

REELING SILK AS A METHOD FOR UNIFYING INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ASPECTS OF TAI CHI CHUAN

By Hal Mosher

Introduction

Tai Chi has a very unique aspect to its practice. It combines its movements with a philosophical background at the forefront. This article is an attempt to bring more subtle aspects of this philosophy into the movements and self defense of Tai Chi. This is not easy, and not always possible, but by focusing on a few key ideas in your practice slowly these principles will be in accord with your movement. This article will focus on how each theory can be practiced during the form, and then discuss how these concepts can be applied to two-man practice. Try to understand these ideas first as conceptual theories, then apply them to your movements.

Reeling Silk

Reeling Silk is used as a metaphor for movement in the Tai Chi Classics. This metaphor serves to help the student understand the levels of subtlety involved in the shifting of the weight and turning of the waist. Reeling Silk should feel like a wave that moves up through your body slowly and softly from your feet to your fingers. The metaphor for Reeling Silk is simple enough, if you move or pull the string of silk too quickly, the silk breaks, or if you don't pull the silk at all, it never comes out of the cocoon. So the movements of Tai Chi must be like the movements of pulling the silk-- fine, continuous, slow and even. When you move the body as one unit you will accomplish pulling the silk properly. Reeling Silk is completing the movements in a continuous flow, like a wave up your body. I have chosen this metaphor because I think it applies to all Tai Chi styles as well as to push hands practice. In the beginning, you feel the silk reeling like a wave up your body, but in push hands you feel this continuous movement in your body as an opponent tries to push you. Your body should respond to their push in a slow, continuous, soft and even way. Even if your opponent is hard and fast, you will be able to meet their speed with agility and softness. In the same way a wave lifts up the water from below it, you should feel the wave of energy given to you by your opponent enter your body and transmit the energy back into them to lift them up. This type of yielding to your opponent relates to the yin-yang symbol. In the yin-yang symbol there is a piece of yin within the yang and a piece of yang within the yin. This relationship also holds true for movement in Tai Chi, Reeling Silk, and push hands. Similarly, there should be softness in your upper body while your lower body is strong and heavy. This softness in your upper body lets you yield while your lower body keeps you rooted. This type of balance of heavy and lightness is much like the yin and yang symbol as it represents light and dark.

Stillness and Movement

Reeling Silk also has an aspect of movement that is specific to Tai Chi. Tai Chi combines movement and stillness. There should be an aspect of stillness within one's movement, and movement within one's stillness. Stillness should feel like the eye of a hurricane, and movement should feel like the clouds spinning around its center. The Classics describe this correspondence in the following passage: "Movement in stillness, stillness in motion."

This statement means that although there appears to be no movement, there is, and when movement appears, it is combined with stillness. This relationship between movement and stillness can only be accomplished by combining internal and external aspects of your movements. To be moving externally means the body is moving outwardly. To be moving internally means there is no external movement but you still feel movement from the inside of your body.

This is easily understood by looking at push hands practice. If you are moving in push hands, and your opponent is moving more than you, then you have more stillness than he does. In push hands you should not move more than your opponent makes you move, this is what it means to "follow" him. This implies that stillness is always part of your practice. However, this is not to say we aren't moving, because we are. This seeming contradiction is exactly what makes Tai Chi the supreme ultimate. It is very difficult to realize this contradiction in a visceral sense. When you do realize this, it is the beginning of understanding Reeling Silk. This contradiction of movement and stillness is then broken down into moving the body as a unit, and central equilibrium.

Cosmologically, these two concepts are represented by heaven and earth. The earth represents central equilibrium, because the earth is stable, and stability is crucial for understanding central equilibrium. Moving the body as a unit is represented by Heaven because the celestial formations are in constant and interwoven movement. Standing on the earth we are stable, but even while still, the heavens appear to move around us. In the Chinese Classics, central equilibrium represents Chung-Yung, or the Doctrine of the Mean, presented by Confucius. The I Ching, or book of changes, represents constant change, or moving the body as a unit. Reeling Silk combines both ideas of movement and stillness, and yin and yang, and is practiced by moving the body like a wave internally and externally. A wave moves up from the ground and envelops all the different parts of the wave in its motion, but when it's done, it is completely still again.

