



Linda's T'ai Chi

Weekly Handout May 31, 2020

What can Endurance Runners teach us during the Pandemic?

Excerpted from New York Times article by Brad Stulberg

I always appreciate articles and research that members of our group send to me. One of our members sent me this article titled "What can endurance runners teach us during the pandemic?" I found this article very interesting. First, the strategies used by long distance runners may be helpful to us as we see our way through the ordeal of the pandemic. Secondly, they are the same concepts that we employ in T'ai Chi/Qigong. At the end, I will cross walk these strategies to our T'ai Chi concepts.

This is not the entire article but excerpted from the original.

Patience

The first rule of running a long-distance race is to acknowledge that the race will in fact be long — and hard. If you envision a race that is over quickly and without pain, you are setting yourself up for unnecessary frustration. This is true off the pavement, too. In 2006, epidemiologists from the University of Southern Denmark set out to explore why Danes consistently score higher than people in any other Western country on measures of life satisfaction. Their published findings zeroed in on the importance of expectations. 'If expectations are unrealistically high, they could be the basis of disappointment and low satisfaction.'

Pacing

A common mistake among novice endurance athletes is when they notice they are feeling good early in a long race; they start moving faster, only to implode in the later miles. Veteran athletes, on the other hand, know the importance of showing restraint, even — and perhaps especially — when things are going well.

Process (Over Outcome)

A goal of finishing an Ironman triathlon is thrilling and energizing — until you realize how hard it is to actually complete one. Focusing too heavily on the end game can demoralize and de-motivate you from the steps you need to take *today* to accomplish it. Focusing on the process means breaking a goal down into its component parts, and then concentrating on tackling those parts. It's a mechanism that keeps you in the here and now, even during the pursuit of distant goals. Studies show that a process mind-set creates regular opportunities for little victories, which can help sustain the motivation required to accomplish long-term goals.

'There is so much outside of your control in a race — how the competition does, the weather, and to an extent how your body feels. 'That's why it is so important to stay focused on what you *can* control in the race, things like your pacing, outlook and response to external forces. It's OK to keep the end goal in mind, but you've got to run the race mile by mile.'

Purpose

In 2017, shortly after Shalane Flanagan became the first American woman to win the New York City Marathon in over 40 years, I asked her what kept her going in the later miles of the race, when she was fighting through the proverbial "wall" that so many distance runners hit. She told me that she kept thinking about three things: her husband, who sacrificed so much so that she could pursue her dreams; the women she trains with; and the young girls watching on television across the country.

Some of you may recognize these strategies in our study and performance of T'ai Chi and Qigong. Here is how they relate:

Patience in T'ai Chi is focusing on the here and now, your breath and the leading hand. We place our mind in the foot that is not moving. Patience is essential to enjoying the health and wellbeing benefits of T'ai Chi. If we become impatient, then we increase our stress response and perform less accurately.

Pacing is a concept and strategy that informs us to perform at 70% effort. It is better to hold back than to go all out. Performing at 70% saves your energy and physicality; Pacing also includes knowing the difference between pain and soreness. When and if you experience, stop. Pain is a red light. It means something is wrong. Soreness is a yellow light. It means to slow down and build up your physical strength. Soreness is an indication that we are using muscles that need exercising. Pay attention to both pain and soreness. Pacing also relates to the idea of "quality over quantity". Sometimes students want to push to learn more postures. It is better to improve postures before moving on to newer ones. This takes patience.

Process in T'ai Chi is the concept that T'ai Chi is a journey and not a destination. We are striving for progress not perfection. Enjoying the journey is enjoying the learning experience. We are always a student.

Purpose is very personal. I perform T'ai Chi because I like the way it makes me feel physically and emotionally. I like the slow choreographed movements and the imagery of nature. I teach because I love teaching and sharing my passion for T'ai Chi with others. Knowing your purpose is helpful. Maybe it is fun. That is a worthy purpose in and of itself.

Enjoy and Peace,

Linda