Zen Body-Being

An Enlightened Approach to Physical Skill, Grace, and Power

PETER RALSTON
with Laura Ralston

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Preface

East-West Journal, November 1979:
1978 was the first time that a non-Asian had ever won the World Championship full-contact martial arts tournament held in China. Peter Ralston not only won the tournament, but did so with an ease and grace that brought comment from the other participants. Afterward, when he said he had no plans to continue in competition, he was asked why he had participated. This was his response:

> *I did it for two reasons. It was to complete something, and to begin something new. The completion was letting go of having to prove myself. Beginning something new started by acquiring recognition. One of the fundamental reasons I fought in a world tournament is that I ask people to do "unconventional" things, to actually question and understand themselves. I want people to listen to me, to open up to what I'm saying. Winning this world tournament was done so that I could say: "I did it. What I'm teaching you is functional. It works." Now people listen to me who wouldn't before, yet I'm saying the same things.*

Foreword

Peter and I come from two completely different worlds, which is probably good news for anyone about to read this book. My husband has a unique way of communicating about his work. He's intent on saying *exactly* what's true, which is probably why his communications can produce what we call "experiential understanding" in both the body-being and consciousness work.

In workshops, Peter has a certain intensity of presence that seems to help get across the many new distinctions that participants need to make, whether it's a new level of feeling-awareness, or a new realm of consciousness. Although the mind work is quite challenging, students say that Peter has a kind of personal energy that guides the focus of the group toward discovery. When I ask him about it, he says all he's doing is "holding the room," or "being" the material. Whatever that activity may be, people who have no personal contact with Peter often find the written form of his work difficult to understand.

We're told that his book *The Principles of Effortless Power* is already something of a classic in the martial world, but clearly it's not for everyone. One student in Japan kept his copy covered in brown paper to hide his "secret weapon" from the others at his dojo. Someone else in England admitted to finding his copy in a trash can. People get frustrated, which bothers me more than it does Peter. He traveled far to find his own teachers, and he trained obsessively for years to gain his understanding. From his point of view, his hard-won experience has practically been handed to his students on a platter. There's nothing wrong with having to make an effort to read his books.

People often write in peculiar English from places like Tanzania or Nepal to say that they hope to attend a workshop someday. Meanwhile they've been working from a single chapter for months and would like to clarify a few things. As I watched Peter answer many such letters with care and patience, I began to think that a more accessible writing style could make things easier for everybody.

It's true that aspects of the Cheng Hsin work are nearly impossible to convey, and require courage and commitment to discover for oneself, but not everyone wants or needs to take it to the level of mastery. Beginning the work involves some simple but potentially very powerful tools, like how to question aspects of being a self and being a body. Peter has a way of drawing attention to what is overlooked—for instance, he'll teach you how to feel your own feet. He can take something "obvious," show it to you in a plain light, and give you a new way of seeing that will affect how you use your body or think about "self" for the rest of your life. Some of this stuff is so useful and so delightful that people want to share it with others. The more advanced students have learned Peter's language in both martial and mind domains, but they tell me they still have difficulty getting across to friends and family what it is that's so different about this work. I can definitely sympathize.

My friends and family tend to be more artistic than athletic, but, like anyone, they have injuries and strains and emotional issues to deal with. Some of the insights produced by Peter's way of shifting our perspective seem to me like little jewels, especially the ones that are helpful in healing the body or calming the mind. Naturally I've wanted to share these with my people, but it has always required something like translation. My best guess is that all the Zen consciousness work that makes Peter's approach so special may also have made it harder for him to communicate to people outside a workshop setting. When he's writing, there is no puzzled student to attend to, and readers do not have the benefit of Peter's presence, his powerful and yet humorous way of "being" the Cheng Hsin work.

After a short time with Peter, I got the idea of a simple, pared-down version of his body-being work. A useful little book that I could give to a family member with back pain or a friend with emotional stress, or even something an apprentice might share with his wife to

help explain why he's planning to live in the Cheng Hsin dojo for seven months. Some kind of prequel to *Principles* would certainly be helpful for the Tanzanian. Of course, I would leave out the consciousness work and just focus on the body.

That idea makes me laugh now, because I understand that what makes the body-being work so uniquely powerful is the way it includes those barely cognized places where mind and body intersect. The body-being work certainly teaches people to be more skillful, but for many of us, the real beauty of the work lies in the recurrent awakenings we have to those places in ourselves that lie hidden in plain view.

Anyone who makes an honest attempt to go where Peter points them is likely to experience something of a "dawning" or small epiphany regarding the nature of being a body. To explain this event, I often compare it to the sensation of viewing one of the "magic eye" holographic images that contain a hidden picture. Peter invites a certain way of looking, of relaxing our hold on the topical view that we're so accustomed to. There is a sense of discomforting uncertainty, but then the view shifts and—*POW*—we get it.

Experiencing one of these awakenings is often accompanied by a sense that it's yours to keep, one of the little jewels. To Peter, many of these are relatively insignificant, but for a lot of people, these small shifts represent the beginning of a new way of relating to their own bodies and selves. At times throughout the project of "translating" this book, I've had a sense of trying to pull Einstein back to teach a course in basic math. Part of my job has been to try to let Peter know what ordinary people will value, and also what we won't understand. He has so much to share, but I've tried to keep him on the shallower end of the pool where everybody needs to begin. The result is something like Self 101 combined with a physical education like no other. I only hope that none of it has been lost in translation.

Laura Ralston
December 2005

CHAPTER ONE

Being a Body

The most profound experiences arise from questioning the obvious.

What Is Physical Ability?

A number of years ago, I was demonstrating a technique to a student in my back yard. When he asked me how I did it, I repeated the moves along with an explanation. We worked the technique a bit and then he said, "What I actually meant was, how did you learn to *move* like that?" At the time, my three-year-old daughter was playing in the yard. Imitating her father, she was dancing around and rolling in the grass, and finally jumped up with a big smile on her face. "For starters," I said, pointing to my daughter, "I trained just like Jenny—and so did you. The question is, why do we stop?"

As children we love to move our bodies. Whenever we aren't resting from all the activity, we can be found running, or dancing, or climbing, waving our arms about, tumbling in the grass, and generally delighting ourselves in movement. This seems like mere play, but it's much more than that. As each pattern of movement is recorded by the body's sensorimotor system for future use, our childhood "play" functions as our primary training for physical development. We're exploring what our bodies can do, and laying the groundwork for future ability. There is no reason to stop this kind of activity, but most of us do. When we continue such open-ended training into adult life, we surpass the needs of mere functionality and begin to operate from the principles that create skill, power, and grace.

