weakness and Strength
- Chapter 8: Adaptability

In each of these chapters, I'll supply Thomas Cleary's translation of the verse upon which I wish to comment, followed by my commentary explaining one or more of the many ways that you could apply the verse to help expand the spirit of cooperation in your relationships.

### **Chapter 1: Analysis**

***Master Sun: Military action is important to the nation – it is the ground of death and life, the path of survival and destruction, so it is imperative to examine it.***

Since we have already established that conflict is natural within any relationship, the real question is how one should handle inevitable conflicts. While some disagreements should be avoided for obvious reasons, it's unhealthy to fear conflict and thus to run from it whenever it surfaces. Therefore, knowing how to confront conflict is important to all personal relationships. When neither relationship partner has skill in managing and resolving conflict, the death of that relationship is usually just a heated argument away.

***Master Sun: Therefore measure in terms of five things, use these assessments to make comparisons, and thus find out what the conditions are. The five things are the way, the weather, the terrain, the leadership, and discipline.***

Sun Tzu defines the way as inducing people to have the same aim as the leadership with whom they share life and death. In the context of personal relationships outside of military concerns, the way can also mean the effective use of empathic listening skills. Empathic listening is the therapeutic style of listening with one's entire being to the entire being of another, while simultaneously withholding judgment about the other. Mastering this practice is extremely difficult, because we've been socialized to judge others automatically. However, empathic listening is the most powerful tool available to humans who wish to connect deeply with others' hearts.

The weather can easily be considered to be the emotional climate within the relationship. In order to keep our relationships healthy, we need to continuously monitor how both partners are feeling about the relationship's development.

It's useful to think of the terrain as the ground upon which we engage in the relationship with our partner. Since relationships are nothing more than ongoing interaction patterns, we meet each other in mutually agreeable ways. We also embrace certain topics/issues and avoid others in each of our relationships. As you can see, it's essential for us to study the "shape" of each relationship we have so that we can intimately know its terrain.

Leadership in a relationship isn't simply a matter of who's officially in charge. At any given time in a healthy relationship, either partner may take the lead on a particular issue when that partner's strength lies in that arena. Also, in times of conflict, one or both partners invoke negative interaction patterns. Peaceful resolution only arrives when one partner initiates an interaction pattern driven by the intention to resolve the conflict to both partners' mutual satisfaction (the win-win approach). This initiation is another, informal, form of leadership.

Finally, both partners should be intimately familiar with their own and the other's level of discipline in conflict situations. This means they should assess the degree to which the partner tends to uphold or break their mutually established rules of engagement regarding conflicts that arise between them. A partner who abandons the rules quickly when anger arises can be said to have little discipline, while a partner who honors those rules even amid a moderate to high level of anger can be said to have great discipline.

***Master Sun: A military operation involves deception. Even though you are competent, appear to be incompetent. Though effective, appear to be ineffective.***

The kind of deception that applies to military operations doesn't work effectively in personal relationships. Since these relationships are ideally built on mutual trust, both partners should tell each other the truth about their lives. However, the kind of yielding that's a basic principle of tai chi is also a form of deception in that it enables the yielding

partner to stick to the other and follow them into their center. Skillful use of yielding during a conflict dissipates the aggressor's attacking energy by making it appear as if the receiver is backing off. However, by sticking and following, the yielding partner can bounce the other's energy back to them. I call this skill "mirroring". When performed effectively, mirroring is difficult for the attacker to detect. And when combined with deep compassion, it becomes a powerful healing tool.

***Master Sun: Attack when they are unprepared, make your move when they do not expect it.***

In all close relationships, the partners become very familiar with each other's interaction response patterns. That's why our closest relations also tend to be the most adept at pushing our emotional buttons. Pushing each other's emotional buttons helps each of us to feel a sense of control within relationships.

