

Competition and challenges as meditation and relaxation

I just recently returned from skiing and re-learned a lesson from more than twenty years ago when I first read *The Inner Game of Tennis* by Tim Gallwey. His premise is that we perform complex physical skills better when we relinquish control of "Self 1," our conscious self to "Self 2," our subconscious self. Actions like playing tennis or skiing are too complicated for our conscious mind to control. Gallwey revolutionized tennis instruction (then golf and skiing) by providing techniques to quiet and distract the Self 1 while the Self 2 is going its work. The problem is that Self 1 always wants to be in control and therefore is constantly trying to intervene. It's a constantly challenge to keep Self 1 occupied.

However, there are another two aspects that I've learned from experience.

1. When skiing it's important to stay relaxed and focused on the challenges ahead of the trail ahead without worrying whether being able to handle them. The same thing happens when I'm playing tennis and focus on my performance, not whether I win or lose. This doesn't mean I win all of my matches nor am I happy when I lose but my chances of winning improve. Staying relaxed lets me perform to my potential.
2. Letting Self 2 operate creates a condition like mediation. Being fully involved in the task at hand without concern over the outcome creates an experience described as "flow" by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in his book, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. What I have found is that the effects of this flow state linger for a while afterwards. It ultimately has a calming and reenergizing effect.