

Expansion on the Five Basic Principles of Tai Chi

By Hal Mosher

The five basic principles of Tai Chi are; relax/sink, move from the waist, separate full and empty, straight spine, and fair lady's wrist.

Relax/Sink

- Motion in stillness; stillness in motion.
- The foot should be flat, like standing on tofu, sinking into the ground with the whole foot, not just the edges.
- The *tan tien* should be treated like an egg that is easily cracked if too much force is applied.
- Movement/momentum pendulum creates a swing with the weight shift and the turn. This keeps the body moving and light.
- Expand and contract the whole body with the movements and the breath.
- Think of a spiral moving internally from the bubbling well to tip of the middle finger. (*chan su chin*)
- Take some of the intention out of your movements. Let the mind relax, too.
- Inhale as you raise the hands and exhale as you drop them.
- No resistance, no letting go.
- Try to bring the opponent's attack back to your waist by using the down-up turn and then giving back their attack by yielding and sticking.
- The yield should be like pulling back a bow and the push like releasing an arrow, or like a sponge that fills up completely and spills out the excess.
- Stick/adhere, join and follow
- Use the sacrum to yield and push.
- Yield 100% before you push.
- Use only four ounces of pressure on your opponent and don't let them put more than four ounces on you.
- Be humble, invest in loss, yield, and listen.

Move from the Waist

- The sacrum needs to go closer toward the full hip, as it leads all movement.
- Move the body as a unit: (exemplified by the left-right turn, heaven, yang or sticking)
- Turn like an axletree and move like a wheel. Once the wheel moves all pieces move together from the central equilibrium point at the bottom of the sacrum.
- The sacrum turns the hips like a spiral into the foot that then functions through the fingers.
- Nine joints and one turn: wrist to ankles, knees to elbows, hips to shoulders. Each joint moves interdependent on the waist turning as its central hub. The smaller distal joints move in proportion to the central hub, with the proportions expanding as they move away from the waist.
- Don't move the hands, only the waist.
- Watch your opponent's waist, if he is turning and you're not; follow where he wants to go.

Separate Full and Empty

- The sacrum moves into the bubbling well of the full foot.
- Reeling silk: as the weight sinks down it creates the movement in the hands, like two elevators. One goes down, creating the root and the other goes up in direct proportion, creating mobility.
- Move both hips in unison continuously. The full hip moves back while the empty one moves forward.
- Connect the three bows: the spine, shoulder to fingertip, and the hip to the foot. Each bow has its own potential energy, like a cocked crossbow that is able to release an arrow. However, the movement of these three bows is interdependent on each other (such as through the joints).
- Connect the above ideas to full and empty in opposing hands and feet, like an old-fashioned scale where one side goes down as the other comes up.
- Check your empty foot by lifting it before you shift your weight.
- *Tui Shou*: The two turns become one.
- Practice as if an opponent is there.

Straight Spine

- Alignment: Central equilibrium (exemplified by the down-up turn, earth, yin and yielding) standing upright, balanced, uniform and even.
- Seven points on one plane: 2 shoulders with 2 hips, the sacrum with the occipital lobe and the point between shoulder blades (like a plank of wood).
- In 70/30 postures, the front knee goes no farther than the toe and the back thigh is vertical.
- The chest drops as the back rises.
- Don't over extend the limbs past the body and keep upright.
- Watch the shoulders - they telegraph tension in the waist

Fair Lady's Wrist

- Find a ward off between each posture.
- Swimming on land