Central Equilibrium

Central equilibrium is the core of Tai Chi practice. It is the rudder that steers the boat, and at the same time, the point around which the body revolves. In order to get more central equilibrium in your practice, use the bottom tip of the sacrum (called the Wei Lu in Chinese) as the focus point of your practice. The sacrum is the plate of bone that is at the end of your spinal column. It is connected via muscle to the two hip joints. During your form practice, try to notice the position of your sacrum in relation to the hip joints and the back of your head. In particular try to notice if the sacrum tilts or moves off the vertical line with the back of your head during practice. If it does, try to keep it vertical and stable, and then notice its relationship to your weight shifting onto the full hip joint. You can think of the sacrum as being the spade of a shovel and the spine being the handle. Whereas if you drop the spade into the ground it collects dirt, and if you drop your sacrum, you collect energy and proper alignment which is merged with central equilibrium. Although not completely necessary for central equilibrium, but related to it, is the idea of developing root on the leg before you turn the waist.

Two Types of Rooting Practice

There are two types of root: one is static, and one is mobile. As the name implies, static root means that you remain still while developing root. This is done by holding postures for long periods of time while feeling the foot adhere to the ground evenly. This type of standing practice is a good time to notice the position of your sacrum and back of the head. When holding postures you can try to feel energy come up your legs and out your arms as a form of chi gung. Any posture will do, but best to choose a single weighted posture like Play Guitar. Even though your body isn't moving in these postures, the energy of the wave is still working. So in standing practice, there is reeling silk, but only at the internal level by feeling the earth's energy enter your body through your feet. Moving root practice is very similar to static root practice, the only real difference being your moving between two legs. In both practices, the important point is the relationship of the hip joint, knee, and the sacrum. To develop root it is important that the sacrum remain vertical and inserted very close to the full hip joint. You will know that you are practicing correctly when you are on one leg and that thigh is vertical while the knee, hip joint and foot all line up. In this position, your sacrum should be over your bubbling well in the middle of the foot. The Bubbling Well is actually much closer to the toes than towards the heel, so it is recommended that the weight be kept closer to the toes than the heel. The foot itself should be soft and relaxed but not collapsed, like standing on tofu without squishing the sides. The sacrum drops into the hip like a pin drops into a door hinge, enabling it to turn. Using this method you will develop an intimate connection with your sacrum as you practice, and you will start to move with awareness of that connection. As that feeling grows you will start to notice how the rest of the body then moves as a result of a tiny movement in the sacrum. This will refine your movements by keeping them connected to the sacrum. In the beginning, your movements in the form will be very small but with practice you can expand your movements and still have the feeling of connectedness. The Tai Chi Classics say:

" All Movements must be upright, balanced, uniform and even."

The Six Alignments

The above sentence relates to the external aspect of central equilibrium, or the six alignments of the body (The hips and shoulders, the knees and elbows, and the wrists and ankles). It also describes the way these points move when the sacrum is their guide. According to Cheng Man Ching in his Thirteen Chapters, the position of the Wei Lu (ie. the sacrum) must remain vertical throughout your form practice. Your sacrum will then move closer to the hip joint that has the weight as you relax and sink into your postures. This allows for the body to line up with that hip joint, which means, the sacrum acts as a catalyst for the shoulders, hips, knees, elbows, eyes, and navel to all face the same direction. It is very similar to a door and its hinges. Think of the door as the six alignments, and the sacrum and spine as the hinges the door rests on. This door cannot twist, it has the nature of being even, and on one plane as should be your shoulders and hips. The door only turns also when it is properly inserted into the hinges. Similarly, you won't turn with the six alignments if the sacrum and spine isn't inserted properly into the hip joint. This insertion into the hip joint is the beginning of coordinating the six alignments with your movement. As the sacrum lines up with the hip joint, it acts as a door hinge pin that is inserted into its hinge. This allows the door (and the hip) to turn. This will create movement of the waist on the external level. Keeping the body upright, balanced, and even during your practice becomes much easier

when you pay attention to the six alignments and the sacrum. These alignments are easy to practice while holding postures, but much more difficult while moving during the form. This is why it is crucial to have a good foundation in holding the postures, so check your standing alignments in a mirror before you advance into the movement aspects of the form.