Therefore, we can neutralize a partner's attempts to push our buttons by simply changing our response patterns when the partner doesn't expect it. This strategy, an outgrowth of empathic listening, is guaranteed to force the partner to seek other ways to elicit the responses that they want from us. Using this approach means completing the entire tai chi cycle of yielding, listening, attaching, sticking, following, and entering (the other's center), in order to neutralize the other's manipulation attempts.

***Master Sun: The formation and procedure used by the military should not be divulged beforehand.***

As you might expect, the self-control method described above works best when our partner doesn't know what we're doing. It's important to remember that even benignly forcing others to venture outside of their comfort zones tends to produce unpredictable and intense reactions from them. So it's best to quietly control our inner reactions to our partner's button-pushing efforts, all the while remaining aware of the adjustments that we're causing in our partner.

***Master Sun: The one who figures on victory at headquarters before even doing battle is the one who has the most strategic factors on his side. The one who figures on inability to prevail at headquarters before doing battle is the one who has the least strategic factors on his side. The one with many strategic factors in his favor wins, the one with few strategic factors in his favor loses – how much the more so for one with no strategic factors in his favor. Observing the matter in this way, I can see who will win and who will lose.***

Our mind is our headquarters, the hub of all of our activities. The more sensitive and aware your mind is to your surroundings, the greater your ability to read and respond intuitively to a wide variety of circumstances and interactions. The key to successfully figuring on victory at headquarters is to train yourself to be constantly mindful. Practicing the tai chi principles of watching the breath and balancing yin and

yang in all of your daily activities is the hidden key to having the most strategic factors on our side.

### **Chapter 3: Planning An Attack**

***Master Sun:* The general rule for use of the military is that it is better to keep a nation intact than to destroy it. It is better to keep an army intact than to destroy it, better to keep a division intact than to destroy it, better to keep a battalion intact than to destroy it, better to keep a unit intact than to destroy it. Therefore those who win every battle are not really skillful – those who render others' armies helpless without fighting are the best of all.**

Tai chi is rooted in turning others' attacking energies to our advantage, thus neutralizing the other's ability to harm us. It's foolish to seek to totally destroy people who are important to us just because you may be angry with them. Of course, while your anger is at its peak, you may find yourself trying to figure out ways make them suffer more than you are. However, when you succumb to these kinds of impulses, you're merely demonstrating your lack of skills in controlling your emotions and in using the resulting liberated chi to reconnect with the best parts of the relationship.

Those who continuously seek opportunities to show their dominance in conflict situations usually leave long trails of the mangled carcasses of their partners' self-esteem behind them. That's why absorbing your partner's anger-inspired attacks, allowing that energy to fizzle harmlessly, and then following through by establishing common ground to refuel the relationship is best of all. This surely requires a great deal of human relations skill.

***Master Sun:* Therefore the superior militarist strikes while schemes are being laid. The next best is to attack alliances. The next best is to attack the army. The lowest is to attack a city. Siege of a city is only done as a last resort.**

When we first become aware of a situation's potential to deteriorate into a major war, that's the best time to step back and renew our commitment to empathic listening. This approach will often disrupt the partner's attacking momentum. Even if it doesn't kill the momentum immediately, it'll still facilitate your reading of the intention behind your partner's attack strategy. Once you know the attack strategy, then you can respond in the appropriate direction by yielding and moving in behind your partner's recoil.

Attacking alliances in personal relationships may be useful if your partner recruits others to gang up on you. You can accomplish this by inducing the others to question your partner's logic or position. In effect, the partner becomes the target of the others' attack in this case.

If you can't avoid an argument, it's advisable that you stay focused on the point of contention. In some cases, stating your case effectively is the only way to get your partner to abort an attack. When this is so, you must make every effort to remain as

rational as possible so that you don't get pulled into a downwardly spiraling emotional exchange.

The most destructive and wasteful way to handle an argument is to start bringing up old wounds that aren't directly connected to the current conflict. This is like attacking innocent citizens in a military conflict, and it only enrages our partner. The only time you should go off on a tangent during an argument is when you need to distract your partner because he or she has completely lost emotional control.

