



The Path of Unity

By Ed Altman

At the recent *T'ai Chi Chih* retreat weekend in Sedona, AZ, I was giving detailed instructions on the movements when a student asked "How do you keep track of all these details during the movements? What are you thinking about during your *T'ai Chi Chih* practice?" In order to address these questions, we must first agree to distinguish between the limited, conceptual mind (small "m") and the unlimited, Universal Mind (capital "M"). The thinking mind is merely a function of the brain while the latter encompasses a much larger array of senses. Yet each has its place as we learn and practice the *T'ai Chi Chih* movements.

The important thing to understand about the conceptual mind is that it can only focus on one thought at a time. There may be many thoughts swirling around, but they are completely independent of each other and vying for a moment of attention. The mind cannot handle all of them at once. In fact, the more the conceptual mind is used during *T'ai Chi Chih* practice, the more scattered and distracted it becomes. This is why we focus on the soles of the feet or the T'an T'ien to develop concentration and ground the Chi. With continued focus, the distracted mind eventually settles down and we receive additional benefits from our personal practice.

When I practice the *T'ai Chi Chih* movements, I focus on the *sensations of the weight shift* in either the soles of the feet or the T'an T'ien. In the soles of the feet, I sense the subtle change in the center of balance as the weight shifts from one foot to the other. I am continually amazed at how much information is conveyed about my practice with this technique, yet few seem to understand its

importance. It is more like "listening" with the soles of the feet rather than just thinking about them. Similarly, when focusing on the T'an T'ien, I sense how the movement originates from this area and flows outward like a wave through every part of the body. Each part of the body is flooded with Chi and spontaneously aligns to it. Every part of the body instinctively understands how to serve the flow of the Chi. This may result in the waist turning slightly at the end of the weight shift, or in the arms extending or contracting with the flow of the Chi rather than moving on their own. The flow of the Chi is the unifying force in the *T'ai Chi Chih* movements and it is guided by Mind, not by thinking.

The challenge is that although we first learn the *T'ai Chi Chih* movements by thinking our way through them, we eventually discover that we can proceed no further with this method. Eventually we move beyond our well-practiced technique and transcend the limited, thinking mind. This transition to a reliance on Universal Mind occurs naturally as the concentration shifts from one point (such as the soles of the feet) to having no *exclusive* point of attention. The awareness of Universal Mind is now free to permeate every facet of the movement, and nothing is excluded. Awareness is present at every point, in every moment of our practice, and all the disparate pieces become unified. This is when *T'ai Chi Chih* practice has become a moving meditation. It is in such moments that great truths are revealed and we come to know our true place in the Universe. When we are finally willing to let go of our need for control and allow the Chi to take the lead, we have begun to explore the path of Unity.