Internal Aspects of Central Equilibrium

The internal aspect of central equilibrium has two aspects: the first aspect is purely mental, the second more physical. Your mind should remain calm and natural like a clear lake on a windless day. The Tai Chi Classics say:

"The millstone turns but the mind does not"

This is similar to the Buddhist idea of calm abiding meditation where your mind focuses on one object for prolonged periods of time without effort. In the case of Tai Chi practice, our focus is on the sacrum and the calm nature of your mind. This is one of the best effects Tai Chi can have on your daily life. By transforming the mind during your practice, you can bring that same peace of mind. When you have calmed your mind, it will give you patience and clarity of thought and intent.

The second aspect of internal central equilibrium is that while you're shifting your weight, the body should feel calm and stable, almost immobile. This seems like a contradiction, but in actuality it is a way of combining polar opposites in your practice (ie. movement and stillness). In order to practice central equilibrium internally, you should again feel your sacrum during all your movements. This stability is then translated throughout your body and eventually to your fingers. The stability will allow you to feel that no matter what happens your body will remain calm and alert, without predicting the future or replaying the past.

The awareness of your own central equilibrium is necessary in order to feel your opponent's movements during push hands. Your opponent should not feel your movements, but you should feel theirs. When your opponent moves and it feels like they are moving in many directions at once, and you remain stable, then this is what central equilibrium feels like. When you are able to remain stable, then they have no choice but to try and move away from it; your stillness creates their movement so to speak.

Practicing push hands this way will greatly increase your ability to follow an opponent, and help you develop central equilibrium during form practice. Whoever has the better sense of central equilibrium will always have the advantage. In push hands, one should only move in response to your opponent, no more and no less. In the Classics of Tai Chi this concept is exemplified by the word "follow" in the sentence:

"Stick, adhere, join and follow."

One way of practicing this is when your opponent pushes on you, you follow their push, and absorb it into your sacrum, and thus remain centered. When their energy is absorbed into the sacrum it feels like catching a ball. You should absorb their weight by dropping the sacrum down

and tuck it slightly forward in a rolling under type of movement. Their energy then goes down your full leg and comes back up through your opposite hand. If you move too much in your yielding, then their energy becomes dissipated, but when you move only in proportion to your opponent's movement, this concentrates their energy back towards them. This is what is meant by yielding to your opponent and using their force to push them. As long as you don't use any force of your own, and absorb their push completely, you will successfully complete the cycle of yin and yang in the yield and push.

Instead of Reeling Silk in your body on your own, now your opponent does it for you. The exact proportion that you are pushed is given back to your opponent. You are like a sponge that becomes filled with water. When the sponge is fully saturated the water is forced out. Just so, when you fully yield to their attack and absorb their push you direct their energy back at them. In the same way that the six alignments keep the body balanced during the form, they also keep you from moving too much in response to your opponent. In both cases, the sacrum is the guide for the ability to remain balanced and still while moving with your opponent. At first you get pushed a lot during this type of practice, but as you learn to yield and move as a unit you will learn how to push. If you never yield to your opponent because you are afraid to lose, then you will never know how to use your opponent's force against them. Never use force in push hands; in order to deflect an attack simply yield. If you insist on using force it might be better for you to study a hard style like Shaolin or Karate. In hard styles you can always win if you are the stronger. Whereas, Tai Chi emphasizes softness since yielding is the harbinger of push hands practice. By using yielding to make your opponent reel silk for you in push hands, central equilibrium is unified with your practice of moving the body as a unit.

Moving the Body as a Unit

Proper practice of Reeling Silk has both central equilibrium and moving the body as a unit functioning together. Moving the body in Tai Chi has two primary aspects: shifting the weight, and turning the waist. Moving the body as a unit combines these two ways of moving into one. During form practice your shifting the weight enables the waist to turn. Once the waist has turned, it enables you to shift. You can see this clearly in the transition between ward-off left and ward-off right. In essence, the shift is not a shift but a turn, and the turn is not a turn but a shift. The hips move like gears as your weight shifts with the front hip going backward and the back hip going forward. It is also helpful to watch your thighs rotate as you shift your weight. The thigh rotations help the weight to shift, and this in turn rotates your hip joints. This type of shifting and turning creates a natural horizontal movement of the body, but eventually this shifting should also be felt vertically like a wheel rotating backwards. When these two types of turning are combined it creates a gyroscope-like movement of the whole body.

