

The Art of Mental Training

Chapter 23

The Present

<http://www.DefenseOnDemand.com>

Copyright © 2006 by Daniel Gonzalez. All rights reserved.

I was finishing my studies at the university. One day Leo-tai called me and said that he wanted to come out to visit and see where I was in the Black Hills, he said he also wanted to see where Rocky Raccoon from the old Beatles' song used to run around. Then he started right into it . . .

"Now somewhere in the Black Mountain Hills of Dakota,

lived a young boy named Rocky Raccoon,

and one day his woman run off with another guy,

hit young Rocky in the eye . . ."

Leo-tai sung it over the phone. It was funny; he really had it down.

So, as so often happened, Leo-tai ended up doing what he wanted to do. Now, here was Leo-tai, smack in the Black Hills, visiting me. He was very excited to be so near the home of Rocky Raccoon.

And, when I told him that I figured Rocky Raccoon ran around in Deadwood: "Then we'll have to go up there for sure," he said.

We were in a beautiful part of the Black Hills, where I rented a place at the mouth of Spearfish Canyon while I finished school. There I took Leo-tai on a short hike up a trail ending high above the canyon.

The stunning view took Leo-tai by surprise.

"Danielsan," he said with amazement, "This is very good."

“Incredible, isn’t it?”

“This is very good indeed!” he said with his widest smile.

I showed him where to sit in order to enjoy one of the best places in the world from which to watch a sunset. I pulled out my journal and two Gatorades, in order to jot down his thoughts as we watched what we later agreed was one of the most beautiful sunsets we’d ever seen.

Leo-tai’s lessons were always concise and to the point. He never went too fast, he kept it simple.

"To be totally in the present, Danielsan . . . that is the key. To learn how to be there throughout the competition, that is your goal. To consistently play in the present moment, where mind and body are as one, where training takes over, where no thoughts interfere. This is Warrior knowledge, Danielsan, it is something that has been taught for centuries. You are being shown an established way to get there."

Leo-tai’s eyes were far over the horizon. He continued, "By understanding and practicing the Art one learns how to create the internal environment that invites the quiet mind in during competition. The quiet mind is a warrior skill. In the present, everything comes together and performance is flawless and automatic. Inside, the Warrior/Champion has no thought, no cluttered mind; instead he is an unstoppable champion totally absorbed in the action before him."

As I listened I remembered having recently watched Pete Sampras being asked in an interview what he was thinking about during a crucial moment in a tennis match. His answer was fascinating, proving his total immersion in the moment. “Nothing,” he replied. “I was thinking about nothing.”

“A true champion,” said Leo-tai, “Learns how to feel no pressure, because pressure is created by anxiety, and anxiety can only exist if one allows one’s thoughts to wander away from the present to some uncertainty in the future or to some remembered failure of the past . . . There is power in the present moment, Danielsan: hold on to it.

“The two skills the Warrior/Champion must possess to help him reach his maximum potential are the ability to recognize when his mind is not focused on the present, and the ability to bring it back into the present. When your mind is racing, help bring it back by focusing on your breathing. This will help you to reach that place where we have a sure sense that we can do what we know we need to do, and that we can do it without having to try too hard, a place from where technique flows freely and accurately, a place from which right action springs forth.”

“You mean the quiet mind,” I said.

“Exactly, and the present moment is where the quiet mind exists. There’s no worry, no judging, no fearing, no hoping; the mind is totally in the here and now throughout the event. You must practice leaving all the mental clutter, all the personal situations, all the distractions that fill up your head, outside of the arena. While it’s crucial to have learned from the past, there is also a time to leave the past behind you. And while it’s important to prepare for the future, to be in the present requires that it too, must be discarded at some level.”

Leo-tai looked at me carefully to make sure that I got his point.

“*Now* is the time in which you perform, and the present is the only place that *Now* exists. Practice quietening the mind, and bringing it to the present; learn to find the present, in order to be able to perform at your highest level – do you understand?”

“I think so,” I told him.

“Then you must practice more, Danielsan, so that you may *know* so.”

Once again, Leo-tai had helped me to better understand his Warrior Art.

Remember: "To be totally in the present, that is the key."