

IMAGINATION: THE KEY TO HIGHER SKILLS

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In this article, I will discuss the imagination process, the utilization of this process in T'ai Chi Ch'uan for the obtainment of higher level skills, and, finally, the role of imagination in human existence and the search for ultimate truth.

Imagination has been used to solve and create some of the most complex problems of man. For the most part, imagination is a private and personal thinking process that is active in all living things which possess consciousness.

And, with a little awareness and practice, one can develop imagination into a very powerful tool for living.

No limitations

Imagination is most commonly linked to the creative process, usually manifested through the arts or problem solving. Imagination, however, has no limitations and is far more active in our lives than we realize.

The imagination process is a synthesis of thinking functions harmonizing to create a "reality."

That reality may be as simple as choosing a restaurant at which to eat lunch, or as grand as a unifying theory of physics based upon sub-microscopic particles not yet discovered. The process is the same, the data quite different.

There are, for our general purposes, three thinking functions involved in the imagination process: subliminal/intuitive, visual and analytical.

Three functions

The subliminal/intuitive function does almost all the work. Here, either inputted data or self-generated data is processed for the purpose of creating an idea.

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In many ways it is like a computer running a program, cross-referencing stored information and coming up with a solution. Unlike the computer, the subliminal/intuitive process is not logically objective.

Indeed, it is quite biased. It is biased by your very being, your emotions, your experience, your perceptions; all are a part of this process.

If you're well practiced, all of your stored memories are accessed and you may even go beyond that as well!

The subliminal/intuitive processing ability really depends on the efficiency of the programming. (See Attributes of a Master, T'AI CHI, August 1987)

Staying with the computer analogy, visualization becomes the interactive display for the idea. The quality and size of the display monitor plays a very important part in the process.

Everyone chooses their size

People possess monitors the size of those found in amusement parks, 10 stories high with wrap-around screens and sensurround hi-fi audio.

On these screens, the idea is displayed with immense detail. But many people use no more than a "Watchman" size display, and some rely only on audio!

Everyone chooses how much of the display that they will use. This is because the analytical thinking functions are the controllers of the display.

From the minute we begin our formal education, our screen size begins to diminish. More emphasis is

placed on analytical/logical thinking and rote memorization than imagination and visual thinking.

There is little objective reason to use visual thinking save for day-dream fantasies. So, most people end up ignoring their visual abilities and the skills atrophy.

Fortunately, it only requires a little practice to regain preschool abilities again.

The analytical thinking process sets the parameters or limitations of the creative process. It inputs data to the subliminal/intuitive base and then evaluates and modifies the results on the display.

Garbage in, garbage out

The analytical thinking process is the primary stimulus or major obstruction of the imaginative process.

Garbage in, garbage out. The ego (the self-concept part of the analytical process) is both the controller and product of the analytical mind; thus, all imagination is directly dependent upon one's self-concept and desires. The ego determines the validity of an idea and the results of the creative process.

Again, we arrive at the psychology of the ego self being a determining factor of a function of consciousness.

That is why philosophy is so important in life. It is through philosophical training that one learns patterns of living, beliefs and values, which become the foundation of ego self.

Friendly philosophy needed

In order to develop a good imagination, one must have a personal philosophy that is conducive to the goal.

For instance, in some Western religions, creative visualizations are considered a manifestation of demonic forces. This is certainly not an attitude conducive to productive and free-flowing imagination.

Imagination is the most important

tool in the development of T'ai Chi Ch'uan ability. This is especially true in the advanced levels.

Without imagination, the principles, ch'i flow, relaxation, and even the movements themselves cannot be understood.

All movement must be visualized within the mind before it can be executed.

This is much the same as an artist sketching a still life drawing. The artist learns to draw what he sees, not with his eyes, but with his mind. The eyes do not direct the hands...the mind does.

Visual skills aid execution

The mind subliminally calculates all the information on the visual monitor, determines the coordinates and executes the action.

Thus, a T'ai Chi player who has good visual skills and memory can learn and execute form in a more accurate manner.

Ch'i flow and relaxation cannot be learned without imagination. Both require primary visualization drills before there is a physical response. The imagination creates real physical sensation.

For example, in training for ch'i flow, the student begins by visualizing and focusing on the tan t'ien. After some practice, a warm sensation is felt (usually pre-programmed information from an instructor).

Two masters raise welts

Then the student is taught to visualize the small circulation orbit. In time, the student will be able to produce a physical sensation around the complete orbit.

With more practice, the student will be capable of producing similar sensations around all the ch'i meridians.

I know two octogenarian masters who have perfected this imagery so well that they can actually raise welts and nodules on their body which they can circulate around the meridians. This ability began with imagination.

A more basic use of visualization in T'ai Chi Ch'uan has to do with overcoming ego verbalization in practice.

Most T'ai Chi players tend to spend a tremendous amount of time narrating their movements. Some even think that this verbalization is a form of focus.

But this is not the case and in fact prohibits focus and ch'i flow. Visualization should be used as a substitute for verbalization. Instead of the movement being verbated, the movement should be visualized.

One should alter the perspective of the visualization to include how the movement looks from the overall perspective as well as the normal viewing perspective.

Eventually, the visualization will not lead the movement, but harmonize with the movement, yielding pure intention and focus.

The greatest stretch of the imagination comes when the physical sensation is eliminated from ch'i training.

Ch'i is non-physical

To accomplish this objective, one has to realize that ch'i is a non-physical force devoid of physical sensation or limitation.

The analytical mind is very comfortable describing neural muscular tension and sensation as ch'i flow or even the result of ch'i flow.

It is impossible for the analytical mind to comprehend anything without tangible evidence or feedback.

It requires imagination to go beyond the limited definition of ch'i created by the analytical mind to a state devoid of physical feedback, where ch'i flows freely, directed by the non-physical spirit . . . the state of ch'i kung.

Reality is what we believe

Obtaining ch'i kung is the prerequisite of learning the empty force ability of Yang Lu-ch'an, his sons and grandson, Yang Shou-hou.

All our belief systems are based upon imagination. Everything can be critically proved to be false no matter how convincing the supporting evidence.

Reality is what we choose to believe. What we believe is created by our imagination and given power by our focus of consciousness. A dream is a real one if one believes it to be so.

A psychotic distortion or illusion is real to the schizophrenic. Thus, reality is relative and not absolute.

The practice of T'ai Chi Ch'uan gradually alters one's thinking, thus changing reality.

Continued practice will eventually result in a sudden mental realization or the breaking of a personal physical limitation, or even a brief tap into a metaphysical force.

Any of these will alter one's current belief and reality system, causing confusion and disorientation. When the shock wears off, one will discover freedom, the freedom to create one's own reality and ultimate destiny. ●