

9 BASIC TAIJI PRINCIPLES

There are principles of posture, movement, intention and application. The fundamental principles are shared by every traditional form of Taiji. The majority of the principles can be classified into 4 categories: 1) posture 2) movement 3) intention 4) application. They must be passed down by teachers and mastered by students. When we practice Taiji, our primary concentration is on the principles. One principle properly understood can correct every technique. There is a saying that “one principle is worth a thousand techniques”.

The principles are so fundamental to understanding Taiji that we can say that anyone who teaches without a thorough understanding of the principles is just cheating his students. A good teacher should be able to both explain each principle clearly and simply to the student and also be able to demonstrate the understanding in both form and application. Naturally, there are levels of understanding. Taiji is the principles and the principles are Taiji.

The principles contain the wisdom of the past Masters. They have been taught and followed from generation to generation. Not only do they clearly set out the requirements of Taiji, but they also provide shortcuts to achievement. When practicing Taiji, the practitioner should be consciously trying to apply the correct principles. Eventually the principles and movement become the same.

The principles of Taiji range from easy to difficult and from basic to advanced. Some of the principles make no sense until one has made a certain amount of achievement. Some principles can be understood one way as a beginner and another way as one becomes more accomplished. There are also different ways of translating the principles from the more open-ended Chinese pictographs and words into our own phonetic language requiring specific and precise meanings.

For my own beginning students, I ask them to be cognizant of at least 9 basic principles:

Number one “Relax”, number two “Sink” and number three “Go Slow” are probably the three most important. As simple as they sound, even after more than 40 years of practice I am still working to improve in these three important areas of practice.

Number four, “Body Straight”, refers to the importance of maintaining vertical alignment and structure. It involves raising the head as if balancing a book on top and tucking the tailbone under the torso in order to straighten the lower back curve. This principle seeks to correct the tendency of beginners to lean back or forward at the waist or from side to side at the waist. At a more advanced level it seeks to encourage the most advantageous posture for conveying the rooted ground strength up through the body from the feet to the hands in the most efficient body pathway. Later the principle of “Body Straight” will be understood as “Body Aligned”.

Number five, “Clearly Differentiate/Distinguish Yin from Yang”. For the beginner, this principle requires that the practitioner know which is the lead hand/arm and which hand/arm is the complimentary hand. Also for the beginner, this involves knowing which leg the weight is on. The cardinal sins of Taiji are stiffness and double weightedness. Just like in riding a bicycle, one must consciously and intentionally push down with one foot and then the other. Trying to push down with both will get one nowhere. Be sure to differentiate and distinguish between the substantial/active (Yang) and the insubstantial/complimentary (Yin) aspects of the right limb and the left limb. Later this principle will be applied to every part of the body and aspects of application.

Number six, “When One Part Moves Every Part Moves” and “All the Parts are Connected”. No part of the body moves unless every other part of the body moves together. Movement is integrated rather than isolated when practicing Taiji. To raise a hand, the whole body must also raise up as well. The movement always starts from the ground up: from the foot to the leg, to the waist, to the spine, to the arms and then finally to the hand. In between movements, the direction is the opposite in order to bring the weight and energy back to the body’s foundation connection of our feet to the ground.

Number seven, “All Movement is Directed by the Waist”. The waist refers to the entire abdominal and back area between the hips and ribs. Today this area is referred to as the “core” in many Western exercise systems. It also includes what is referred to in Chinese as the tan tien. It contains many of the body’s largest and strongest muscle groupings. Think of all the home runs hit by Mark McGwire and Barry Bonds, or the long drives of Tiger Woods, or the devastating serves of the Williams sisters in tennis, or the hook punches of Mike Tyson. They all involve moving the waist first and then the arms follow. Turning and sinking the waist one way stores power and creates neutralization while turning, shifting and rising releases power. The waist also unifies and connects the upper body with the lower body so the whole body can move as a unified whole.

Number eight “Every Movement All the Way”. The Taiji classics admonish to “first seek expansion”. By making movements bigger and longer we extend the body joints and release tension which can build up in the joints. Expansion also helps to connect the different body parts together. It provides both exercise and relaxation. However, if this principle is balanced with the first principle (relax). Therefore, make movements only as big and as strong as you can without feeling pain or unsteadiness. The best way to practice these principles is simply by practicing the form regularly. As time goes on different principles will become clearer with regular practice. The Masters have assured us that proper practice will lead to progress.