The same ease of movement that we enjoy as young children often shows up in the mastery of every kind of body-expressive art from basketball to comedic acting. Consider the fluid grace of someone like Fred Astaire or Michael Jordan. There is something so captivating about the way they move that even someone who cares little for dancing or basketball will pause to watch them perform. Each seems as though he's operating in some other world, where the laws of physics are more lenient. Like a child, he is unhindered by concerns about failure or self-consciousness. Unlike a child, his gestures are precise and economical, and his timing is flawless. Balance and speed indicate a keen awareness of the body in space, and yet the entire body remains as relaxed and calm as if he were playing in the park.

So how is it that some people manage to effectively use their bodies with the strength and precision of an adult while maintaining the relaxed and supple ease of a child? They obviously have superb muscle control, and yet their movements are free and open. Such movement appears effortless, but there is clearly a great deal of power. Next to an average person, these people seem more alive, more vital, and somehow more *present.*

While natural in itself, this way of being in the body does not come naturally to most of us. We must discover it, and in some cases, rediscover it. Just training is not the answer, because what we're doing can often move us in the opposite direction. I trained for years in the more rigid styles of martial arts before realizing that there were far more effective ways to use my body. Like everyone around me, I began my study by endlessly repeating techniques and hoping to absorb something of the art in the process. I progressed quickly enough, but it was not until I learned to recognize the principles behind the movements—behind any physical endeavor—that my training became truly productive. It also became as easy and joyful as play.

One of the biggest factors for me in making this shift came about through my work in Zen contemplation. It was there that I learned to question my own way of holding reality, and to get past the limiting effects of intellect and emotion. Using the simple mind training and the principles that I've laid out in this book, I increased my skills tenfold. I learned to command my body with more efficiency and

power than I had thought possible, and went on to become a world champion martial artist.

Some of the references here will be to martial arts because that was a central training ground for me, but the work goes beyond any particular sport or activity. Dancers, athletes, body workers, musicians, doctors, golfers, laborers, and even chefs have all adapted this study to suit their needs. This book is not about fighting, or any other system or discipline. More than it is about mastery, this book is, at heart, simply about a deeper awareness of being a body.

What I want to share with you concerns physical ability, whatever that may mean to you. Whether it's the ability to re-learn the use of an injured limb, hit a ball, or fight in a world tournament, the training is guided by the same principles. The work is simple, and yet it can be taken to a very deep level. We'll look into the mysteries of effortless power, but we'll also learn more effective ways of just walking and standing. You could call this a kind of prep-school for anyone with a body. It is the basic instruction with which every new student of mine must begin, whether he or she is a baseball pro, an executive, or an aikido instructor.

I don't conceive of ability as something that a person just "has" or does not have. Ability is effectively relating with what's happening around us in any given moment. Think about it: a skillful person is one who perceives circumstances correctly and then responds with appropriate actions. It should not be surprising, then, that I must continually draw attention to the role of mind as we address physical ability.

Being able to "change" our minds—to create new ways of thinking, perceiving, feeling, and relating to our bodies—is what really makes the difference in physical skill. How we choose to act depends entirely upon how we perceive our bodies and how we perceive what's occurring. When our perceptions are clear and accurate, we can respond more effectively. Real ability tends to have a quality of ease. It does not arise from struggle, but from a calm and natural state of being. This state is created, not inherited.

Great joy can be found in the experience of simply being a body. In any sport or activity, people value that state where there is no

separation between the mind's dictates and the body's actions. A place where there is no second-guessing or self-consciousness—what you imagine doing is already done. This kind of whole-body integrity is not just an issue for athletes or professionals. We all live in our bodies every day, and how well we inhabit them greatly affects our way of being in the world.

Cultural Influences

> *Most people fail to realize that the dictates of any belief system are not the truth, and that memorizing beliefs often replaces authentic investigation.*

In our culture, we tend to focus more on *doing* than on *being.* When we want to change something about ourselves, instead of "being" our actions or "becoming" a better person in some way, we merely "do" something differently, and so remain separated from the act or change that we desire. When we adopt some external process to *do,* rather than a new and better way to *be,* the body and mind remain fundamentally unchanged. What's needed is not the addition of a new activity, but a change in the foundation from which all our actions arise.

Our idea of body improvement has grown to include a multitude of activities that reflect a kind of fitness renaissance since the Fifties. Back then, exercise pretty much consisted of Charles Atlas-type strength training, using free weights to build muscle mass. By the mid-'70s, we were experiencing a national fitness craze and everywhere you looked, there were people in running suits. In addition to running, tennis, and biking, there was growing interest in activities like gymnastics, yoga, and t'ai chi. Martial arts began to shift from an esoteric mystery to an acceptable form of recreation. And injuries resulting from all this activity raised sports medicine to a field of its own.

As fitness concerns became more a part of daily life, we have become more conscious of health issues as well as exercise. We've

learned to pay attention to important factors like proper stretching and nutrition. We may not always follow the current "expert" advice on fitness and diet, but these ideas continue to be part of the public discourse. Over the past few years, gyms and martial arts centers have sprouted up everywhere, and personal trainers are in demand. Now ordinary people can be found using their lunch hour for t'ai chi or cardio-kickboxing.

This all poses an interesting question. With a large number of the population exercising regularly, we should be more physically fit than ever. People are always telling me about the various exercise regimens, movement techniques, or esoteric disciplines they've been involved in. They've taken classes and studied books and videos on every sport and practice under the sun. Some have actively explored everything from obscure stretching and breathing methods to the ancient mysteries of ch'i cultivation and the power of semen retention. It appears that there is a particular method available for each specific aspect of being a body. So why is it, I wonder, that very few of these dedicated people are genuinely in touch with their bodies? Why haven't they learned to move with any real skill? Most don't even notice that they are using their bodies ineffectively. Why aren't we all more graceful, powerful, and at ease within our bodies?

The fact is, fitness routines and sports activities are not enough. Too often, we're just layering new skills and musculature over an inadequate foundation. After random development of basic bodily commands in early childhood, our training is quickly confined to specific activities. Indeed, what passes for "physical education" in most schools is often little more than calisthenics and coaching for specific sports. There is no opportunity to investigate the basics of sensation, movement, and interaction for their own sakes.

