

Simply Centered © Michael Arloski, Ph.D. - 2002



You may not be a martial artist, a trained mediator, or a practitioner of Tai Chi. You may not be a trained athlete whose performance depends on how balanced they are on a ski slope or an ice rink. You may not be a professional dancer whose moves reflect what appears to be effortless grace. So, you may not be familiar with the term “CENTERING”.

“Be centered.” “Center yourself.” “Come from center.” “Move from center.” “Return to center.” “Centering practice.” Unless you are watching Kung Fu movies (and actually listening to the soundtrack), or remember what Obie Wan Kanobi was saying about “The Force” twenty-some years ago (yes, it’s been that long!) in Star Wars, you might not hear phrases like this. Yet this concept, once understood and applied, can dramatically improve your life.

You have been speaking prose all along, but didn’t know it. You have experienced what I am referring to here as being centered. When you made a decision, without anxiety, that was true to yourself, that was being centered. When you sank a long putt, a three-point shot, hit a solid line drive or threw the third strike exactly where you wanted to, that was being centered. When you twirled on the dance floor beautifully, carved your best run on a snowboard, or made the perfect cast with your fishing rod, that was being centered. You were “in the zone”. When you found a poem or piece of expressive writing just flowing out of you like liquid, that was experiencing a centered state. When you ended a relationship, not to relieve anxiety or fear, but because you knew, with calm certainty, that it was the best and right thing to do, that too was being centered.

Think of how different your life can be if you realize that becoming centered is always an option you have in every situation. Think of the effectiveness of decision-making and creativity of effort that can result from operating more from a centered state! Choose to be centered!

How do we “become” centered? Instead of it being a magical and elusive state that is hard to create again (that 15 foot putt was just luck, right?), what if centering was a skill that you developed and practiced? What if knowing how to center yourself was always accessible information that you could draw upon in conflict, in emergencies, and in opportunities that demand peak performance?



A centered body centers the mind. Centering has a physical aspect to it, and a mental/emotional aspect. They affect each other and you can start in either domain.

Quieting your thoughts will relax your body. Nervous and fearful internal self-talk can produce muscle tension, increased heart rate, blood pressure, stomach acid production, and more. Quieting the internal chatter and soothing yourself with more positive and calm self-talk, or enhancing it with mental images of tranquil and safe, even idyllic settings has just the opposite effect on the body.

Physically you can center yourself by focusing on your breath, changing your posture, lowering your center of gravity and movement, broadening your stance, becoming more in balance. Breathe slower on each breath, and a little deeper. Close your eyes for a moment, perhaps. Sit up straight, or stand with your feet further apart, your knees slightly bent, your weight equally distributed on both feet. As you do this, especially the breathing, you'll notice that your mind is slowing down and you are focusing more on the present moment.

Move from center. Place your right index finger in your naval...yes, your belly button! Now take your first three fingers of your left hand and place them across your belly right below your right index finger. At that level on your belly where the third finger rests imagine the point that is half-way between your belly and the skin on your back. That spot right in the "center" of you is what the Chinese call "Tan Tien". The Japanese call it the "Hara" center. Imagine that this is where your body moves from, not up higher somewhere.

Stand like you have just mounted an invisible horse. This is the "horse riding stance" that you see all of those martial artists assume in the Kung Fu movies or in such films as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Keep your back relaxed but nice and straight. Look straight ahead. Now flex your knees and shift your weight back and forth from one leg to the other while keeping your feet flat on the ground. Feel very connected to the ground you are standing on. Take small steps with one foot while leaving the other one "planted". Move so "Tan Tien" is just floating at the same level all the time.

The "horse-riding stance" is one you can feel very solid in. Someone who is centered in this stance is no "push over"! It is a stance you can move quickly from and be very flexible in. Solid, quick, flexible. Sounds like a good way to be in a conflict or a high performance situation.

The next time you are out in public and need to make an important decision, or deal with a challenging situation, just adopt this stance. When the others around you stop laughing the

conflict will be over. Yes, I am kidding! Getting yourself centered physically can really help though, so try more surreptitious methods like the following.

Breathe. A good, long, slow, deep breath can do wonders. It cues your mind to come out of a tendency toward overwhelm or panic, and allows you to take in more immediate information about the situation. Sit up or stand very straight, with your feet firmly planted on the floor or ground.

Now the mental part! Think of this “Tan Tien” center in your body and adopt the ancient Samurai notion of “expect nothing, be prepared for anything.” Be aware of everything around you where you are, right here and right now in the present moment. Let the past and future evaporate. Focus on the present.

Bring your thoughts to an observation of the present situation without letting your past prejudices influence it. Take what the moment brings you without judgment. Then from that calm, centered place make a distinction between your choices, based on the values that are true to you.

Do the things that “center” you in your life. There are probably favorite activities that you like to do that produce in you this experience of centering. They are usually activities that are very healthy, that give you perspective, that refresh you and renew your soul. Do them. Do them more often. They may be as formal and consciously designed to develop your sense of center, such as the practice of Tai Chi, Yoga or meditation. They may be as simple as a walk in the park, a hike in someplace a bit “wild”, throwing pottery, gardening, or just getting together with good friends with no agenda or expectations. Do what “centers” you more often and you will have more access to “center” when you really need it!

REAL BALANCE

www.realbalance.com



Global Wellness Services