***Master Sun: Therefore one who is good at martial arts overcomes others' forces without battle, conquers others cities without siege, destroys others' nations without taking a long time.***

Mastering the tai chi movements of yin and yang in everyday life wins others' hearts. When you win others' hearts, they give you the "keys to the city", and they place important parts of their lives in the peaceful warrior's (your) capable hands.

***Master Sun: So there are five ways of knowing who will win. Those who know when to fight and when not to fight are victorious. Those who discern when to use many or few troops are victorious. Those whose upper and lower ranks have the same desire are victorious. Those who face the unprepared with preparation are victorious. Those whose generals are able and are not constrained by their governments are victorious. These five are the ways to know who will win.***

It's common knowledge that we should master the art of picking our battles, because some battles are not worth fighting. You should also use no more force than necessary when you do fight. You'll be able to meet these conditions most consistently if you constantly practice observing your deepest psychological patterns. That way, you won't be constrained by mental habits that force you to react to situations in predictable and negative ways.

***Master Sun: So it is said that if you know others and know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles; if you do not know others but know yourself, you win one and lose one; if you do not know others and do not know yourself, you will be imperiled in every single battle.***

This is my personal favorite of Sun Tzu's verses. The tai chi classics speak frequently about knowing your opponent while your opponent doesn't know you as the key to effectively applying tai chi fighting skills. If you understand your own patterns and tendencies in certain situations, and if you can read others' intentions in times of conflict, then you can neutralize or counter any attack launched against you.

On the other hand, even if you understand yourself well, failing to read the other's intentions leaves you vulnerable to too many potential surprises. Therefore, if the attack is particularly clever, you may be caught off guard and be rendered defenseless against such an attack. In some of these cases, you discover that you can recover effectively.

However, in others, we can't. Being able to guarantee consistently favorable results in conflict situations is best.

Not knowing your own mind, and not being able to read others' intentions, obviously brings you disasters of all kinds in any of your relationships. If you aren't alert to the ebbs and flows of chi within your relationships, I don't see how you can legitimately claim to be a serious peaceful warrior, because in that condition you can't possibly apply the lessons learned in a training center to your life outside of that. This is disaster for those who would be peaceful warriors.

#### **Chapter 4: Positioning**

***Master Sun: In ancient times skillful warriors first made themselves invincible, and then watched for vulnerability in their opponents.***

Contrary to popular belief (or more accurately, delusion), security is a nice ideal, but it does not truly exist. Death and all kinds of other life challenges can overtake us at any time without warning. Warriors who understand this and surrender their fear of death have always tended to be the hardest ones to defeat. That's because warriors who aren't worrying about living or dying, or success or failure, but are focused fully in the present moment, are free to remain relaxed, even in the most challenging emotional situations. Playing tai chi provides continuous practice in the art of remaining relaxed, which enables your energy to be fully available for you to use as a particular situation dictates. This is a sign of true flexibility.

Remaining relaxed is also the key to invincibility because while in a relaxed state, a warrior reveals no weaknesses. When your weaknesses are invisible to others, those same others are wise not to attack you. Thus, at such times you appear invincible to those who would contest against you.

On the other hand, the calmer you remain in times of conflict, the more alert you are to weaknesses in others because more of our energy is available for reading a situation accurately and responding with the totality of your being. This same alertness also helps you to spot opportunities to heal conflicts in relationships by refraining from judging others and from rubbing their noses in their obvious mistakes.

***Master Sun: Invincibility is in oneself; vulnerability is in the opponent. Therefore skillful warriors are able to be invincible, but they cannot cause opponents to be vulnerable. That is why it is said that victory can be discerned but not manufactured.***

Wise warriors know that we can only be truly responsible for our own responses to how others behave toward us. No one "makes" you mad. You (either subconsciously or consciously) select an anger response when you feel disrespected. Therefore, if you can stay in control of your emotions in the face of mistreatment, you can make yourself invincible.

