

THE PROCESS OF MASTERY: The Goal Is Unlimited Perfection

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In general, we use the term "mastery" in reference to obtaining a high degree of skill and/or artistic expression within a limited endeavor such as art, martial arts, and anything else requiring human effort, skill and commitment. We view mastery in reference to accomplishment.

However, in reference to the universal T'ai Chi, all masterful accomplishments become meaningless endeavors. From the T'ai Chi perspective, everything is in motion, changing and evolving into something else.

An accomplishment is nothing more than a momentary point of focus; recognized, then lost.

A perpetual process

An attempt to retain that moment places one in opposition to the flow, where one will be worn away as a stone in a stream; highly polished, but continually diminishing in size. One is immobile and thus unaware of the knowledge further downstream.

Mastery, then, to become meaningful, must not be linked to individual accomplishment, but instead be associated with the movement of T'ai Chi. Thus, mastery becomes a perpetual process, a way of life.

In this article, I will discuss the three basic components of mastery and their relationship to the practice of T'ai Chi Ch'uan.

Three components

Grandmaster Lu Hung Bing, once espoused the philosophy of his teacher, Taoist Grandmaster Lao Kung, in this interpretation:

"To achieve immortality, one must unite the three incarnations of life with a method that connects Heaven and Earth."

There are most likely thousands of methods that accomplish this edict, and each would be considered a process of mastery. The process of mastery is the result of the activity and

interrelationship of its three components: mentation, meditation, and movement.

Each of these components is an individual process of an incarnation: mentation/mind; movement/body; and meditation/spirit.

So, to put it simply, we choose a lifestyle focus (in our case, T'ai Chi Ch'uan) which coordinates the active

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processes of mind, body and spirit, and thus becomes part of the process of mastery.

The goal of the process is perfection. Perfection is beyond form, or anything that can be measured. Perfection doesn't have limits; it's a state of being.

Since goals are set to establish a lifestyle or discipline conducive to accomplishing the goal, it is irrelevant whether perfection is accomplished or not!

It's working the process that matters. It's working the process that yields tangible benefits and skills. To effectively work the process, one should have a basic view of its components.

Mentation is the process of the mind. It is our active ego/analytical being which is why psychology is the most important part of the mastery process. It is within the environment of mentation that we come to realize that mastery is an obtainable, though intangible, reality.

Without this realization, all the training and meditation in the world will not turn you into a master. However, once the realization is gained, the process is automatically, subliminally set into action.

Through mentation we decide to pursue a discipline to acquire mastery. The discipline we select usually is the result of coincidence, circumstance, or gut feelings.

Once we choose a discipline, the attributes of a master-- patience, commitment to practice, self-discipline, imagination, experimentation and inquiry--are developed. It is through these attributes that we learn of our limitations and strive to overcome them by doing the impossible!

Each person has his own range of physical, psychological and spiritual limitations from which they view and interact with the universe. This is our "comfort zone."

Strive for the 'impossible'

As long as we are rooted within our comfort zone, we are safe and without stress. We define everything within the limits of our comfort zone; so, it becomes comprehensible. The universe/Tao is, however, without limitation. Thus, it is incomprehensible.

To overcome limitation, one must strive to accomplish the relatively impossible. By relatively impossible, I mean accomplishing a task you do not believe you can or desire to do.

Accomplishing the relatively impossible, shocks and expands the comfort zone while building self-confidence and esteem. No one can ever expect to achieve the absolutely impossible metaphysical abilities of T'ai Chi without overcoming the relative impossibilities of their own limitations.

Above all, mentation is the process that brings everything together in a comprehensible form to provide understanding and direction of the process, without which we would wallow in mediocrity.

The catalyst of mastery

Movement deals with the body. For the sake of this article, I am going to confine my discussion of movement to T'ai Chi Ch'uan. However, the definition could be expanded to include almost all physical endeavors.