Exercise and training can improve body condition and performance, but they only go so far. In themselves, they don't encourage understanding or growth, and they don't provide real learning or transformation. And mastery, when it arises, is most often achieved by going beyond such physical training, and sometimes occurs *in spite of it.*

The Source of Improvement

How well we can perform physically depends largely on the accuracy and sensitivity of our senses. Not only the five senses, but, perhaps even more importantly, our "feeling-awareness" of the whole body. After all, the key to effective movement is built right into the design of each human structure. The more fully we can feel our bodies, the easier it is to live and move in accordance with this design. A finely tuned sense of our own bodies is what makes us athletes or artists or masters. Anyone can train activities—to increase ability, we need to train our sense of feeling-awareness.

But what is feeling-awareness? When we hear athletes speak of being "in the zone" we might imagine a special trance-like state that makes them capable of great feats of skill. We usually attribute this mysterious occurrence to some rare combination of luck and circumstance. Some people are downright superstitious, designating the shirt they wore while skillful as their "lucky" shirt. When we look into the matter, it becomes clear that the "special trance" achieved by athletes involves a mental shift that creates a state of heightened perception, which allows for an effortless command of the body. Probably everyone has experienced a kind of "zone" at some time in their lives, but people like Michael Jordan have learned to access this perceptive state while the rest of us still rely on our lucky socks.

The phrase "increased feeling-awareness" might lack the mysterious appeal of "the zone," but our sense of feeling is something that we can actually investigate and train. We all employ two levels of feeling-awareness in order to interact with the world, and each can be improved upon for greater skill. First, we perceive incoming sensations, feelings that inform us of anything related to ourselves. Improvement here is mostly a matter of increasing sensitivity, which is addressed throughout this book. Second, we command our bodies by creating outgoing motor impulses from which we generate movement. Whether our actions are an appropriate response or a knee-jerk reaction depends on our state of mind. This is where Zen training is useful. Every feeling we have is a bit of information traveling to or from the brain. Since it is the basis for all our actions and

interactions, clarifying this information will have an immediate effect on our abilities.

Feeling-awareness is a powerful sense. If you assume that your abilities are mostly dependent on muscle strength or your sense of sight, you're overlooking the fact that you cannot properly direct something you're unaware of, even if it's your own hand or foot. Precisely where your body is in space, how fast it's moving, its relationship to the ground and the force of gravity, are all data that you can gather most effectively by feeling your body. Consider times when you pushed the limits of your ability. What were you thinking when you played your best game, or threw that amazing pass, or aced your dance audition? Chances are you were not thinking very much at all. Just like any athlete in the zone, you were responding directly from an intelligent and sensitive feeling-awareness.

> *Seek not to follow in the footsteps of men of old;*
> *seek what they sought.*
>
> MATSUO BASHO

Accessing Body Intelligence

Your perception of the world around you is not necessarily the same as what is actually occurring. Did you get that? Better read that line again. Each bit of sensory information that you gather flows through mental and emotional "filters" that may distort or even suppress the message. The fewer the filters, the more clear the message. Directing your body from a sense of feeling-awareness allows you to bypass some of these interpretive filters so that the perceptual information you receive is more accurate. Whenever we are surprised by our own abilities, it is likely that we have slipped into a non-thinking sense of connection between perception and action.

In any situation that you encounter, you can either respond to what *is* occurring, or you can respond to your ideas and emotions about what is occurring. Most of us believe that our intelligence begins and ends in the "conscious mind." Yet if we look closely, we realize that when we go deeper than this surface intellect, we begin

to engage the powerfully creative resources of another kind of intelligence.

This book is about operating from the kind of direct body awareness that can bring about leaps in ability. Using the information offered here, you can learn to clarify and refine the feeling pathways by which you command your body. We all create physical ability from three basic ingredients: perception, neural response, and body mechanics. All three of these occur primarily in a non-intellectual domain, and mostly in the domain of "feeling." When all three function smoothly, such qualities as power, precision, grace, and speed arise naturally.

Most of you assume that the way you're inhabiting your body right now—how sensitive you are, how you move, and how skillful you are—is the only way you can be. The truth is, there are ways of being in your body other than the way you are being. If you feel clumsy or awkward, it's because you learned and adopted that particular way of relating to and with your body. If you are skilled and graceful, that is something you learned as well.

It's useful to keep in mind that no one is "naturally" stiff or uncoordinated. How you inhabit your body is learned by role models and your internalized reactions to experience. The body's most natural state is one of balance and wholeness, being intrinsically connected, centered, alive, and aware. Anything else is a deviation. For example, to adopt the state we call "being clumsy," there must be a disconnection from the natural flow of information with which you command your actions. This is what makes your body "confused" or insensitive in places, thus disrupting balance and compromising the integrity of your structure. Increasing the flow of information can help alleviate this unnatural condition.

True, some of us have physical challenges that require special compensation or training to overcome, and some conditions will never change despite our best efforts, such as the loss of a limb or a serious spinal injury. Because re-training is already necessary, it's likely that people with challenges such as these will find much to assist them in this book. The points on balance and structural integrity may be very useful, as well as the use of imagery for re-training the nervous system. A more open and grounded mental attitude always

speeds learning, and adopting a state of calm can assist with emotional obstacles. For the rest of us, the ball is in our court. Whether we want to restore our abilities or increase our skills, we need to re-train our minds in order to access the inherent intelligence of the body.

Beginner's Body-Being

In the early days of teaching, I created the term "body-being" because there was no such inclusive word in our language. Using an unfamiliar term also helps a student's mind remain open to possibilities that are not immediately apparent. Consider that within the basic nature of any living body, awareness is inherent and an entity is implied. I'm not heading into a philosophical discourse here, but simply pointing to the "aliveness" of the human body, which is a large portion of our investigation. We cannot successfully address a body's condition, healing, or transformation without becoming conscious of the role that the mind—perception, thought, emotion, memory, association—has in every bodily activity. The term "body-being" helps remind us that we're not dealing exclusively with a physical component, but also and always with the *beingness* that is both body and consciousness. Whether we name it or not, body-being is where our training actually takes place.

All our lives, we've acquired new skills through trial and error. We experimented until we learned to stand, to walk, to lift, and to throw, mostly at a very young age. As soon as we discovered some pattern of movement that got the job done adequately, we adopted it as the correct and proper way to move. By adulthood, most of our actions take place without conscious thought. It seems we've always done it this way, and we rarely stop to question whether our habitual actions are the most powerful and efficient methods available. Our familiar way of moving feels "instinctively" right to us because it was the first and therefore the strongest one imprinted on our sensorimotor system. It may work, but there is a wide range of options between an adequate means and a powerful one. With increased awareness, we gain the power to recognize our habits and make better choices.