Connected throughout means continuous, if not connected then it is broken.ä

When this is understood by your body, you are able to use central equilibrium to move. In the beginning, this is practiced by listening to the weight shift while watching how it helps you rotate your hip joints. Moving the body as a unit has two aspects, internal and external.

External Moving the Body as a Unit

External moving the body as a unit is characterized in the Tai Chi Classics by the saying:

"Rotate like an axis and turn like a wheel"

This statement completely combines the ideas of moving the body as a unit and central equilibrium. Consider the axis as being the sacrum and the wheel as being the hips connected to the arms and legs. If you move the sacrum this will then create movement in the hips as they connect to it, much in the same way the earth rotates around its center. The important point at the outset of this practice here is to make sure that the arms and legs move in exact proportion to the waist turning and weight shifting. The thighs should be rotating in circles as we shift the weight. The front hip in the 70/30 posture goes backward while the back hip goes forward. This rotation is mirrored throughout the body (especially in the arms) as you move. You want these rotations to be in exact proportion to shifting the weight.

The Internal Aspect of Moving the Body as a Unit

The next aspect of moving the body as a unit is shifting the weight. This is the internal aspect of moving the body as a unit. This can be accomplished in a couple of ways. The first way is to feel the energy as it rises and falls. When the weight shifts into one leg, this brings energy up into the opposite arm. Moving the body as a unit in terms of sinking can be successfully practiced by visualizing two elevators going up and down your body. When you shift your weight forward you imagine this weight sinking like dropping an elevator down, while another elevator comes up to move the hands. The upper body is then moved with the weight shift in the lower body. All movement is in proportion to that shifting. This visualization or feeling of movement can be done horizontally (from one leg to another) or vertically (on one leg only). This can help with your Chi Gung practice by feeling this weight shift as an energy moving up and down or across the body. The more you relax and sink into your feet during your practice the more this will become evident. In the beginning, just imagine the legs are pumps pumping the energy up and down your body. The energy begins at the bubbling well at the center of the foot of the full leg, and then winds around the body and out the opposite arm through the middle finger. The hand only moves in exact proportion to the energetic elevators creating weight shifting and waist turning in this practice. This you can watch easily in a mirror: you observe your waist and the opposite hand to see if they are moving together. This is very important because moving the body as a unit gives you the ability to yield to an opponent. Just like the practice of central equilibrium, if you are moving as a unit it will be very hard for your opponent to push you. Your body becomes a sphere where any part of the ball responds with all the other parts. It is like pushing the top of a beach ball on the surface of water; the bottom part of the ball comes around to meet where the top was. The same thing happens in push hands, when the energy goes into you, it is just turned around and given back. This ability to yield is dependent on the shape of the ball. Moving the body as a unit creates this ball. Also, the turning of the waist and the shifting of the weight is actually creating movement of the ball. In push hands, the same analogy is used to yield to your opponent, but instead your opponent makes you shift your weight. Their push once yielded to, creates the push against them as you turn your waist towards them. Most of the time, try not to turn your waist away from your opponent but towards them bringing your weight forward into a push. Turning too far away from your opponent sacrifices your central

equilibrium which then gives them the advantage. Instead, always face your opponent with your six alignments intact while remaining on one leg. Once this is accomplished, then you can respond to your opponent in any direction as needed. Your yield then becomes a push, and this then develops "interpreting energy". With practice you will begin to feel their energy go up and down their body as well as yours.

You will be able to respond in the right way to their energy as long as you stick, adhere, join, and follow them. Central equilibrium and moving the body as a unit become unified in proper push hands practice, like two sides of a coin.

