

## The Inner Game

I remember walking through the New England Mobile Book Fair in the 1970s seeing one edition or another of W. Timothy Gallwey's *The Inner Game of Tennis*. Having had maybe three games of tennis in my life, I was not eager to delve into the mental set one should aspire to in order to be a tennis star, but the idea that someone was actually taking some interest in the mental attitudes of a clearly physical pastime fascinated me.

His theme, at the risk of simplifying it, is that one's body has a sort of intelligence that the athlete should trust in attaining his/her goals. To me this sounded like a much earlier Napoleon Hill in *Think and Grow Rich* (1937) who suggested that wealth (the "success" most of his reader's aspired to) is a result of increasing one's thinking power and connecting with the intelligence of the universe. This spiritual component of success could lead one to a religious sort of spirituality as it had many authors writing on the topic of success and prosperity, but it could also lead one to yet an earlier set of works on psychology.

Carl Jung (1875-1961) posited a collective unconscious. This, according to Jung, was inherited genetically but was not part of one's personal experience, although one could tap into it.

Fast forward to 1998 and a seminar I taught in Ohio: I was working on an aiki reception that could be used by almost any art. People were trying to make it practical before they mastered it, but worse, in my opinion, they were concerned with making it masterful before they practiced it. I explained that since they all had some experience in the martial arts, they should adopt the attitude that they could not make a mistake, that anything they did would produce a result and that result could easily be adapted for their own self-defense. In essence I was saying that they should trust their bodies (a la Gallwey) while suggesting that they could mentally act as if they could tap into a vast storehouse of experience in their minds (a la Jung) that would result in not a wealth-building but a nonetheless a successful interaction (a la Hill).

The inner game of self-defense through traditional martial arts is one of both conceit and demureness. One has to be confident that one's training has prepared one for any eventuality, even if a fact-hardened look at the world today would argue that it cannot be true. If one feels trained to handle any sort of encounter, one will have a greater chance to adapt one's reaction on the fly, thus improving one's chance of emerging unscathed. Trusting his bodily reactions and his "universal intelligence" to support him means a martial artist must feel that no one can defeat him. That cocky attitude however has to be inverted when it is training time. One must feel that one is never good enough and accept the idea that anyone can defeat anyone at anytime.

The inner game, therefore, is one of irony. I look at the inner game as a healthy balance. One's modesty is not false—a rational mind informs one that any lucky blow or unusual attack can put one down, but the positive thinking mind knows it is wise to assume confidence once a conflict starts.

The inner game became the root of one of Takeshin Sogo Budo's *okuden* (advanced teachings):  
“See yourself as invulnerable; act as if humanly vulnerable.”

*More on this next week.*