One useful analogy might be that making the shift to a more conscious and effective body-being requires something akin to a wine taster clearing his palate. In order to fully experience some new flavor, he returns his sense of taste to an inactive or "neutral" state by removing all traces of his last sensory experience. This is like the Zen master's advice to keep a "beginner's mind," which means approaching life with an open and unbiased awareness. It is wise to approach this study with a beginner's mind and a beginner's body, freeing your mind and body of all unnecessary activity. Letting go of habitual impulses allows an open and neutral state from which to create new impulses.

For instance, notice that tension is an "activity." When you stop tensing, your muscles are free to respond to new commands. The same is true for your mind. When you disengage from useless mental activity, which often concerns either the past or the future, you can fully experience what's occurring for you in the present moment. Such shifts will not only tend to increase your present level of ability, but will also open the door to learning something new.

At any time, you can adopt a more effective body-being by consciously making a shift to a more functional state. You can shift your attention away from habitual patterns of ineffective movement to focus instead on a heightened sense of feeling-awareness. You can take real notice of your body and make adjustments wherever you feel tense or unbalanced. You can even expand your feeling- awareness to include the space within and around your body. Make any of these changes and you immediately heighten your experience and become more powerful in any physical endeavor, from training an extreme sport to taking a walk or making love.

Beyond what is immediately accessible to change, there is a whole new world of body awareness waiting to be created. The skill level we developed while growing up is not the end of what's possible. It is simply where we stopped. Also available are extremely sophisticated uses of bodily physics and physiology. These are accessible only through discovering how to free oneself from habitual ways of thinking and familiar neuro-impulse patterns, and by creating new dimensions of physical ability. (Don't worry, it's not nearly as complicated as it sounds.)

Zen is the unsymbolization of the world.

R.H. BLYTH

What you learn in the following chapters may at first seem too simple to be useful. To learn more about our bodies, we're accustomed to looking everywhere except into our own experience. We chase after expert opinions, the latest trends, or the most dazzling fantasies looking for the secret keys to power and skill. When these fail us, we move on to something new, frequently narrowing our study even further by excluding possibilities that don't fit our current beliefs. We don't realize that the "secret" lies in plain view and always has. To discover it primarily requires an open investigation, a search beyond techniques or systems, beyond any of our habitual assumptions about what is true or correct. This type of inquiry is profoundly simple, and yet difficult to begin, since it requires an uncommon openness. I recommend that you try to forget what you know and approach everything here as though it's the first time you've ever heard of it. After all, this book could accurately be called *a guided investigation into the overlooked obvious.*

CHAPTER TWO

Origins and Influences

Genius, in truth, means little more than
the faculty of perceiving in an unhabitual way.

WILLIAM JAMES

Mind Training

When I was a teenager studying judo and jujitsu, I very much wanted to be good. I studied in the traditional manner, repeating technique after technique, learning by rote. I listened to my teachers and tried hard to find the connection between endless repetition and what the founder of judo had in mind. My skills increased only through sweat and determination. In other words, I was as slow as everyone else.

When any of us sets out to learn a new physical skill, we try to imitate the teacher, or some model of skill, and do the best we can to reproduce the given movements. Within this effort we try out various movements that seem to represent what we're trying to do. Our brains monitor the success or failure of each attempt and then adopt those that most resemble the skill we want to achieve. Through repetition, we continually refine these movements until they produce the desired result. In other words, we practice. Yet, how is it that some learn quickly and become masterful, while others toil and strain just to reach mediocrity? What makes a person skillful? Being physically equipped for certain activities doesn't hurt, but while training judo, I learned that there are other elements that make a much greater difference.

When I was still at the beginner level, I grew impatient with my rate of progress. I decided that I needed more practice, but the dojo

wasn't open long hours, so there simply wasn't enough time. Since I couldn't train physically, I began to train mentally. It was better than nothing. I'd sit in a chair in a little alcove near my room and go over the techniques in my mind.

At first, I pictured what it would look like if I were training with a partner. I visualized myself repeating successful techniques, hoping that this would reflect in my practice. It was great until I got to the dojo and realized that such "training" was merely fantasizing and had little effect on my actual abilities. After that, I tried to visualize more realistically. I soon noticed that my mental image of the throw was very different from my experience of an actual physical throw. It gradually became clear that, in order to truly train in this way, my imagination had to be the same as my body's actual movements and effects.

Instead of just imagining successful techniques, I started mentally *doing* the techniques. For that I had to remember the exact feeling of it. In time, I learned to mentally recreate the feeling of my body, then my partner's weight, each of his feet, the feel of tugging his gi, the pressure on my legs, the arc of motion when I turned, even his sweat. After a while, I got so that I was mentally just as bad at leg sweeping, or hip throwing, or whatever we were studying, and I would get just as frustrated at home as I did in class.

Once I could reproduce the physical experience, I could analyze and correct my actions mentally. I could try things out, experiment with a new motion, and examine details that might escape me in the rush of actual confrontation. Then I would go back and check everything out at the school. Working back and forth between physical and mental training heightened my awareness of the techniques, my own body, and also my awareness of my partner. A new dimension opened up as my study of the techniques grew to include the subtleties of *relationship*.

One night, after a few hours of going over *tai otoshi* (a flipping throw over the leg), I did it perfectly in my mind. The motion, balance, positioning, off-balance of my partner, timing, the arc of his body-mass through space, the direction of his fall . . . everything was just right. There was nothing added and nothing omitted—I could feel it! I could hardly wait to get to the dojo the next day. I was

probably grinning from ear to ear when I stepped onto the mat and executed my first perfect *tai otoshi.* It worked exactly as it had in my mind the night before. That was when I knew I had discovered something powerful.

I ddn't realize what I was doing at the time, but later when I was at UC Berkeley, I heard of an experiment that helped me make sense of what had happened. There were three groups tested in the study. The first group threw basketballs through a hoop for an hour every day. The second group threw basketballs only once a week but sat in a classroom *imagining* throwing basketballs for an hour each day for the rest of the week. The third group only sat and imagined throwing basketballs for an hour each day. At the end of the experiment, the third group who only imagined throwing did very poorly when tested. The first group who practiced daily did fine, but the second group, who combined mental training with a physical reality check, proved the most skillful of all. What is it about mind training that made it possible to leap ahead in ability?

This question has been central to my work since I first saw how powerfully mind training—and later, "insight"—transformed my abilities in judo. It's true that some people acquire new physical skills faster than others and, like most of us, they just assume it is a gift that can neither be studied nor improved upon. But when we look into ability, we find that there are many "gifts" that we can consciously create for ourselves. The most important factor is one that we continually overlook: how we take in and process sensory information. Our rate of progress from awkward to skillful movements depends a great deal on how accurately we can *feel* what we're doing with our bodies.

