

HOW TO COUPLE THE TAI CHI CHUAN MOVEMENTS WITH PROPER BREATHING

All the different postures of Tai Chi Chuan are basically composed of two opposite yet co-existent types of motion or state in continuous alternation: the “opening” and the “closing” motions, or the “insubstantial” and the “substantial” states. Our breathing is also composed of two opposite yet co-existent types of motion or state in continuous alternation: the inhaling and the exhaling.

The traditional ideal way of coupling the Tai Chi movements with breathing is: inhaling while doing an “opening” motion or going into an “insubstantial” state; exhaling while doing a “closing” motion or going into a “substantial” state. Bending, retreating, facing upward, raising, energy accumulating, and neutralizing are classed as “opening” motions and being “insubstantial”; stretching, advancing, facing downward, dropping, energy-issuing and attacking are classed as “closing” motions and being “substantial”. From the point of “Yi”, any part of the body where “Yi” is concentrated on, that part is “substantial”, then it’s counterpart is “insubstantial”. For instance, if your “Yi” is on your right hand, then that is the “substantial” hand, and your left hand is the “insubstantial” one.

However, owing to the differences in the formation of Tai Chi Chuan movements and postures, the speed of doing the movements, the depth of one’s breath and other physiological capacities as well as the degrees of proficiency of the doer, it is usually not quite possible to couple the entire set of Tai Chi Chuan movements with one’s breathing in the traditional ideal way. As long as one is not holding their breath to cause any discomfort, but breathing naturally, it is quite all right for beginners.

The next step is to try to couple the two types of motion with inhaling or exhaling as stated above at the end of a movement. And if a certain movement is too long or complicated and if you are too slow that before coming to the end of that movement you are unable to continue the inhaling or exhaling as deemed fit, you can intersect the inhaling with a short exhale, or intersect the exhaling with a short inhale, then you will be able to accomplish the proper coupling at the end of the movement.

Then, when your breathing capacity has notably increased, and the way of your breathing has become longer, deeper, finer, and more even as a natural result of your constant practice with a gradually increasing training load, you should try to adopt an optimal speed with your practice to meet the aforementioned requirements in coupling the movements with proper breathing. And when that way of coupling, gradually and finally becomes natural to you, you can forget all about it, and let your “Yi”, “Qi”, and “Shen” (the vital spirit) be merged into one, and let your body be truly vitalized after each session of practice.