

# 10 Principles of T'ai Chi

Excerpts from the *10 Essential Points of T'ai Chi Chuan* by Yang Chen-Fu (1883 – 1936)

## 1. 虛領頂勁

Head upright to let the shen (spirit of vitality) rise to the top of the head.

Head upright means that the head must be held perfectly erect, (i.e. suspending the head) so that the vital spirit can reach the crown of the head. One must not use force; if one uses force, the muscles of the neck will be strained with the result that qi and blood will not be able to circulate freely. Rather, one must have a light and alert feeling. If the crown of the head is not suspended lightly and alertly, the vital spirit cannot be raised.

## 2. 含胸拔背

Hollow the chest or release the chest gently inward and keep the back slightly rounded.

This is the key to form ward-off. Hollow the chest so the qi can sink to the dan tien. With the energy sinking to dan tien, ward-off will make you centered and rooted. One must avoid forcing out the chest; if the chest is forcibly expanded, then the qi will accumulate in the chest with the result that the upper part of the body will be heavy, the breathing will be shallow and the lower part light; the heels will be too light and consequently you will be uprooted. If you can manifest ward-off correctly, you can store qi and be ready to emit power through the spine.

## 3. 鬆腰

Relax the Waist.

In the book *T'aiji Classic*, it is said “the root is at the feet and power is generated from the legs, controlled by the waist and expressed by the fingers. From the feet to the legs to the waist must be integrated, and one unified qi.” The waist is the controlling axis of the entire body. If one can relax the waist, then the feet can develop rootedness and strength and one’s stance can be secure. The interchange of substantial and insubstantial all derives from the rotation of the waist.

## 4. 分虛實

Differentiate the Substantial (full) and Insubstantial (empty).

If the weight of the entire body is placed on the right foot, then the right foot is substantial (full) and the left foot is insubstantial (empty). If you have learned to clearly distinguish the full and empty, then you can relax and begin to move lightly, lively and nimbly. If you can’t differentiate them, then your step will be heavy and clumsy, your stance will be insecure, and you will easily fall under the control of an opponent.

## 5. 沈肩墜肘

Sink the shoulders and let the elbows hang down loosely.

The shoulders will be completely relaxed and free and allowed to hang loosely. If you cannot relax and sink, the two shoulders will be raised up and tense. The ch'i will follow them up and the whole body cannot get power. "Drop the elbows" means the elbows go down and relax. If the elbows are held up, the shoulders are not able to sink. The discharge will then be close to the broken force of the external schools.

#### 6. 用意不用力

Use mind-intent, do not use muscular force.

The "Treatise on Taijiquan" says when you practice T'aijiquan, your entire body must be relaxed and open, so that you can release any stagnated energy in the sinews, bones, and blood vessels. If the body's energy channels are not closed off, the Qi will reach every part of the body without hindrance.

If the body is full of stiff energy and the energy channels are clogged, then the blood and Qi will become stagnant, your movements will be clumsy. If you do not use brute muscular force, but employ mind-intent, then wherever your mind is directed your Qi will follow. One who has fully mastered the art of Taijiquan has arms as soft as cotton externally, but with the weight of a heavy iron bar internally.

#### 7. 上下相隨

The upper and lower parts of the body must move as an integrated whole.

If the hand moves, the waist moves, the foot moves, the eyes and intent follow the movement the movement – only this can be called "moving upper and lower parts of the body as an integrated whole. If even one part does not move, then the body's energy will be scattered and dispersed. One of the elements of this point is the "six harmonies" (hands/feet, knees/elbows, shoulders/hips).

#### 8. 內外相合

The internal and external must be in coordination.

The spirit is the leader; the body is the follower. If one's spirit can be raised, then every movement will be light and spirited. When one "opens," not only does a hand or foot extend, but the mind and intention must also extend outward. When one "closes," not only does a hand or foot come in toward the body, but the mind and intention must also draw inward.

#### 9. 相連不斷

Each form must be joined to the next without interruption.

One of the special characteristics of Taijiquan is its continuity of the mind, qi circulation and action. The ending movement of the previous action is the beginning movement of the next action. From beginning to end it continues fluidly without interruption. It flows in an endless circle and is never exhausted. Some express it is "like a river or the sea itself, flowing on

endlessly without ceasing.” Also expressed “mobilize the intrinsic energy as if you were drawing silk from a cocoon.” Both refer to its continuity without break.

#### 10. 動中求靜

In movement, seek tranquility.

Taijiquan uses tranquility to control movement. Although one moves, one remains tranquil, so that in practicing the forms, the more slowly one moves the breath becomes long and deep, qi sinks to the dan tien, and the excessive tensing of the blood vessels is avoided. If the student examines each principle carefully and embodies it through unremitting practice, how can s/he fail to acquire the true meaning of all the above?