Adding "mind training" to my judo practice forced me to narrow the gap between my imagination and reality. To mentally recreate a technique, I had to get very clear on what it felt like from beginning to end. I needed completely accurate sensory feedback, which meant that I had to give up everything I thought or wished to be true, and instead give precedence to noticing the full range of my physical experience. As a result, I became aware of fine distinctions in feeling and movement that were simply not discernible in my usual practice.

The same is true of the people who had both physical and mental training in throwing basketballs. Having no actual ball and hoop to work with most of the time helped them focus on the feelings involved rather than on the result of making a basket. They sought out and discovered subtle differences in the sensation of throwing the ball and made adjustments to improve their imaginary throws. Then, physically checking the accuracy of their imagined sensations with actual throwing once a week helped them correct inaccurate imagery and stay grounded in reality.

Creating Insight

One of the biggest barriers to effective movement is the way we think about our bodies. As a culture, we habitually operate from "knowledge" and so we think that becoming skillful in an activity means acquiring more knowledge. We might read books or look into more complicated practices, not realizing that the information we seek is already available to us through our own investigations. One reason for this is that our "knowing" seems like solid ground, while not-knowing appears to us as a negative, as ignorance or confusion. Setting aside my ideas and beliefs about "fighting"—as well as all the fantasies that are part of the appeal of martial arts in general—was difficult at first. I felt freed, but also somehow vulnerable, without a compass to guide me. Not long after my first successful *tai otoshi,* however, I had an experience that once and for all validated the power of "not-knowing" for me.

> *You must change your state of being.*
> *You cannot change radically within the same state.*

While sitting there one evening working on the throws in my mind, in a flash I simply "got" judo. I got what it *was,* the essence of it. I understood what the founder of judo, Jigoro Kano, had in mind. Judo was supposed to be easy! And after that, it was easy. Suddenly I ddn't have to learn technique after technique searching for "judo"—I could create techniques from my new understanding. It seemed unbelievable, even after my success with mind training, but the power of this

insight was proven by an immediate change in my abilities. Overnight, I became good at judo. And, overnight I became a real fan of insight.

It is often tempting to read something magical into this kind of leap in ability. The "magic" was simply the discovery that conscious insight could make an enormous difference in physical performance. As it turned out, this kind of learning is rare, but it needn't be. It could and should be commonplace. One of the central goals of this book is to guide others to make this kind of approach to learning the norm rather than the exception. I believe this has not occurred yet because our culture hasn't developed in this way, hasn't discovered that the domain of insight is a central aspect to learning. Because of this, we consider insight rare and mostly a chance occurrence, instead of nurturing it as a normal and primary principle of human development. For me, the process was experimental, but it did follow a certain natural progression.

Once I had cleared my mind of what I "knew," true learning became possible. I had greater clarity about what my body was doing and, just as important, by setting aside what I knew—or thought I knew—about judo, I became open to discoveries outside my usual frames of reference. For instance, rather than remaining stuck with how I thought a technique was supposed to work, I freely investigated and experimented with how it *could* work, whether it seemed "logical" or not. In this way I could find what was truly effective, beyond the limits of my beliefs and perceptions.

To navigate this new, uncharted territory, I developed an increased sensitivity to feeling and to subtleties in movement that I'm certain I would not otherwise have discovered. I still had to master the techniques in the physical domain, but after the insight into the "principle" of judo my ability to learn increased dramatically. I went from a white belt (yonkyu) to a black belt (shodan) in fifteen months. No one else at the dojo accomplished this in under five years.

After the insight, I noticed that wherever I saw mastery in any physical skill—whether in boxing, riding horses, dancing, skiing, football, or surfing—there was evidence of the same kind of clear awareness that had so improved my own abilities. I was interested in learning more about perception, but in those days no one was

dscussing how to heighten awareness or mentally train to affect performance. As I moved through such studies as karate, kung fu, t'ai chi, and aikido, there was a lot of talk about how things "have to be," or about mysterious "internal" powers, but much of what I found there seemed rooted in fantasy or belief and was not grounded in open and honest investigation. As I studied in and beyond these many arts, I continued to use my own experience to investigate consciousness directly.

> *One does not become enlightened by imagining*
> *figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious.*
>
> CARL JUNG

Zen

During my search for greater insight, I was introduced to the practice of Zen contemplation. Zen is a branch of Buddhism that stresses meditation as a means to enlightenment. By now most people have probably heard of Zen's reputation for being puzzling, even nonsensical. This is partly due to the *koan* or "problem" that Zen masters often give students to focus on while meditating. Questions like "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" or "What was my face before my parents were born?" might seem absurd to an outsider, but there is a method in the madness. A Zen master understands the human desire for certainty, for "knowing." He uses this desire to engage the student's mind in a futile struggle for resolution. Pushed to a certain point, the mind must finally let go. At this moment, it becomes possible for the student to have a breakthrough in understanding.

Our minds continually strive to interpret the meaning of our experiences, to freeze the moment into concepts that are intelligible. While we busy ourselves with trying to capture what cannot be caught, the moment passes away and we miss it. Practitioners of Zen seek to go beyond this tendency of mind to a more clear and authentic experience of being in each moment. The meditation, the koans, the insistence on denying symbols or the importance of Buddha is, in short, all geared toward frustrating our habits of interpreting and " knowing,"

so that we may experience the moment more directly. Simply put, a goal of Zen monasticism is training the mind to get free of the ego, or "self," to see beyond the mental filters that shape our perception of reality, and become directly conscious of the nature of Being.

When applied to the physical realm, Zen teachings direct us toward becoming more sensitive and receptive. Often when we perform at our best, we say that we "lose ourselves" in an activity. Have you ever wondered why we say that, or why it doesn't have a more negative connotation? After all, losing one's self seems like a pretty big loss! But on some level, we are aware that much of what makes up our sense of self are emotions and ideas that serve to distract us from being in the moment. When we can detach from these intellectual and emotional considerations, we are free to engage more fully with reality as it unfolds. How skillfully we perform in any situation depends on how clearly we can perceive what is occurring. Those who respond effectively can do so because they perceive more clearly what's actually there, instead of ignoring what's there or confusing it with what they think or hope is true.

