

## Principles of Movement

To derive the deepest benefits from our practice, we must adhere to certain time-tested principles of movement. If the movements of T'ai Chi Chih are performed without applying the proper emphasis and attitude, we cannot hope to enjoy the full spectrum of benefits. The principles of movement are simple and quickly become second nature with daily practice.

Keep the body as relaxed as possible while performing the movements. Practice moving with "softness and continuity", because tension-free movement allows Chi to express more easily through the body. The degree of relaxation that we are able to maintain directly affects the circulation of this dynamic healing energy. So, the way that we move is a most important consideration. The execution of the movements becomes refined as we progress. We learn to expend the least possible effort in order to accomplish each movement.

## Posture and Execution

Hold the spine and the head in a straight line without strain, as though suspended from above by a supporting wire. Keep the wrists and hands pliable and soft. Relax the abdomen completely, like an infant. Breathe naturally.

The shifting of weight is a very important aspect of movement principles. The legs gradually and continually change from substantial (bearing the weight) to insubstantial (resting). The substantial leg bends at the knee as the insubstantial leg straightens (not stiffens). When the weight is shifted forward, the heel of the rear foot lifts off the ground. When the weight is shifted to the rear leg, the toes of the forward foot lift off. When taking a side step, the heel contacts the ground first, followed by the gradual shifting of the weight. The torso glides forward and back or side to side, on an even plant (kept level) as the weight shifts. The body does not lean in any direction or bob up and down. Give the full weight of the body to each leg in turn, as this action helps to stimulate the circulation of Chi.

The closing posture is used at the conclusion of each movement with the palms facing the floor and the legs slightly bent. This posture is held for a few seconds, while deeply concentrating on the center of the body (T'an T'ien) to encourage the activated energy to be assimilated and stored by the body. Be still, open and receptive in this posture.

## Concentration and Intention

Concentration inwardly at the T'an T'ien (psychic center two inches below the navel) throughout the practice period. Mentally anchor yourself at this spot as the movements flow effortlessly. It can be useful to feel that all outer movement springs from and revolves about this central spot. As we progress, this internal point becomes primary and the movements will be performed with equal intention. This stems from the even-mindedness we achieve by balancing internal energy flows. Eventually, all circumstances in life can be met with this same degree of even-mindedness or equal intention. This is an indication that wisdom is beginning to express.

By cultivating one-pointed concentration at the T'an T'ien, we can develop psychic strength and unshakable peace. Our lives will reflect this inner condition. We might describe our experience thusly: established in the center, all movements naturally unfold in softness and continuity. In other words, softness and continuity tend to be the natural expression of one who is inwardly stable and at peace. Ideally, we will be ever-centered (stable within) regardless of outer circumstances. We will not need to get centered or practice being centered, we will naturally and consistently reside in and express from this changeless core of peace.