

T'ai Chi Ch'uan

Circle of Strength

One of the chief tenets of Tai Chi is that of respect for the chi of others. This is translated in several ways. First, physical force is never used unless necessary. Second, if physical force is necessary the amount of force used is only that which is required to protect yourself. This is often stated as "I will respect your Chi if you will respect mine". An additional way of looking at the respect for the Chi of others lies within the concept of circle of strength.

What is meant by circle of strength? The concept can be expressed as that area around your body where you are able to develop and deliver power. In other words there exists some space around you (i.e. a circle of space) where you are able to maintain your balance and center and utilize your energy effectively, but beyond which you will lose your balance and your energy will be ineffective against an opponent. The physical space that is defined by this concept is from your physical center (Tan Tien) out to your forward toe. If you were to pivot at your center your forward toe would draw a circle around you that defines your circle of strength.

The classics state that "the power of Tai Chi is rooted in the feet, developed in the legs, directed by the waist and expressed by the hands". While not explicitly stated with a little study and thought it will be realized that the concept of circle of strength is implied.

For the energy to be rooted in the feet the feet must be firmly attached to the ground. If you extend your palm beyond your forward toe you will find that your balance shifts slightly and that your feet are no longer firmly rooted. With the palm overextended you will note that your knee extends beyond your toe which causes a break in the structural integrity of the natural triangle. You will also find that your shoulder is turning slightly and beginning to direct the movement rather than the waist directing the movement.

For your Tai Chi to be truly effective in terms of health as well as physical energy you must keep this concept in mind as you practice.