Often movement is the catalyst of the mastery process by stimulating the realization that mastery is possible. Movement provides an obvious health benefit, and it presents many physical limitations to surmount.

It provides a focused activity to integrate the information arrived at

through mentation and meditation into everyday life.

Movement provides a medium for which power can flow and be expressed as art, healing or destruction. Through movement, one can unify mind, body and spirit, acquire skills, and express creativity.

Meditation is the source of unwritten knowledge and power. We look inward to see the universe and exercise the part of us that is incomprehensible, our spirit.

Meditation must have a purpose

Meditation builds a bridge between the spirit and mind. The mentation process then acts as a medium and as a buffer for understanding and, ultimately, expressing the knowledge and power of the spirit into physical, comprehensible reality.

With the exception of the benefits of relaxation, there will be no real benefits from meditation until the mentation process is developed enough to interpret the incoming information.

Part of this development comes from having an overview of the meditation process. One's meditation must have a defined purpose and objective; otherwise, it is just an exercise, good for you, but not very far reaching.

Remember, goals are necessary to establish discipline and direction. Purposeful meditation can accomplish in two years what undirected meditation cannot accomplish in twenty!

3 levels of meditation

T'ai Chi Ch'uan contains three levels of meditation: Psychophysical, which unifies mind and body and can be observed and charted; Metaphysical which unifies mind and spirit and is beyond physical scientific explanation, and T'ai Chi, which unifies that mind/body with the mind/spirit, creating a master of T'ai Chi, one who controls the substantial and insubstantial!

Psychophysical meditation is the first level of T'ai Chi Ch'uan meditation and is often done in conjunction with movement.

The purpose of psychophysical meditation is to develop relaxation,

concentrated focus, and breathing coordinated with movement.

Common practices of this discipline are tan t'ien focus, reverse breathing and form work. A higher level of psychophysical meditation in-

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volves the ch'i circulation orbits and ch'i kung health exercises.

These exercises increase mental concentration, body awareness and also develop the ability to create neural-muscular responses from mental focus. This is invaluable training greatly benefiting health and necessary for more advanced physical and metaphysical skills.

Metaphysical meditation usually begins with classical seated meditation to achieve a "quiet mind," the state of "nothingness," or "oneness with the void."

Contrary to what most believe, this is not the void but a very important prerequisite state to acquiring higher levels of consciousness.

The objective of psychophysical meditation is to obtain the highest level of interaction between mind and body.

The objective of metaphysical meditation is to transcend the physical body. The common training methods for this ability are through standing/postural meditation and lying meditation.

Postural meditation develops the ability to ignore extreme discomfort by a shift of consciousness and also, if done properly, distinguishes between substantial and insubstantial bodies and energies.

Lying meditation is used to develop the ability to transcend space and time. If the mentation process is strong enough, the practitioners will be able to combine their traveling ability with the concentrated focus of psychophysical meditation to obtain psychokinesis.

The downside of this accomplishment is that one's comfort zone is devastated and reality needs to be redefined.

Various forms of enlightenment are achieved through meditation's visuals, dreams, and travels. One obtains a tremendous amount of information and insight.

T'ai Chi meditation is the process of unifying all the experiences of mentation, movement, and meditation to achieve harmony without limitation. It requires no special exercise, just a shift of focus based upon enlightenment of Yin and Yang.

Balance is essential. Movement without something to integrate and flow is an empty exercise. Meditation's power and knowledge unchecked is self-destructive. Mentation without something to direct is chaos.

Your reaction to this article depends on your comfort zone and not what was presented. The process of mastery exists and works almost entirely without any intervention on our part. All one has to do is mentally commit to the process to change.

As I've tried to illustrate, the mentation process, our thinking, is the key determining factor to our success in the mastery process and, indeed, to life itself. In the final analysis, you cannot be any more than what you think you can be.

So truthfully, how much do you really want to change, and how much do you really want to know? ●