In the same way, you don't "make" others angry. This means that others only show you their weaknesses if they're unable to control their responses. Nonetheless, you can and should familiarize yourself with the patterns of their responses to you in various conflict situations. When you leave your partner with no weaknesses to exploit, while staying mindful of the partner's vulnerable areas, then you can speak and act at the optimum moments, consistently creating the kinds of conflict resolutions that you desire most.

***Master Sun: To perceive victory when it is known to all is not really skillful. Everyone calls victory in battle good, but it is not really good.***

As I indicated earlier in this paper, yielding so that the other's attacking energy dissipates harmlessly is the art of fighting without fighting. This art is as subtle as it is highly sophisticated, but it's most effective in strengthening our relationships. When tai chi is used effectively, it doesn't attract the multitudes' attention or cause them to be impressed with highly sensational actions. However, not having access to this skill leaves you with little choice but to overpower others in heated conflicts. Since few people are really skillful in the art of peace, no wonder so many relationships fall apart.

***Master Sun: In ancient times those known as good warriors prevailed when it was easy to prevail. Therefore the victories of good warriors are not noted for cleverness or bravery. Therefore their victories in battle are not flukes. Their victories are not flukes because they position themselves where they will surely win, prevailing over those who have already lost.***

Again, maintaining control over our emotional responses makes us invincible to others. In the invincible state, the slightest mistake by an imbalanced partner makes your task of redirecting negative energy relatively easy. Consistency in maintaining control proves that this skill is no fluke. From such a position, the peaceful warrior always enjoys a probability of success approaching 100%.

***Master Sun: Therefore a victorious army first wins and then seeks battle; a defeated army first battles and then seeks victory.***

Skillful tai chi means maintaining control of our emotions, which renders the partner's attack ineffective before it forms. By starting out victoriously, you can then lead your partner straight to the mirror that shows the path to realizing his or her full potential. When you lack self-control, you help to create cesspools of animosity that force you to try to salvage the trust and honor that you habitually squander.

Years ago when I was playing basketball, I fouled a high-scoring player while he was elevating to shoot the ball. He turned to me angrily and barked, "I'll bust you in your mouth!" I was fully aware of my response options, so I chose a calm dismissive approach. I merely said (in matter-of-fact agreement), "I'm sure you will," and walked away so the game could continue. This left him surprised and befuddled, so he

immediately refocused on the game, and that was the last of our conflict. If I had allowed his threat to destabilize my mind, there's no telling what kind of destruction might've happened to either or to both of us.

## **Chapter 5: Momentum**

***Master Sun: Therefore those skilled at the unorthodox are infinite as heaven and earth, inexhaustible as the great rivers. When they come to an end, they begin again, like the days and months; they die and are reborn, like the four seasons.***

Tai chi is counterintuitive in that it's designed to instill in its practitioners the habit of relaxing fully in times of crisis or emergency, whereas our natural instinct is to tense up at such times. But when you successfully maintain your composure during challenging circumstances, you remain free to choose from among a vast array of possible responses. At such times, the more attuned you are to the flow of life as you encounter it in the moment, the more you experience what Bruce Lee referred to when describing the action of his body while he was in a transcendental state: "I don't hit; it hits all by itself." Playing tai chi is an open invitation to live your whole life that way. In summary, the right thing is done at the right time, and life itself directs the action.

## **Chapter 6: Weakness And Strength**

***Master Sun: Military formation is like water – the form of water is to avoid the high and go to the low, the form of a military force is to avoid the full and attack the empty; the flow of water is determined by the earth, the victory of a military force is determined by the opponent.***

We should never simply work hard. We should also work smart. Working smart means using your energy and time to their fullest capacities. Bruce Lee said, "Don't waste yourself." The best way to practice this advice is to avoid slamming against the strongest parts of your partner's fortresses, and instead to find unguarded openings and enter therein. Tai chi teaches you to move out of harm's way while simultaneously following the path of least resistance to reach your partner's heart space unimpeded. Of course, your partners are ultimately responsible for whatever patterns you discover in them and for whatever weaknesses you can identify in them as openings for healing.

