

A Tai Chi Moment

I took a long walk from home to downtown the other day. I like to do that sometimes to see if I can still make it. After having lunch at the Village Green, I wandered around downtown doing some window shopping. Then, before catching the bus back home I thought that I would have a glass of carrot juice as an energy pickup and hang-out on the Midrachove (outdoor mall) a bit. That's what retired people do you know; they hang out on the midrachov.

So, there I was, sitting on one of the planters in the middle of the Midrachov in the heat of the afternoon, under the shade of a small tree sipping my carrot juice. Suddenly, a guy came around the corner and our eyes locked on each other. He stood there and stared at me as I sat there with my carrot juice staring back. Not knowing exactly what to do, he warily came over in my direction and asked if we knew each other. I said, "No, I don't think so, but you are welcome to get to know me if you wish. Here, sit down."

So, he sat down in the shade beside me and we began to chat. After a minute or two of small talk, he began to tell me about himself. He was a musician, had been heavily involved in the hippie movement and drugs and eventually drawn into the Carlebach movement where he became a "chozar b'tshuva" (newly religious). I told him that I was originally from Oregon and he said "Ori-gone" and began to flip out. He was originally from New York but had gone to California and lived in Berkeley, which is where he got involved with Carlebach. I told him that my wife and I had also lived in Berkeley for a number of years, and it turns out that we both had been there during the exact same time period.

"Now I know," he exclaimed, "We must have met in Berkeley. I think I recognize your face. Didn't you used to have long hair down to your shoulders?". "Not me," I said. "My hair is curly. It was more like an Afro." Then he said to me rather mystically, "I'm really into studying Torah, I don't work; I study all of time. You seem different, more educated. You must have taken a different route than me." I returned, "Yea, I didn't become religious until a bit later. It basically coincided with my aliya. And yea, I went to college and I work in computers."

"Anyway, this place where you are sitting is where my group meets," he said. I answered, "Oh, and what group is that?" "In the afternoons, a group

of us Carlebachers from Berkeley get together here and philosphyze. We really don't have anything else to do." Then he said a bit sheepishly, "We're all kind of a bunch of losers."

By this time, other members of the group were beginning to arrive and they were listening in on our conversation. I responded, "Well, I sort of specialize in losers. One of the other things that I do besides computers is that I am a tai chi instructor." He said, "Oh, you mean that thing with those slow movements?" "Yep," I responded. So I began to explain to him how tai chi is a martial art, a soft martial art and how it uses a series of martial art movements strung together in order to develop strength, coordination, and flexibility. "It also trains the mind to concentrate on the parts of the body so that they function together as a cohesive unit. You have to be in the present, concentrate on what is happening right now, not thinking about what happened yesterday or dreaming about what will happen in the future. Tai chi trains you to focus your mind. You get to know yourself better, your inner self. This focusing and concentrating on the present moment will help in your tefilla (praying) and Torah studies."

Without waiting for a response, I continued, "One of the aspects of tai chi is that when you work with a partner, you have to learn to loose. Only through losing can we learn what we are doing wrong so that we can react differently next time. It's what we call *Investing in Lose*." They all responded, "*Investing in Lose*? What a cool term. So, by losing, we can learn to win?" "Yep, that's the way it works in tai chi and it carries over into other areas of our lives as well."

They seemed somewhat satisfied by this surprise visitor who had accidentally invaded their turf, looking for a place to sit and enjoy his carrot juice. "Well, I have to go catch a bus home now," I said. I gave my new friend a hearty hand shake and a hug, and started off to catch my bus. As I was walking away I turned around and yelled, "You know, maybe we can start a tai chi group for losers. All of us losers can get together and learn how to become winners." They all gave an affirmative nod and smiled. I continued, "Now that I know where you folks hang out, I know where to contact you."