

Part and All: Exploring the Principle

By Laoshi Laurince McElroy

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One of my most repeated mantras on the mat and in the room is this T'ai Chi principle: "If part of me moves, all of me moves; if part of me is still, all of me is still."

This has been a part of my play and part of my teaching since the early days. I honestly do not know the source. It could have been the words of Sifu Mesmer during my beginnings with T'ai Chi at Black Dragon School or it could have been something I read. I will even readily admit that it might be my paraphrasing such sources as the writings of Master We Yu-Shiang: "When in stillness you should be still as a mountain. When in motion you should move like the water of the river."



Art by DavidChenArt.com

Regardless of how it entered the Water Tiger world, it is here to stay and its importance cannot be denied. You may not, however, realize that its meaning is two-fold. In other words, like the many currents of the river's water, the phrase has more than the meaning at its surface. There is both a practical way in which to interpret its meaning and an esoteric way.

Although it is the practical that I invoke more often than not on the mat and in the room, we'll explore both meanings here.

The practical is about how every part of the body should be moving if there is movement in one part of the body and no part of the body should be moving if one part of the body isn't moving. As Chang San-Feng's fourth practice point tells us: "Feet, legs, waist, fingers – all move as a unit."

Consider the gears of a watch. Even though different gears of different sizes are moving at different speeds, they all move to a single purpose. If one gear stops, they will all stop. So should it be through our body.

Since Water Tiger reserves teaching Opening until later in our step-wise process in learning even the most fundamental open-hand form, let us look to our Closing for a more direct example. It can be the more formal version, such as at the end of either Standing Meditation or our *T'ai Chi Qigong Breathing Set*, or it can be what we call Casual Closing at the end of many of our floor exercises. My usual direction for this process is: if something happens upstairs (upper body), something happens downstairs (lower body), and vice versa. The arms and hands float into a position on top of a rising invisible ball as the weight settles into, usually, the right foot. The left foot is drawn into the right as the hands roll in toward the body. The left heel is driven down and the weight is re-divided between the feet as the hands press down. A final "rebound" —

either a sinking or rising movement through the entire body — serve to pull the hands onto the *Shiah Dan Tien* acupuncture point at the abdomen. The entire body comes to and holds in stillness as one unit.

Nothing happens in isolation.

I also cite this principle when we play our *Turn & Circle* exercise. Even though the exercise is played in *Ma Bu*, it can still be a gateway to an understanding of this concept. Movement should be a left and right wave linked from the *Shiah Dan Tien* into the abdomen, lower back, and hips, these turn the mid-torso into the chest and upper back, which turn into the shoulders. The shoulders turn into the biceps and triceps, which turn into the elbow joints. They turn into the forearms and the forearms turn into the wrists. The wrists turn into the hands or metacarpals. From there, it's into the knuckles (or, interphalangeal articulations) into the proximal phalanges into the next knuckles into the intermediate phalanges into the next knuckles into the distal phalanges. It is not waist to shoulders, shoulders to hands.

Abbreviating Chen Man-Ch'ing: "... the hands do not move." In other words, the hands only move because everything else moves. If anything stops, everything should stop.

Unbelievably, the esoteric way to interpret the phrase can actually be viewed as easier to comprehend. Look at it through the lens of the phrase: "stillness in motion". Even though we move, we move in stillness, in quiet, in calm.

I recently used a line from physical training guru Tony Horton at the end of some martial application play with a student. We were shifting gears from the martial to our *T'ai Chi Qigong Breathing Set* at the end of the session and I said: "Time to take the violence out and put the peace in." The student responded with a query: "Shouldn't've the peace already been in there?" He was correct. Even during the times we are in conflict, we are to be calm, quiet, still.

This calm should be demonstrated in our easy flow from movement to movement in our form play and floor exercises, as well as our easy flow from moment to moment in conflict. No tension. Just relaxation. No force. Just flow. As we move all, we are still throughout.

To use a Water Tiger favorite formula, practical or esoteric: T'ai Chi is about movement. T'ai Chi is not about movement, it's about stillness. T'ai Chi is about both movement and stillness.