***Master Sun: So a military force has no constant formation, water has no constant shape: the ability to gain victory by changing and adapting according to the opponent is called genius.***

Once again, maintaining self-control is the key to effectively fighting without fighting. And this skill naturally produces the level of adaptability that enables the peaceful warrior to flow like water in almost any situation. Mastering this ability is seeing the spirit of sickness and removing it before it takes shape.

## Chapter 8: Adaptability

***Master Sun:* Therefore generals who know all possible adaptations to take advantage of the ground know how to use military forces. If generals do not know how to adapt advantageously, even if they know the lay of the land they cannot take advantage of it. If they rule armies without knowing the arts of complete adaptivity, even if they know what there is to gain, they cannot get people to work for them.**

Peaceful warriors are deeply in tune with the flow of life as it emanates from the heart of creation. The ability to adapt is the natural product of complete surrender to the Supreme Creator. Therefore, tai chi can't be mastered by intellectual investigation alone, because none of us can consistently memorize and apply the endless variety of options that are always available to us. Instead, emptying your mind and relaxing your body frees you to allow Infinite Reality to fill you with "the knowing that passeth all understanding." This freedom is the essence of adaptivity.

When you're rigid in your thinking, you unnecessarily limit your own options, and consequently, your outcomes. So you miss openings to enter for healing, and you miss opportunities to inspire others to give you their best efforts. When you miss these chances as they arise, all of your knowledge becomes useless.

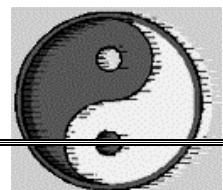
***Master Sun:* Therefore the considerations of the intelligent always include both benefit and harm. As they consider benefit, their work can expand; as they consider harm, their troubles can be resolved.**

By maintaining our central equilibrium in our tai chi practice, we gain access to the unlimited energies of heaven and earth. We also more easily maintain our balance, even when we need to adjust to difficult conditions. In the final analysis, the most successful people are those who demonstrate the following three characteristics. They clearly understand their life's purpose and know where they are headed, they don't fail to recognize and take advantage of beneficial opportunities, and they use potential and existing obstacles as tools to inspire expansion of their consciousness. These are the characteristics of the peaceful warrior.

## Section 4: Conclusion

As you can see, the fundamental benefits of tai chi chuan are extremely valuable. But these benefits also constitute merely the first steps towards realizing the ultimate gifts that the art helps to bring into the dedicated player's life.

Even the highly advanced skill of issuing chi in a fight is still only an intermediate step towards tai chi's ultimate application, which is just now beginning to reveal itself to a small number of players outside of China. This ultimate application of tai chi chuan is its use as a bridge by which human beings can consciously channel pure spirit energy into



physical expression and then use that channeled energy to create desired conditions. In this light, the scope of the benefits of chi cultivation has now grown from individual to cosmic proportions. In other words, any tai chi player who successfully cultivates and learns how to direct chi with the mind will then be in a position to render service to the planet as a messenger of light, love, and peace.

Since physical combat no longer constitutes the primary application of tai chi martial skills, it's fitting that the opening of the human portal to the eternal dimension of spirit has replaced fighting as the art's highest and best use. Such is the key to mastering the art of fighting without fighting.

All of this means that although tai chi fighting applications may appear to have almost disappeared, they've actually just retreated to a subtler level: the astral (mental/emotional) dimension, which is the next frontier upon which humanity is being challenged to master chi cultivation and projection. Success at this level will place skillful tai chi players in a position to stand firmly at the forefront of the current world movement to raise the spiritual consciousness of the entire human race. In fact, out of all the people who are fighting for this planet's and the human species' survival, such tai chi spiritual warriors will be among those who're best equipped to lead the forces of light against the forces of negativity in battles for the hearts and minds of the unsuspecting masses.