Within the first few months of intense contemplation work, I had a remarkable breakthrough—what Zen people call an "enlightenment experience." After this, my mind was cleared to such a degree that I quickly developed new levels of awareness in martial arts, such as the ability to read an opponent's intention. This allowed me to change my body's position before my opponent could act, thus rendering his attack ineffective. It was not a matter of "figuring out" what he would do, but of being calm and clear so that even the most subtle information could reach me. Paradoxically, the more I learned to let go of my own wishes and desires (in this case, the desire not to be hit), the more they became possible. Contemplation proved to be just what I needed to take my martial studies to a new level. It provided a means to explore the very mechanisms by which I perceive reality.

The marriage between this "consciousness" work and developing physical and relational skill gave birth to a new pursuit for me. I called this new endeavor *Cheng Hsin* (pronounced cheng shin), which translates as "genuine heart," or "true being." Cheng Hsin has grown up over the decades with a central theme of honesty and a spirit of open

investigation. It has generated a vast body of knowledge, which all emanates from the discovery of the founding principles behind skill, interaction, and an effortlessly effective body-being. The body-consciousness that we are discussing in this book comes from the work of Cheng Hsin.

During decades of investigation, I devoted a considerable amount of time to deciphering the nature of experience and the components of perception. I learned that the more we understand the relationship between skill and perception, the more we can take charge of our development and increase our abilities. How we perceive our bodies determines how effectively we use and relate to our bodies, and therefore how effectively we can relate to the world around us.

I have never learned anything that I already knew.

The Basics of Perception

A perception can be defined as a sensory encounter with some object or occurrence. In a pure form, it is simply data, and has no association or emotional charge. To make sense of what we perceive, our brains automatically sort, edit, classify, and revise all the information that becomes available. As an analogy, it is like the way a computer can download a file in code that looks like Greek, and then quickly translate it to a picture onscreen. Whenever we encounter something, the information goes through a subconscious translation process. In a millisecond, we calculate the meaning and value of what is occurring. What we react to is not the information itself, but rather our interpretation of that information.

This interpreting mechanism is a remarkable feature of the human psyche—a quick and efficient means of cataloging new information to help ensure our safety and survival. At the same time, it's wise to remember that everything you think you "know" or "perceive" is an interpretation. Every bit of information you take in is influenced and altered by your particular set of beliefs, assumptions, and associations based on your past experience. Picture two children in the surf for the first time: One might be delighted and enjoy playing, while the other is miserable and frightened by the waves. Because

of their individual interpretations regarding the water, they have vastly different perceptions about what is occurring.

Our interpretations help us learn from our experience. When we encounter something familiar, we automatically fill in any blanks with information from past encounters. The problem is, the true nature of what is actually there is often missed. When faced with an unknown, we seek out some familiar element and make an association, so we can categorize it and thus "know" more. The child who enjoys playing in the surf may have a favorite cartoon involving mermaids and fishes, and so he views the waves as friendly. The one who is unhappy may have been told by his older brother that the ocean is mean or dangerous and would try to get him, so to him every wave is a monster. Neither point of view has any bearing on the present, and yet each child holds it as his current reality.

While these two children are busy reacting to their interpretations of the waves, there is something else going on. Their individual interpretations are being further substantiated by experience. One child perceives a friend in the waves, maybe playing tag with him, or cuddling him. The other child perceives a monster chasing him up the beach trying to devour him. As this occurs, the child who is happy in the water reinforces his associations of friendship while the child who is frightened is reinforcing his associations of danger. The next time either encounters the surf, they will perceive it as good or bad because the foundation for their future interpretations is growing stronger with each crashing wave. This may be an over- simplification, but you get the idea.

The example implies that our interpretations do more than just determine how we perceive, they also limit our future openness to discovering any possibilities outside our usual experience. This is not to say that our interpretations are bad. Without interpretation, nothing would have any value whatsoever and the information would be useless to us. But holding our thoughts, feelings, and ideas as if they are the truth is very limiting, and even harmful.

Variations in interpretation are endless and complex, but in each case, the results produced by acting from them will match the beliefs and assumptions that shaped the interpretation in the first place. In other words, the same beliefs that influence one's perception in an

encounter will also influence the perception of any resulting feedback. In this way, beliefs have a tendency to reinforce themselves. Allowing yourself to openly investigate—to experiment and question beyond what you believe—opens the door to learning and improvement.

Picture a third child going into the surf for the first time, one who appears neither particularly pleased nor frightened, though he is perhaps a little of both. Unlike the other two children, he is simply curious. He observes the rolling waves with openness and wonder. He investigates and experiments with the water, setting out to discover what is happening and how he can best relate to it. As he understands more about the power and rhythm of the surf, he grows more comfortable. Soon his body is in harmony with the waves.

Most people are unaware that they have access
to what's true about their own bodies.

Three Aspects of Body Awareness

Some people are just naturally more present in their bodies and their surroundings. Others have to make a conscious shift in order to get past the intellectual and emotional habits that separate them from their own experience. In my years of study, contemplation, and teaching, I've found a few simple steps that can help shift our focus away from what we think or assume is true, and engage instead with what is actually occurring. In the upcoming chapters, we are going to look into three major aspects of body awareness: *feeling, alignment,* and *relationship.* As we work to clarify each of these, our bodies will become more effective, and our skills will improve in whatever we do.

The most important area in which we need to increase awareness is our sense of *feeling.* How much we can feel, and how aware we are of our bodies as a whole, affects our level of skill in three important ways. First, incoming sensations provide the body with information about our environment more quickly and efficiently than any other sense. Second, the feelings that we generate are the very basis

from which we create movement and action. And third, the key to balance and power lies in our ability to feel the body as a whole.

If you can't feel your body, you aren't fully interacting with your environment. For example, without a feeling-awareness of the whole body, you will not know where every part of your body is in space in each moment, you will be unable to direct your movements with accuracy, and your sense of balance will also be impaired. Clearly, the ability to fully and accurately feel is of primary importance for every other ability, but this is often overlooked or misunderstood.

In contrast, when our feeling-awareness is enhanced, we take in a great deal more information about our bodies and environment. We are able to make fine distinctions in our movements and in the movements of others. We can respond more quickly and accurately to what we perceive. Being more in touch with what is occurring, we can more quickly discover where things are breaking down. Increasing our sense of feeling is the first step toward commanding our bodies effectively in relation to what's happening. We'll discuss feeling-awareness further in Chapters Three and Four.