The Nine Joints and Three Bows

The next two aspects of moving the body as a unit are the idea of "nine joints and one turn", and the idea of "the three bows." These two ideas help you actually practice moving the body as a unit when you're doing the form. The nine joints help the waist turn. They are the ankles, knees, hips, elbows, shoulders, and wrists. These joints should be seen as moving with the waist as the commander. Start by moving your waist freely and then watch to see if your shoulders are moving with your waist. Then watch your elbows and see if they are moving with your hips proportionately. Then watch your knees move with your hips. Eventually, you will be watching your wrists and ankles moving together with the hips. Remember, any small turn in the waist creates a proportional turn in the nine joints. The joints farther away from the center turn more than those close to the center. The nine joints should be seen as spherical, with an ability to move in any direction and still remain connected to each other. This nine joints practice is very helpful in reinforcing the idea of moving like a gyroscope where power is generated from the center of the body and expressed out to the limbs. The next way to practice moving as a unit is using the three bows which really help with understanding the weight shift. The three bows are: from the foot to the hip, from the sacrum to the occipital bone, and from the shoulder to the fingertips. Like the bow of a bow and arrow, these bows, when bent, create potential energy. This potential energy is created by the roundness in the body, and is proportional to how circular they are when doing Tai Chi. When you sink this creates energy in the body by bending the three bows. For example, if you are pushed and sink onto your back leg to yield, then that energy created in the leg becomes expressed in the hands. This expression is dependent upon sinking into your foot completely and bending your hip joint. This bending of the hip joint sets up your alignment and creates the posture and the ability of the bows to connect to each other. As stated above, it is the relationship to the hip joints that the body has the ability to move. The Classics say:

"The movement starts in the feet, functions through the legs and waist, and is expressed through the fingers."

To practice the statement above correctly it is important to combine all of the internal and external aspects of moving the body as a unit and central equilibrium. This is very difficult to do. Make sure in your practice you go slowly, and are very conscientious that you are moving only in proportion to your waist turning and weight shifting. Moving the body as a unit and central equilibrium are only separated for the purpose of careful study but they are later assimilated as a whole, which is the complete practice of Reeling Silk. The three bows and nine joints help us understand how weight is expressed energetically in the hands with the waist as the commander.

Correcting Double Heaviness or Lightness

The Tai Chi Classics also state that double heaviness and double lightness are both faults in our practice. Double heaviness makes your form too hard or limp. Double lightness creates floating in your form and it makes the form dysfunctional in push hands. Reeling Silk can remedy this problem if done properly. We can't have double heaviness or double lightness in our practice, this means we need a balance of lightness and heaviness (sinking) in our practice. The easiest way to understand this is to see the lower body as being heavy while the upper body as being light. This is done by bending your legs deeply as mentioned above. However, this does not complete this practice because there still has to be some lightness within your heaviness, and visa versa (the Yin and Yang again). The technique mentioned above of feeling the elevators move the arms and legs will accomplish this balance of heaviness and lightness. Every time you shift into the leg there is heaviness going down into the outside of the leg while at the same time lightness coming up the inside of the leg. This sinking is very active and very subtle at the same time. It only comes after years of practice, but you can start practicing it mentally in the beginning. This kind of sinking relies heavily on being relaxed while practicing, especially during push hands. In fact, this type of sinking comes mainly from push hands practice. It is the lightness within your heaviness that creates an ability to yield and respond with the proper amount of force. When this sinking with lightness gets to the arms, it is reversed, where the full arm is heavy on the inside and light on the outside. Looking at Brush Knee Twist Step for example, the ability to lift the arm is accomplished through the sinking of the opposite leg. In this way, every part of the body has its full and empty aspect, depending on the individual posture. It is important to practice this aspect of Reeling Silk along with moving the body as unit and central equilibrium together. The balance of heaviness and lightness is related to the analogy of the elevators and also is crucial for a proper understanding of developing the balance of yin and yang in the body.

Push and Rollback Training Exercises

1. Sensitivity training

All of Tai Chi two-man practice is to be centered around listening to yourself and your opponent. For this reason I use the following exercises to teach listening to beginners. These are done very slowly in the beginning with an emphasis on softness in order to help develop listening with the whole body. Please remember to focus on sticking adhering, joining, and following your partner.

a) Playing the piano one finger at a time

This is the simplest way of practicing listening. Person A puts one hand on person B's chest at the level of the sternum. Person B is standing with all their weight on one leg with their body upright. Person A gently pushes one finger into their chest while person B turns away from their finger. Person B should only move in response to their finger and then stick to their finger as it retreats. Person A then chooses another finger on their hand and repeats the process. It is important for person A to go slowly and to choose only one finger at a time until person B becomes used to responding. Person B is receiving the real practice of listening here while at the

same time strengthening their leg, so when you are ready change the roles of person A and B. With practice, this exercise will teach the different angles that one must be aware of when it comes to yielding to your opponent.