Number nine “Seek smooth, continuous, circular movement”. Taiji movement always has a unique appearance, “flowing like a mighty river”. At the first level a beginner seeks to learn the individual movements with proper posture and sequencing. At the next level, the student seeks to link the body’s movements in each posture and to link the movements together in the form. Smoothness, circularity and continuousness are the qualities most persons admire when seeing Taiji performed correctly.

Sometimes you will be working on one principle at a time for awhile and then later progress onto another. It would be great to be able to do them all well and in time anybody can with proper practice. Work on the ones you are comfortable with. When you are done with these there are plenty of others. The nine I have chosen primarily for beginners. However, until one makes progress in these there is no point in going beyond. These are foundation principles. Think of them as advice from the great, past Masters echoing down the ages directly to you.

The Taiji classics stress the importance of using the mind to lead the body. Only when the mind and body are in sync can we be said to be actually practicing Taiji. Think of the principles as a way of uniting mind and body in movement. They give us a point of view as well as a challenge. At very last, mindful practice will dispel distractions and return our attention inward. At best proper practice in accord with the principles will offer the greatest potential for improved health and performance.

Vocabulary

Hun Yuan Taiji and Qigong

Taijiquan (pronounced Tie Ghee Chwan and written also as taiji, t'ai chi) – A Chinese internal martial art that develops whole-body power by training the mind intention (yi) to lead the internal energy (qi) to produce strength (li). It is primarily practiced today for its health and wellness benefits.

Qigong (chi kung) – The art of moving energy both inside and outside the body for healing, spiritual and/or martial purposes.

Silk reeling exercises (qian si xian, chan su chin) – The art of rotating and connecting the 18 balls of the body (the joints) and coordinating their movement with the dantian to produce the spiral power essential to Taiji. A fundamental method of training characteristic of chen-style Taiji, silk reeling is necessary for the achievement of maximum health and martial arts benefits.

Yi (pronounced ee) – mind intention

Qi – vital energy; breath

Li – external force

Three Treasures of the Body:

Jing – the vital essence inherited from ones parents and stored in the kidneys

Qi – vital energy that flows in channels that permeate the body. It can be replenished and invigorated by food, rest, exercise and good living. Blocks in the Qi channels can eventuate in illness.

Shen – spirit. It is the aim of Taiji and Qigong to transform Jing into Qi and Qi into Shen.

Dantian – the energy storage reservoir of the body, located in the center of the body in the lower torso or core.

Three planes of circling the dantian to create spiral power:

Ping – the horizontal plane. Think of a hula hoop.

Shu – The side lateral plane. Think of a clock face of steering wheel.

Li – The front-facing vertical plane. Think of a bicycle tire.

Four primary energies of Taiji:

Peng – uplifting energy. Also, whole-body alignment.

Lu – neutralizing energy. Also called “roll back”. Redirecting the opponent’s incoming energy away from one’s center.

Ji – Energy that expands or presses forward and outward.

An – Energy that sinks or presses downward.

Dantian Breathing – Abdominal breathing or diaphragmatic breathing

Guanqifa – Qi permeating Technique of Grand Master Liang Shou-yu, author of Qigong Empowerment.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sifu J. Justin Meehan

Background

J. Justin Meehan or Sifu Justin, as he is known to his students and peers, has studied the martial arts for 44 years and Tai Chi Chuan specifically for over 40 years. He began his study in New York at the age of 14. Originally studying Japanese Karate, he later studied Korean Tang Soo Do, in 1967 earning his Black Belt. In 1967 he began studying Chinese martial arts, and in particular, Tai Chi Chuan (Taijiquan). His Chinese Martial Arts studies include Shaolin, Northern & Southern Praying Mantis, Hung Gar, and Wing Tsun. He was the first person to teach the Chinese Internal Arts in St. Louis in 1970. He was selected to present Chen Style and Tai Chi Free Fighting workshops at the Annual Tai Chi Festival at the Tai Chi Form of Master Jou Tseng Hua. In 1985, he was selected for a feature presentation in the Whose Who of Martial Arts and chosen to serve on the Selection Board for the Midwest area. In 1981 he traveled to China to visit the Shaolin Temple and to study the original Chen style of Tai Chi. He has also traveled to Bahia, Brazil (1980 and 1995) to study the African-American martial art, Capoeira.