The second area we need to clarify is our *alignment,* both with the principles that provide an effortless effectiveness, and with the body's proper structural mechanics. Body alignment includes much more than our posture. Alignment concerns the way we arrange our bodies and minds in relation to anything—body parts relating to other body parts or to the whole, or our body-mind relating to objects, the Earth's gravity, or space. Alignment refers to the domain of the body's awareness and structure, how the body is used, integrated, and arranged so that it performs most effectively and easily. The body is not a randomly occurring hodge-podge of parts. Every aspect of the body is precisely designed for a specific purpose. Frequently the integrity of our body's natural alignment is compromised through injury, neglect, or habit, and although our skill level is also compromised, we often remain completely unaware of the problem.

Aligning the body properly depends on feeling the body. Within this feeling, we must learn to discern how the body functions, so we can adopt appropriate alignments to the task at hand. For instance, when we're standing, we generally believe that we're balanced simply

because we don't fall down. What's actually true is that we're simply good at managing *off*-balance. This unconscious skill keeps us from noticing our constant state of being slightly unbalanced. In this way, we give ourselves little chance to feel and align to true balance, and so we are limited in every action where balance is a factor—which means almost every action. Through investigating and learning the principles that govern our body's design, we can align our bodies more effectively. Once we understand the principles involved, we are able to deal with variations in movement, without sustaining injuries or losing power. We'll discuss alignment further in Chapters Five and Six.

The third thing to clarify is *relationship*. Whether we're dealing with people, objects, or circumstances, skillful interaction is always a matter of relationship. Sometimes we respond clearly and creatively to what presents itself. At other times, we do not relate well to what occurs, instead remaining stuck in an idea, a technique, or our reactions. We are not fully there with what's happening. Mastery, on the other hand, is being present with what is occurring, staying with it from beginning to end. It is a completely alive and creative experience that includes everything that's there—sensation, alignment, other people, objects, gravity, spatial awareness, mental activities—as well as whatever else may arise. With no attachment to ideas or techniques, but instead understanding the principles of engagement, we can change as circumstances change. It's a lively kind of relating that shows up as qualities like ease, grace, and fluidity. We'll discuss *relationship* further in Chapters Seven and Nine.

The effectiveness of any physical interaction is grounded in our experience of our bodies. We need to observe and work with how our bodies interact with the environment in order to more fully understand how the body is functionally designed and how we need to develop. Our task here is to enhance our *feeling-awareness, align* with the principles and structure that allow an effortlessly effective use of our bodies, and understand how *relationship* is the domain of all skill.

The point is to experience what is presented here,
not to merely know about it.

CHAPTER THREE

Feeling-Awareness

Awareness

The place to start our work on the body is with awareness. I always find that fact interesting, since in a way we aren't starting with the body at all, we are starting with the "mind." It is our awareness that provides us with every piece of information we have about our bodies. Without body awareness, no movement can be directed accurately, no actions will be effective, no feedback will be acknowledged or related to, and no corrections can be undertaken. In short, no skill or improvements will occur without awareness.

Body awareness is rooted within our ability to feel. When I speak of *feeling* in this case, I'm not referring to our emotions or moods, but at first to the feeling-sensation of every part of the body. How could you take a step without at least some feeling in your leg? How could you relax a tense shoulder without feeling the tension? How would you perceive the movement of your arm arcing through the air without having a feeling-awareness of this movement? A sense of feeling is how we move our bodies so precisely, and aside from looking at them, it's the only way we know that they're there. We might see, hear, taste, or smell the world around us, but it is not until we feel something that we become most intimately related to others and our environment. The experience of being alive is largely a feeling.

When we cannot feel some part of ourselves, whether because of a drug like novocaine or the restriction of circulation to a limb, we often say that part of us is "asleep" or even "dead." But there are less extreme degrees of insensitivity. Have you ever watched someone trying to sew on a button for the first time? Someone whose hands

are awkward so that the simple task of threading a needle seems completely beyond him? He's lucky if he can hang onto the button! Do you think that he is somehow "naturally" that way? It could be that he has sustained some kind of nerve damage so he will never be able to do fine work with his hands. It's more likely that he has not developed a "feel" for fine work. He has never in his life practiced the kinds of delicate movements needed for sewing. He is not a clumsy person, he just lacks a certain sensitivity in his fingers. If he increased the feeling in his fingers, he could become skillful enough to do needlepoint.

Our skill level in most activities is largely determined by how much we can feel our bodies. We might be able to see how something can be done, and even have the strength to accomplish it, but we must also have precise control of our bodies, and for that we need sensitivity. The good news is that feeling sensitivity is something we can change. Understanding feeling as a perception that can be improved upon is the beginning of increasing sensitivity. Any increase in sensitivity allows us to achieve finer distinctions within the sensations of movement and touch.

Sensations are the most efficient way for our bodies to move vast amounts of information from a cellular level to our conscious awareness. They are like neuro-chemical bulletins from the body to the mind. Because these "feeling-messages" are far more extensive than we need for adequate gross body functions, we can disregard many of them and simply respond to the most noticeable or familiar feelings. We may, however, be ignoring useful messages and responding out of habit to coarse and even inaccurate messages. Few of us take any direct action to sort these out. The difference between having great physical ability or not is often simply a matter of developing the sensitivity to use the body's vast communication system more effectively.

Feeling Is Foremost

Feeling is what movement is all about, and it is also primarily how movement is perceived. To experience this, spend some time and do the following exercises.

Lift your hand a few times while investigating these questions:

How do you "will" your hand to go up? What actually gets the hand up?

You will find that in order to lift your hand, you generate a feeling. It's not necessarily easy to break it down, since the feeling you generate is the one you call "lifting your hand."

Now continue with this question:

How do you know your hand is up once you've lifted it? Try closing your eyes and raise your hand. Given that your eyes are closed, notice how it is you manage to lift the hand, and how it is you know it's moving, and how you know it is in the air once it is lifted.

Excluding sight, you perceive where the arm is by *feeling* that the arm is raised up. You know because you can feel it.

Take a few moments to study this until you can experience for yourself the subtle sensation, the feeling-impulse, that is actually responsible for lifting your hand. Also isolate the sensations that allow you to perceive where your arm is in space. Notice that without this sensory feedback you would have no idea where your arm is.

Such feelings are usually taken for granted and so we lose touch with them. With practice, we can make these distinctions once again and so become conscious of subtle feelings of impulse and perception. As a result, we'll develop much greater control and mastery of both action and awareness. A look into the basic physiology involved will help point us toward obtaining a greater command of our bodies.

