

Finding Balance

Wildfires. In this moment, and this place, life is presenting wildfires. Intense. Dramatic. Sudden. Cruising along in summer mode and within a few short hours everything is different. *Very* different. Huge plumes of billowing smoke fill the sky. Wind screams through the valley. At night the mountain glows red like lava streaming from a volcano. Helicopters fly overhead with huge water buckets. Large planes dive bomb with retardant.



It's in times like these that the importance of balance arises and becomes very, very clear. The ability to feel balanced, find balance, regain balance during an intense, dramatic phase of life can be very influential in how we react, respond, deal with all the details and situations that quickly arise in situations like, in this moment, wildfires. Or, it could be a car accident, health issue, job change, aging.

Balance allows us to naturally respond to what's most needed in the moment: evacuate, pack, run, soak the roof, help a neighbor, cry, laugh, sing. Without the sense of being grounded and rooted provided by balance, our responses can be inappropriate, not useful to the situation.

Balance is an underlying theme throughout all the Chinese arts and sciences. We find it central in medicine, philosophy, martial arts, poetry, feng shui, diet. The concept of balance is so pervasive it is integral to every aspect of life, both individually and as a culture and community.

Theories and explanations of exploring balance have developed in Asia over thousands of years. Chinese classics all over revolve around this theme, like the Taoist classics: Tao Te Ching, I Ching, Chuang Tzu. The Confucian analects and the myriad Buddhist texts all describe different perspectives on balance.

There are many Chinese approaches to describe balance, especially focused on energy. For example yin and yang describe the balance of light/dark, up/down, internal/external, positive/negative, male/female. There's also the balance of the elements, like, fire/water and metal/wood.

Because these concepts of balance have evolved over numerous years, it can be very easy to go deeply and spend much time learning about, thinking about these ideas. At this level they are only ideas about balance.

I find the value of these concepts in the application to our daily life. Rarely found in a book, class or training, the benefits of balance are obvious when experienced in the normal, routine aspects of everyday life: family, relationships, finances, work, play, exercise, gardening - each provide a context to learn about and find balance. The skills of balance learned in simple, routine events

then become easily found in the intensity of a dramatic phase, like wildfires.

Learning about balance is not limited to the Chinese arts. Nature continuously provides teachings about balance all around us: light and dark cycle through balance each day, shifting amounts as the seasons change. Dry and damp also have their own balance from one season and one year to the next. Different environments and ecosystems each have their own balancing dynamics: the ocean, mountains, desert, forest. The current prevalence of wildfires is demanding our attention about the balance within forest ecosystems.



All of these examples in nature can teach and guide us toward finding balance within ourselves and our environment. They clearly demonstrate how balance is not a static state. There are continual shifts and adaptations as numerous variables change, following their own natural rhythm. Finding balance allows us to adapt to this continual dance.

Kayaking on the river is one of my favorite places to learn about balance. Even though it may be the same familiar stretch of river, numerous variables change with each journey: water level, temperature, trees and branches form obstacles, submerged rocks, wind, current. Different kayaks, paddles and kayakers all relate differently to the combination of river qualities. There are moments, stretches or entire trips that feels so in sync with... everything. There are also moments, when not balanced, not paying attention, then the consequences are immediate: swimming in the water instead of paddling on the water.

The Chinese practices of medicine, martial arts, tai chi, meditation have provided me with a valuable learning context to explore balance in a supportive environment. For example, the six healing sounds finds balance in the internal organs: heart, lungs, liver, kidney. Standing chi kung postures find balance in poses like embracing the tree. These practices help us find the same balance a great tree has with its roots deep into the earth. The practice of tai chi is a context to find balance within movement. Advanced chi kung practices focus on balancing the deep, subtle energies of body, mind and spirit.



Sitting. Standing. Moving. Each can be a rich learning environment for finding balance. What we learn from these practices can then be applied to whatever is going on right now, the present moment.

What is going on right now? Can we pause, take a breath, and bring awareness, mindfulness to the reality of this moment? Parenting, finishing school, growing food, aging, health issues, finding a life direction, relationships, career. Each can be a continuing education in the process of finding balance.

Just like wildfires. In this moment, at this writing, it is wildfires. Another powerful context to see, find, explore... finding balance..

