

Yang Cheng Fu's Ten Principles on Tai Chi Chuan

Narrated by Yang Cheng Fu

Recorded by Chen Wei Ming



1. Straightening The Head

Stand straight and hold the head and neck naturally erect, with the mind concentrating on the top. Do not strain or be tense; otherwise, the blood and vital energy cannot circulate smoothly.

2. Correct Position Of Chest And Back

Keep the chest slightly inward, which will enable you to sink your breath to the dan tian (lower belly). Do not protrude your chest, otherwise you will feel uneasy in breathing and somewhat "top heavy".

Great force can be launched from the spine only when you keep the vital energy in your lower belly.

3. Relaxation Of Waist

For the human body, the waist is the dominant part. When you relax the waist, your two feet will be strong enough to form a firm base. All the movements depend on the action of the waist, as the saying goes: "Vital force comes from the waist". Inaccurate movements in Taijiquan stem from the erroneous actions of the waist.

4. Solid And Empty Stance

It is of primary importance in Taijiquan to distinguish between "Xu" (Empty) and "Shi" (Solid). If you shift the weight of the body on to the right leg, then the right leg is solidly planted on the ground and the left leg is in an empty stance. When your weight is on the left leg, then the left leg is firmly planted on the ground and the right leg is in an empty stance. Only in this way can you turn and move your body adroitly and without effort, otherwise you will be slow and clumsy in your movements and not able to remain stable and firm on your feet.

5. Sinking Of Shoulders And Elbows

Keep your shoulder in a natural, relaxed position. If you lift your shoulders, the qi will rise with them and the whole body will be without strength. You should also keep the elbows down, otherwise you will not be able to keep your shoulders relaxed and move your body with ease.

6. Using The Mind Instead Of Force

Among the people who practice Taijiquan, it is quite common to hear this comment: "That is entirely using the mind, not force". In practicing Taijiquan, the whole body is relaxed, and there is not an iota of stiff or clumsy strength in the veins or joints to hinder the movement of the body. People may ask: How can one increase his strength without exercising force? According to traditional Chinese medicine, there is in the human body a system of pathways called jingluo (or meridian) which link the viscera with different parts of the body, making the human body an integrated whole. If the jingluo is not impeded, then the vital energy will circulate in the body unobstructed. But if the jingluo is filled with stiff strength, the vital energy will not be able to circulate and consequently the body cannot move with ease. One should therefore use the mind instead of force, so that vital energy will follow in the wake of the mind or consciousness and circulate all over the body. Through persistent practice one will be able to have genuine internal force. This is what Taijiquan experts call "Lithe in appearance, but powerful in essence".

A master of Taijiquan has arms, which are as strong as steel rods wrapped in cotton with immense power concealed therein. Boxers of the "Outer School" (a branch of Wushu with emphasis on attack, as opposed to the "Inner School" which places the emphasis on defense) look powerful when they exert force, but when they cease to do so, the power no longer exists. So it is merely a kind of superficial force.

7. Coordination Of Upper And Lower Parts

According to the theory of Taijiquan, the root is in the feet, the force is launched through the legs, controlled by the waist and expressed by the fingers; the feet, the legs and the waist form a harmonious whole. When the hands, the waist and the legs move, the eyes should follow their movements. This is meant by coordination of the upper and lower parts. If any part should cease to move, then the movements will be disconnected and fall into disarray.

8. Harmony Between The Internal And External Parts

In practicing Taijiquan, the focus is on the mind and consciousness. Hence the saying: "The mind is the commander, the body is subservient to it". With the tranquility of the mind, the movements will be gentle and graceful. As far as the "frame" is concerned, there are only the Xu (empty), shi (solid), kai (open) and he (close). Kai not only means opening the four limbs but the mind as well, he means closing the mind along with the four limbs. Perfection is achieved when one unifies the two and harmonizes the internal and external parts into a complete whole.

9. Importance Of Continuity

In the case of the "Outer School" (which emphasizes attack) of boxing, the strength one exerts is still and the movements are not continuous, but are sometimes made off and on, which leaves opening the opponent may take advantage of. In Taijiquan, one focuses the attention on the mind instead of force, and the movements from the beginning to end are continuous and in an endless circle, just "like a river which flows on and on without end" or "like reeling the silk thread off cocoons".

10. Tranquility In Movement

In the case of the "Outer School" of boxing, the emphasis is on leaping, bouncing, punching and the exertion of force, and so one often gasps for breath after practicing. But in Taijiquan, the movement is blended with tranquility, and while performing the movements, one maintains tranquility of mind. In practicing the "frame", the slower the movement the better the results. This is because when the movements are slow, one can take deep breath and sink it to the dan tian. It has a soothing effect on the body and the mind.

Learners of Taijiquan will get a better understanding of all this through careful study and persistent practice.