Intent, Impulse, and Feedback

When we move the body in any way, an impulse has occurred. From the brain a signal is sent through the nervous system that activates muscles to contract, and this produces movement. This may be a

simplistic physiological description of how we move, but actually doing it is even simpler. When you or I move, we simply move. We don't need to know how the body works in order to do it, we only need to know what to do to make it work. But how *do* we get it to work? We've been doing it for so long that it is easy to miss the subtleties involved.

First, a desire to move occurs—this can exist below our cognitive radar and so be quite unnoticed in some cases. This intent to move will be created in relation to whatever we perceive at the moment—an itch, a Frisbee coming our way, hunger pangs, the thought of our girlfriend—and our interpretation of what's needed in relationship to it—scratch the itch, catch the Frisbee, eat some food, call our girlfriend. This is what activates the brain to send particular signals to the nervous system. In order to express this intent, a nerve-impulse, which occurs as a feeling, is sent to the muscles to produce movement.

We do this so easily and quickly that we hardly notice the intent. When we have need for our hand to go up, it goes up. But if we break down this process and carefully look at what is actually happening, we begin to notice that the intent or desire to move occurs first, and is separate from the feeling. The feeling follows the intent so closely as to be virtually indistinguishable. This is the "feeling" of lifting the hand—what we normally just cognize as "lifting the hand," and even the act of lifting itself often goes virtually unnoticed. It includes both a feeling-impulse that commands the hand to go up—although it doesn't usually seem like a command, it simply seems like making the hand go up—as well as feedback in the form of a feeling-perception, which is the sensation of the hand moving up.

Because all movement is like this, we can say that movement occurs as a result of feeling. Walking is produced by the feeling of walking, running occurs through the feeling of running, lifting a heavy object occurs from the feeling that lifts a heavy object. Just so, our balance comes from coordinating an array of different feelings and requires adjustments in the whole body to produce a feeling that the brain reads out as simply "balance." We create movement by producing the appropriate feeling that evokes the particular physiological

We want our actions and impulses to be as "reflective" as possible. I don't mean that they are mechanical or in any way not intelligent, but that they are immediate to the event—they "reflect" the event. This occurs like still water reflects a bright moon—accurately, and without distortion or delay. The instant the moon changes, so does the reflection. Calming the mind and becoming as present as possible is like *stilling the water.* Relaxing the body allows it to remain open to the next moment and free to take action, and so able to *reflect the moon,* so to speak. In this state of open stillness, we can accurately respond to whatever activity arises, since our actions are already connected to the experience of the moment.

Perception dictates action, therefore skill.

Adhering to a principle of interaction that compels us to relate to every action as it occurs opens us up to a whole new realm of interactive abilities. One example of such an interactive principle that we use in Cheng Hsin is *following,* which means always moving in harmony and in relationship to the actions of the person we are interacting with, no matter what's going on. Some other interactive principles are *joining, leading, complementing,* and so forth. The names give you an idea of the various natures of these principles, but their main effect overall is that engaging in this way of relating constantly draws us to remain directly connected and responsive to what's happening.

Since by using such principles we are already present and active with what's occurring, we need only to direct our responses toward appropriate goals as the action unfolds. The principle of remaining directly connected and responsive to everything that's happening applies to any interaction with another person, be it wrestling, fencing, ping pong, tennis, or making love. It also holds true in a different sense for interactions with the environment, objects, or circumstances, such as skiing, surfing, or playing music. Eventually, as more development occurs along these lines, the "feeling" of the activity in which you are engaged seems to actually move your body, with very little mental processing on your part. At this stage, your

role appears more like directing the flow of the interaction than it does deciding what action to take.

Mystical sources of power are overrated;
mastering one's disposition is underrated.

The Creative Aspect of Mind and Perception

It seems that the effects of a principle like gravity are a constant in our world. As a principle of physics, the law of gravity operates independent of our participation, so our role in this relationship is limited to the choice of aligning with it or not. With the principles in this book, such as the body-being principles from Chapter Five, or relational principles such as *following* and *joining,* our participation is essential to their existence. Aligning to them is what creates them. If we don't recognize such principles occurring or not occurring in our actions, minds, or relating, then they do not exist.

Principles such as relaxing, grounding, and being calm can only occur by creating the commensurate body-mind states that activate them. When this is done, they are known to produce effortlessly effective results. These results occur because the specific body-mind states place us in alignment with a complex set of physical, physiological, and psychological principles too difficult for us to grasp easily with the intellect. Likewise, principles that we use in interaction, such as *following* and *joining,* produce a method or strategy for relating that will consistently prove successful when we use it. But we must use it. Principles like these only come into being within our state of mind, and in how we use our bodies, or interact with someone or something. They do not occur on their own. If we don't create them, they don't exist.

The more we create and come to understand a principle like grounding, the greater the changes in our body-being, and the more far-reaching the results. Grasping a universal truth firsthand through contemplation work will reverberate through our experience and affect our beliefs and perspectives in much the same way, although on a deeper, more personal level. This entire domain of discovery,

Remember, the key to exercises involving imagery is that you must convince your mind that they are real, and for that you need to take them seriously. If you are imagining standing on pilings, or that there is a flow of energy rushing out your arms, the image won't have any substantial influence on your structure and nervous system unless you can feel these things as if they are actually happening. Although you're just making up these feeling-images, the changes that result from adhering to the principles are real and lasting. The principles themselves are hard to grasp, and even harder to adhere to directly. Those who comprehend the principles can only point the way for others, because these things must be experienced in order to be understood. Creating feeling-imagery provides an excellent way for a student to gain experiential understanding and also train the body-mind to align with any principle or structural point.

Anyone interested in adopting a principle or structural point is capable of inventing an appropriate feeling-image to aid this effort. You simply need to make up an image that evokes qualities that are aligned to that particular principle. For example, if you want to work on grounding, you could imagine a very large lead ball, say a thousand pounds, hanging under the floor and attached to your center with a chain.

What qualities does this image evoke? Obviously heaviness, which pulls your attention downward. Since the ball is so big, you will become more aware of the force of gravity—your body structure must align to this pull or risk being broken like a twig. The image also helps draw your feeling-attention *under* the ground, and so your mind shifts to a reality that is quite different from the norm and becomes far more invested in a new way of relating to the ground.

The most effective body structure for supporting the weight of the ball is to keep your pelvis aligned between your feet. The massive weight would also press you into your feet, encouraging you to keep your knees pointing with your toes, and to press your weight into your heels to avoid the extreme strain that would be put on your knee joints if you failed to do so. Being pulled downward from its base, the spine is likely to straighten. You're also encouraged to more consciously shift your weight in relation to the ground, paying more attention to the pressure on your feet. All of these changes in body-