

LIVING ALIGNED

Universal Principles of Qi Cultivation

The Dao of Taijiquan: Way to Rejuvenation

by Tsung Hwa Jou

"The universal Taiji expresses these principles, and the practice expresses these principles into one's body and one's life. In this way one can cultivate a direct relationship with the origin of all of the aspects of nature and life."

- Great Taiji Masters Saying

1. Lengthen - knees bend slightly, head rises, tail sinks
2. Open - fill internally with space, open body, open heart, open mind
3. Relax - everywhere ... fingers, eyes, shoulders, torso, mind
4. Breathe - take a deep breath now and then, or link the breath with the movements
5. Mind Intent - focus on what is happening now, focus on the center (lower Dan Tien)
6. Taiji Pole - attend to the Taiji Pole, the central channel between Heaven and Earth
7. Center - initiate movement from center, return the mind to the Dan Tien often
8. Weight Shift - smooth transfer initiating from the center, widen the stance to enlarge the gesture
9. Flow - when any part moves all parts move, all movements flow as a continuous sequence

Further exploration of the principles:

Lengthen - knees bend slightly, head rises, tail sinks

Lengthen the body, so you get a feeling of spacious length as you move. This is the energy of the Yin, solid self reaching up toward Heaven - an antigravity gesture.

Open - fill internally with space, open body, open heart, open mind

In addition to opening vertically, open in every direction to create a vastness within. For thousands of years, great masters have affirmed "I am in the universe, the universe is in me." Expand to allow more of the universe to be within you. Use the arms, open from the elbow to open laterally, create space around the heart and within the HeartMind.

Relax - everywhere ... fingers, eyes, shoulders, torso, mind

Relax means to be constantly returning attention to the present where there is no cause for alarm or contrivance, to sink the body and the Qi. To reinforce relaxation, take a deep breath as frequently as is comfortable and exhale slowly through the nose. This triggers a wave of the Relaxation Response within.

Breathe - take a deep breath now and then, or link the breath with the movements

The breath is one of the great sources of power and Qi maximization and internal coherence. Bring the attention to the breath constantly. Notice if are you linking the breath to the movement, remembering to deepen occasionally. Without forcing, create opportunities to integrate breath and movement

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Mind Intent - focus on what is happening now, focus on the center (Lower Dan Tien)

The mind intent for practice originates in the present and is housed in the lower dan tien. Allow this mind-focus intention to guide your practice while continually linking it with the movement, gesture or breath.

Taiji Pole - attend to the Taiji Pole, the central channel between Heaven and Earth

Sustain awareness of the Taiji pole as you breathe, move, and step. It is your own personal power, Heaven and Earth connection. It provides for the merging of primordial Yin and Yang within. Return kinesthetic attention to the pole physically and with your intent. Be attentive to the external aspects of the practice while sustaining an internal sense of the center line or pole.

Center - initiate movement from center, return the mind to the Dan Tien often

Cultivate an awareness and feeling of the center. The biomechanical center is the lower Dan Tien; the center of the eternal being is in the middle Dan Tian. "Move" from the lower center to lead the weight shifting. Feel the center as an aspect of consciousness, open, alert, care free, attentive, powerful.

Weight Shift - smooth transfer initiating from the center, widen the stance to enlarge the gesture

Use space as consciously as you can. This is where you express the art of Taiji that is "seen" externally. Moving through space is a part of how the body fitness aspect of the practice is implemented and it can be a part of how the inner resources are moved. A Taiji secret is in the appropriate widening of the stance which makes for more flourishing external movement. OR, when the stance is less wide use the imagination and the breath to cause smaller movements to create great inner flow.

Flow - when any part moves all parts move, all movements flow as a continuous sequence

Cultivate and sustain the intention to the movements that are learned as separate "forms" or postures to evolve toward constant flow. Understand how/where to start any gesture clearly and finish just as clearly. Remove the evidence of the starting and ending transitions with continuous flow.

"When one part moves, all parts move." At any point in the practice some parts emerge as the focal aspect of the gesture. However, all the parts that are less focal, in great Taiji, are moving. While the weight shifts and the torso turns and the arm moves, the less active parts are in play - the foot adjusts, the spine lengthens, the fingers relax. Experience that everything is moving. Everything is vibrantly alive.