Current

He currently teaches at BCOH (Brentwood Center of Health) at 2558 S. Brentwood Boulevard in St. Louis, Missouri, at Floored Studio at 3190 South Grand in St. Louis City and at his Summer and Fall 5 week introductory Taiji/Qigong classes at the Missouri Botanical Gardens (which he has done for the past 10 years). J. Justin Meehan is also a practicing Attorney at Law. He has been in private practice for 25 years receiving many Human Rights Awards. He is President of the Chinese Internal Arts Center, Regional Director of the USA HunYuan, Taiji of Grandmaster Feng Zhiqiang, President of the Taoist Research and Resource Center.

Tai Chi Chuan (Taijiquan)

Sifu Justin has studied Taiji extensively from the world's foremost Masters, including:

- * Cheng Man-Ching **Modified Yang Style** and Push Hands from the famous "fighting" instructor and Cheng Man-Ching protégé, William C.C. Chen, New York 1967 and 1970.
- * **Synthetic Style** of Chen Pan Ling and Push Hands from Kai Sung of Taiwan. The Synthetic style combines different aspects of the Yang, Wu, Sun and Chen styles, as well as Pakua and Hsing I. 1970 to 1981.
- * **Chen Style**, the original form of Tai Chi Chuan and Push Hands form of Tai Chi Chuan, from Grand Master Feng Zhiqiang, Push Hands Master and leading disciple Chen Fake. Beijing, China 1981 (and Master Ma Hong, disciple of Chen Zhao Kui. 1995) and Master Zhang Xue Xin, Grandmaster Feng's Senior U.S. disciple.

* **Hun Yuan** 24 Form, 48 Form, 24 and 32 Cannon Fist Forms of Feng Zhiqiang and Push Hands from Grand Master Feng's Senior U.S. disciple Master Zhang Xue Xin, Pres. Feng Zhiqiang U.S.A. Taijiquan Academy. 1991-present and Grandmaster Feng Zhiqiang, Hun Yuan, Taiji QiGong and Push Hands (Finland 2000; San Francisco 2001; Beijing, China 2007).

* **Chen 38** Form and Push Hands from its creator, Chen Xiao Wang (19th generation Chen successor) grandson of Chen Fake and nephew of Chen Zhao Kui, 1981 (1st met), 1988 (brought to St. Louis) and 1996 (New York).

* **Yang Family** Style and Push Hands from Yang Zhenduo, the son of Yang Cheng-Fu (who was responsible for the final form of the Yang Family style) 1990, 1993, 1995, 1996 and 2000 and his grandson Yang-Jun 2005.

* **Wu Style** and Push Hands from famed Beijing Wu style teacher, Wang Peisheng, Director of China's Phy. Sci. (QiGong) Research Center and author of Wu Style - Taijiquan. 1993

Chi Kung (QiGong)

Sifu Justin is a recognized member of the **QiGong Association of America** and the **National QiGong Assn. U.S.A.** He has studied Buddhist, Taoist, Er Mei, Hun Yuan and Chan Mee forms of Chi Kung from many teachers including Masters Zhang Xue Xin (1991-present), Feng Zhiqiang, Liang Shou Yu (1990-present), Ken Cohen, George Xu, Yang Jwing Ming, Fu Wei Zhong (Er Mei QiGong), Lama Lodu, Kai Sung, Dr. Shen Wu (Musical QiGong), Wang Peisheng and Dr. Jean (Ching Chung) Ou of San Francisco. He has lectured on Qigong for Health and other related subjects throughout the U.S and as far away as Brazil. He is a **Certified Medical QiGong Instructor** under Master Liang Shou Yu, author QiGong Empowerment and **Certified Instructor of Hun Yuan QiGong System** of Feng Zhiqiang under Master Zhang Xue Xin. He currently teaches QiGong each new season at the famous **Missouri Botanical Gardens**. Call M.B.G. at (314) 577-5140.

For further information regarding Tai Chi Chuan and QiGong classes, workshops and seminars, please contact The Chinese Internal Arts Resource Center at (314) 772-9494 or www.sttaiji.com. The mailing address for the Chinese Internal Arts Center is Lafayette Towne Professional Building, 2734 Lafayette Ave., St. Louis, MO. 63104. Web site is: www.jjustinmeehan.com