



Institut QiShen Institute

Tai Chi & Qigong



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Traditional Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan
103 Movement Hand Form

A Talk on Practice

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Although there are rather a lot of different styles of Chinese martial arts, they are all alike in that successive generations have striven all their lives and with all their might to explain the principles and theory contained in these techniques, but these efforts have never been totally successful. Nevertheless, if a student will expend the effort of one day of practice, he will receive the achievements of a day of work. Over days and months this accumulates till everything falls into place naturally.

Tai Chi Chuan is the art of letting hardness dwell within softness and hiding a needle within cotton; from the point of view of techniques, physiology, and physics, there is considerable philosophy contained within it. Hence those who would research it need to undergo a definite process of development over a considerable period of time. Though one may have the instruction of a fine teacher and the criticism of good friends, the one thing which is most important and which one cannot do without is daily personal training. Without it one can discuss and analyze all day, think and ponder for years, but when one day you encounter an opponent you are like a hole with nothing in it - you are still quite inexperienced, lacking the skills (kung fu) borne of daily practice. This is what the ancients meant by "thinking forever is useless, better to practice". If morning and evening there is never a gap, hot or cold never an exception, so that the moment you think of it you proceed to do your training, then young or old, man or woman, you will alike be rewarded with success.

These days from north to south, from the Yellow River regions to the Yangtze River regions, more and more comrades are learning Tai Chi Chuan, which is heartening for the future of martial arts. However, among these comrades, there is no shortage of those who concentrate and practice hard, study sincerely, and whose future ought to be limitless, yet typically they fail to avoid two kinds of pitfall: in the first case they are very talented, still young and strong, able to apply one criticism to many places, their understanding surpasses that of most people; alas once they make some slight achievement, they are satisfied too quickly, stop in the middle and never really get it. In the second instance, the person is anxious to make rapid progress, throwing it together sloppily, so that before a year is through, they have gone completely through bare hand, sword, knife and spear. Although they can "paint a gourd by following a template", they really haven't achieved the enlightenment in this. The moment you scrutinize their direction and movement, upper and lower body, internal and external, none of it turns out to be standard. In order to correct them, you have to correct every move, and corrections given in the morning are forgotten by evening. That's why you often hear people say: "it's easy to learn tai chi, but hard to correct it". The reason for this saying is people trying to learn too fast. Such a group takes their

mistakes and transmits them to the next generation, necessarily fooling both themselves and others, and this is the most discouraging thing for the future of the art.

In Tai Chi Chuan, we first learn the form or frame. That is to say, according to each posture name from the manual, we are taught the postures by a teacher, one at a time. The student does his best to calm his mind, and silently attentive, pondering, trying, he performs the moves: that is called “practicing the form”. At this time the student focuses on “inner”, “outer”, “upper” and “lower”. “Inner” means “using intent rather than force”. “Lower” means “the *chi* is sunk to the cinnabar field (dantian)”. “Upper” means “Empty, lively, pushing up and energetic” (xu1 ling2 ding3 jing4 - refers to requirements for the head). “Outer” means: the entire body is light and nimble, all the joints are connected as a whole, (movement proceeds) from foot to leg to waist, sink the shoulders and keep elbows bent (low). Those beginning their study should first take the above several instructions and perfect them, pondering and trying morning and evening. Move by move, you must always carefully seek these. When you practice a move, strive for correctness, and only when you have practiced it till it is right go on to the next move. Proceed in this way until you have gradually completed all the postures. This way there is nothing to correct and you do not tend over time towards violating the principles.

In practice as you are moving, the bones and joints of the entire body must all relax and extend and be natural. The mouth and abdomen must not block breathing. The four limbs, the waist and the legs must not use strong force. Something like these last two sentences is always said by people learning internal arts but once they start to move, once they turn the body or kick the legs or twist the waist, their breath becomes labored and their body sways; these defects are all due to stopping the breath and using strong force.

1. When you practice, the head must not incline to either side or tilt forward or backward. There is a phrase “you must suspend the tip of the head”. This is as though something were placed on the top of the head. Avoid at all cost a stiff straightness! That's what is meant by “suspend”. Although the gaze should be directed levelly ahead, sometimes it must turn in accordance with the position of the body. Even though the line of the gaze is empty, it plays an important role in transformations and supplements what is left wanting by the body and hand positions. The mouth seems open but it's not, seems closed but not quite. Nose and mouth inhale and exhale: do what is natural. If some saliva accumulates below the tongue, swallow it; don't spit it out.
2. The torso should be centered and not leaning. The line of the entire spine should hang straight and not be bent to one side. But when you encounter transformations between open and closed you should have the flexibility of waist turn which comes of sunk chest, pulled-up back and lowered shoulders. This is something you need to attend to in the beginning stages of learning. Otherwise, as time goes on it will become hard to change and will turn into stiffness, so that although you have put in a lot of practice, it will be hard to improve your applications.
3. The bones and joints of the two arms all need to be relaxed open. The shoulders should hang down and the elbows should bend downward. The palms should be slightly extended and the fingers slightly bent. Use intent to move the arms and *chi* to suffuse the fingers. As the days and months of practice accumulate, the internal energy connects and becomes nimble, and mysterious ability grows of itself.
4. In the two legs you must distinguish “empty” and “full”. Picking up and dropping (of the feet) should be like the way a cat moves. When your body weight shifts to the left, then left is “full” and the right is termed “empty”. If you shift to the right, then right is “full” and the left is termed “empty”. What is termed “empty” is not really empty, the position still hasn't been abandoned, but rather there is the intent of (possible) expanding or shrinking left there. What is termed “full” is just weighted and that's all, it is not using too much force or fierce strength. So when the leg bends it should go until it is straight up and down, further than that is called excessive force. The torso will tip forward and then you will have lost the centered posture and the opponent gets an opportunity to attack.
5. In the kicks we must distinguish between the two types: toe kicks (in the manual left and right separate leg, also called left and right flap legs) and heel kicks. In toe kicks, pay attention to the tip of the foot, whereas in heel kicks pay attention to the entire sole of the foot. When the intent arrives then the *chi* arrives and when the *chi* arrives then energy arrives by itself. But your bones and joints must relax open and you must stably kick out the foot. This is the easiest time to give rise to strong force. If the body is

slightly bent then you will be unstable and the kicking foot will not deliver much force.

In the process of learning Tai Chi, we first learn bare hand form (a solo exercise), such as Tai Chi Chuan, or Tai Chi Long Fist; after that comes single-handed push hands, fixed step push hands, moving step push hands, big rollback (*da4lu3*), sparring (*san4shou3*); and finally comes the weapons such as Tai Chi sword, Tai Chi knife, Tai Chi spear (13 spear).

As to practice times, every day after getting up practice the form twice. If you don't have time in the morning, then twice before bed. You should practice seven or eight times a day, but at very least once in the morning and once at night. If you have been drinking heavily or have eaten a lot, avoid practice.

For places to practice, a courtyard or large room with good air circulation and lots of light are suitable. But avoid places directly exposed to strong wind or places that are shady and damp or have poor air quality. Because once the body starts exercising, the breath naturally becomes deeper so strong wind or poor quality air, because they would go deep into the belly and harm the lungs, might easily cause illness. As for practice clothes, loose Chinese clothing or short clothing along with wide-toed cloth shoes are suitable. When you practice, if you happen to perspire a lot don't remove all your clothing or rinse with cold water; otherwise you might get sick.

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