b) Pushing the four corners

This exercise is similar to the one above, the difference being one pushes on the four corners (two shoulders and two hips). In this case person A pushes on person B's right shoulder, and then left shoulder, then right hip, and left hip. During all of this, person B is on one leg again with their hands relaxed at their sides. Person B yields to person A by turning with the push and not resisting it. After yielding to that push, person B then follows person A's hand with their hip as it retreats. This same process is repeated with the other three corners. When person B gets tired switch roles with person A. This practice is done to teach you to not resist another's push, rather you will have to yield and follow their force.

2. Single hand exercise on one leg

This is a modified version of a one handed push hands practice as taught by Cheng Man Ching. In this practice both A and B are on one leg, and stay on one leg throughout the practice. The reason being that we are only using one hand, so to use both feet would be double weighted. Both A and B are on their right legs facing each other. Person A pushes with his right palm faced down (push) towards B's right shoulder while person B turns his right palm up and turns to the right. As A's hand comes close to B's shoulder, person B turns his waist to the right as his hand turns up (rollback). Person A turns his waist to the left as he pushes towards B's right shoulder. Then reverse the roles. When B pushes, and A turns up his palm up and turns the waist in order to yield to the incoming force. When you get tired you can switch legs and hands. This exercise is done to emphasize moving the arm with the waist and eventually to move the whole body as a unit. It also trains the participants in rollback and push by using the idea of the two man saw. The two man saw implies that the two participants are connected, and in this case they are connected at the wrists. The listening techniques above are now applied to the connection at the wrist. More importantly, try to feel the opponent's whole body as you connect to their wrists and turn your waist. Only turn as much as you are made to turn, no more or no less. This is also a perfect time to check your alignments and make sure you are moving with the waist by rotating your thighs. As your thighs rotate also check to see if your arms are moving in direct proportion to that rotation in the legs. In order to practice central equilibrium make sure your sacrum is vertical and it is lined up with your bubbling well behind the ball of your foot.

3. One man pushing exercise with ti feng (repeat 3 times)

This training exercise only uses push, where one person pushing and the other is getting pushed. Both opponents stand in front of each other with same foot forward in a 70/30 stance. If you have a blank wall nearby have the person B getting pushed with their back facing the wall. Person A then pushes on B's right arm resting on his body. Slowly and gently A pushes until B's front foot lifts off the ground. A then backs off their push to let B's foot down. This is done to show that even in push there is an element of yielding before you push. This is done three times to person B: the third time A pushes B gently against the wall as B's body comes back into

A's hands. Person B is not completely passive however; he tries to hide his center while being pushed and stick to person A. More importantly, person B watches his body to notice his reactions while getting pushed and tries to relax his natural tendency to tense up. Person A is trying to make the gap between person B's rising up and their foot dropping imperceptible. Person B should not feel person A go back at all but instead just feel him relax. If this sequence is done correctly, person B will bounce like a ball before hitting the wall. This happens because lifting up B's foot and then letting them come back uproots them. After three pushes on each side the roles are switched. In the beginning, you might feel resistance in person B; they may resist putting all their weight on one leg. This is normal, because most people resist being pushed. The antidote for this is to shift back and forth until you feel each other relax into the momentum and movement. This practice is difficult, but if you relax and stick to your opponent progress will happen quickly. Person B actually has the harder job because he has to try to yield even though he can't. This forces him to invest in loss again and again. This is when real progress comes. You have to give something up in order to receive something else. The goal of this practice is to yield 100 percent as you are being pushed, when you do, this will teach you when and how to push. Person A should be trying to push at different angles and notice the quality of push each time. The less force used to push the better the quality of the push. This is a perfect time to practice the idea of the elevators going up and down your body. When A is pushing the elevators in his body make his hands function with the legs like a wave moving from the feet up to the fingers. Person B is trying to practice Central Equilibrium by feeling his sacrum absorb the push while he's trying to hide his center.

4. One man Roll back exercise with ti feng.

Person A and B are facing each other in a 70/30 stance again, with person A pushing and person B doing rollback. Person A fully commits to their push and overextends into B's rollback. Person B then sits on their back leg and waits until person A's weight fills up their back leg. When the weight is fully received then B does rollback by turning their waist. This should push person A off to the diagonal if done correctly. This technique reinforces the need to yield 100 percent before rollback can be done effectively. If you don't yield then you will be trying to muscle your way through it. Instead, let person A come in very close until you feel they have nowhere to go, at that moment, think of the elevators in your full leg filling up your opposite arm and that will cause your opponent's body to lift up. Again you will know if you have done this right when it is completely effortless and spontaneous. This practice combines using central equilibrium by absorbing their push into your leg because by absorbing their push you are not giving up your center. You are practicing moving the body as a unit by turning your waist to push them out, because your arms need to be connected to your waist for rollback to work.

5. Push and Roll back together.

This last exercise combines push and rollback with both people equally engaged in each activity without each person doing one technique at a time in a rote fashion. Now push and rollback are combined together as one unit of movement and sensitivity. One person will do push or rollback depending on the situation. That is, if person A overextends then B does rollback. If person B doesn't yield, then A does push. Because this exercise is spontaneous and without set limits one needs to be careful not to use force during this particular practice. It is also advisable that the

first four exercises be mastered before moving on to this practice. If done with softness this practice becomes an easy way to develop listening skills and an ability to follow your opponent completely. When you follow your opponent you will feel their elevators move and you will be able to know what they want to do before they do it. This is the pinnacle of Tai Chi practice because as soon as you touch your opponent you will know their intentions and thus they can be easily evaded.

Conclusion

Reeling silk as a metaphor has many subtle aspects to it. Not only is it a way to move evenly through the Tai Chi form, it also a means of cultivating central equilibrium, and moving the body as a unit. Central equilibrium can be enhanced by thinking of moving with the sacrum as a guide. This will also help focus on keeping the six alignments intact. Moving the body as a unit can be accomplished by making sure all parts of the body move proportionately to one another while thinking that the elevators will help the body shift and turn. Considering the nine joints help us think of the body moving like a gyroscope, while the idea of three bows help us round the limbs which in turn allows us make our movements circular. Correcting double heaviness and double lightness helps us make sure we have a balance of yin and yang throughout our body. All of these practices are conjoined together in the Push Hands exercises by learning to yield through listening to and following your opponent. In many ways each one of these topics is additive, and at the same time codependent. Try to do one of them correctly and all of the other techniques will develop as a result. The Classics say that once one technique is learned correctly then others will follow. In this way our practice of Tai Chi is in accord with the Classics of Tai Chi literature. Although I have not referred to the whole of the Tai Chi Classics in this small article, I believe I have given enough techniques to let the ones I didn't mention develop on their own. These ideas are from the Yang Family Classics translated by Douglas Wile with commentary by my teacher Liu Hsi Heng. This article results from a combination of asking my teacher question after question concerning these matters and the years it took of practice to understand the answers. I am a Westerner, and so I approach these matters differently than a person with a Chinese upbringing. It is from a Western perspective that I chose to unveil this knowledge that would traditionally be kept secret. I wrote this article in order to bring these ideas out in the open so that others can practice and benefit from them. I continue to learn from these ideas every day myself, and I have found that they immensely help my practice. It is my hope that these ideas will likewise benefit the reader. These words should be read many times in order to let the meaning sink into your mind and body. If you have a teacher, then ask him/her about these matters in order to bring them into your practice. I feel they are the real essence of Tai Chi.

I wrote this article in order to benefit all practitioners of Tai Chi. I was not trying to profess my knowledge or abilities. It is my opinion that too much emphasis is placed on teachers and their schools, and not on the teachings themselves. I feel this sectarianism is destroying Tai Chi as an art, and because of this, it is not being passed down as a complete system. If all practitioners in the West compiled their knowledge, there could be a real renaissance in Tai Chi and its principles, instead of factionalism.

I want to thank my teachers, Mr. Robert Smith, Ben Lo, Mr. Liu, and Allen Pittman for their guidance and encouragement. I hope practitioners read this and incorporate these ideas into their

practice so that they may be passed on to future generations. Feel free to contact me at Halmosher@yahoo.com for questions or comments. I live in Marin County, California and I have been practicing Yang style Tai Chi, Hsing-I, and Bagua for twenty years.