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Mastering Tai Chi

Course Guidebook

David-Dorian Ross
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David-Dorian Ross, B.A.

International Master Tai Chi Instructor

David-Dorian Ross is the founder and CEO of TaijiFit and the creator of the TaijiFit program, a revolution in mind-body exercise. He has a B.A. in Human Movement Studies from San Francisco State University, has completed graduate course work in Physical Education and Chinese, and is participating in a program to study healthy aging at the University of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Ross has successfully sought to modernize and mainstream the teaching methods used to transmit the ancient mind-body disciplines to contemporary students without losing the essence of those arts. Since 2012, he has collaborated with international action film star Jet Li on a mission to introduce tai chi to 100 million new people worldwide by the year 2020.

Mr. Ross has been a fitness industry leader for more than 30 years. He was the founder and chief instructor of the Honolulu T'ai Chi Academy and a certified continuing educator for the American Council on Exercise. He is recognized as an expert on mind-body fitness in particular but also on

fitness in general. He has been a presenter at virtually every major fitness conference in the United States, Canada, and China and has served as a committee member for several organizations, including the National Association of Health and Fitness.

Mr. Ross's competitive performances have won him seven U.S. gold medals, two world bronze medals, and a world silver medal—the highest awards ever given to an American for international tai chi performance. His tai chi training includes studying in China with the coach of the women's world tai chi champion and with Wu Bin, the former head coach of the Chinese national martial arts team. In the United States, Mr. Ross's teachers include Grandmaster Doc-Fai Wong and Master Wen-Mei Yu, and for the past eight years, he has been the student of Master Wei Jingling.

Mr. Ross is the creator of a dozen award-winning DVDs, including *T'ai Chi Beginning Practice* (the number-one selling tai chi video in America), produced by Gaiam. He also hosted the PBS television special *T'ai Chi: Health and Happiness*. His first show on PBS was *T'ai Chi in Paradise*. He is the author of five books on health and wellness, including *Exercising the Soul*, an Amazon number-one best seller in the meditation category.

Mr. Ross's company, TaijiFit, aims to combine the best of traditional tai chi with modern Western fitness for health and happiness. His list of clients includes LinkedIn (on the corporate fitness side). In 2011, when LA Fitness bought Bally Total Fitness, Mr. Ross was hired to recertify more than 1,000 LA Fitness personal trainers.

Mr. Ross is a pioneer in the use of social media and the Internet to teach tai chi, qigong, and meditation. He created the first online full-service mind-body training studio at davidorianross.com, with all classes at the studio held in real time via two-way video. The curriculum's centerpiece is the TaijiFit program, but it also includes yoga as well as Nia (neuromuscular integrative action) and classical tai chi (taijiquan).

Mr. Ross's previous Great Course is *Essentials of Tai Chi and Qigong*. ■

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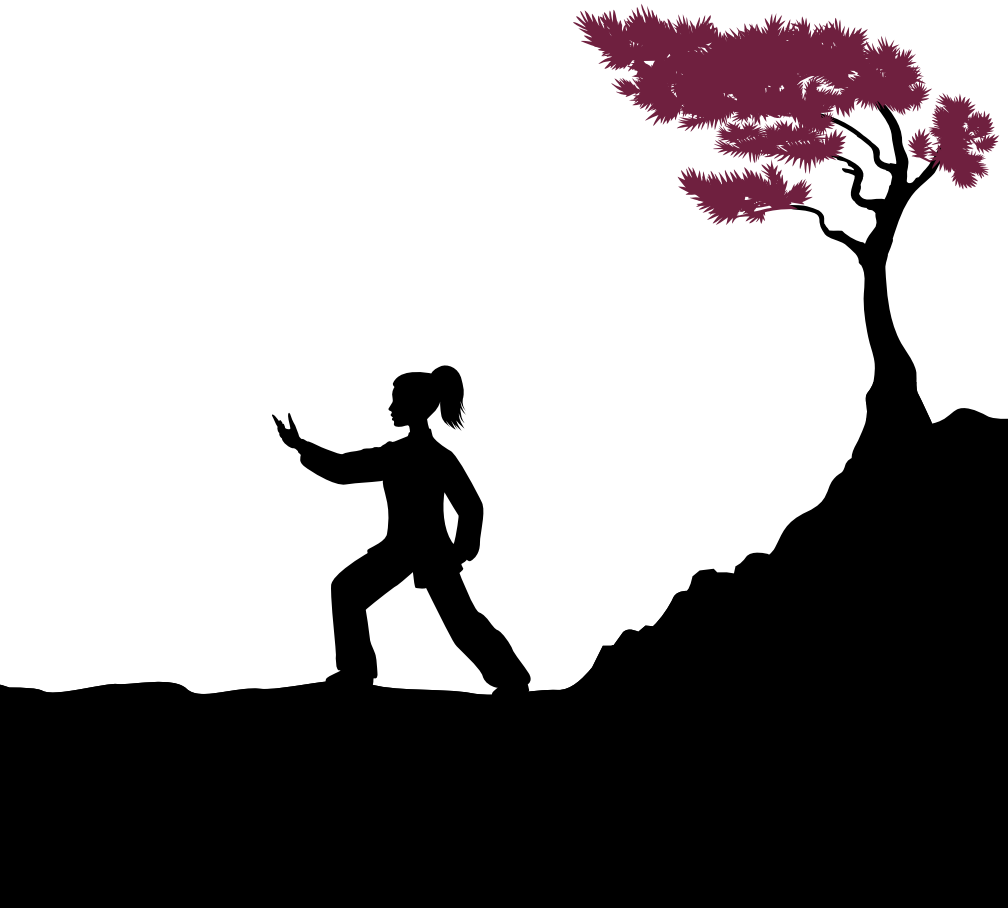
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Central to the tradition of learning tai chi is the study of the principles: the organizing concepts that guide correct practice. These principles have been passed down from teacher to student for hundreds of generations. Each lecture in this course comprises both movement instruction and information about tai chi's foundational principles and concepts. The two are intertwined so that the viewer will learn about the principles as they learn the movements. In this course, the instructor, teaches the Yang-style 40 form routine, which is composed of 40 movements.

Tai chi practice is both external and internal. The external aspect of tai chi teaches the martial arts applications as well as the exercise and health-related routines. The internal aspect improves the circulation of the inner energy known as qi, and it aids in the the development of the performer's character.

Tai chi practice involves three separate but intertwining aspects: the study and practice of pre-choreographed routines known as forms, a series of non-moving meditations done in a standing position known as standing qigong, and an interactive game of two-person tai chi known as pushing hands. In turn, these intertwining aspects are based on a broad foundation of organizing principles that all serious students must learn if they want to truly master this art.

From tai chi's inception, it was meant to present a philosophy that harmony and balance are the most desirable goals in life. They are the keys to inner peace, as well as safe and peaceful society. For more than 500 years, practitioners of tai chi have discovered generation after generation that living by these principles has led to health, longevity, success—and inner peace. ■

In this lecture, we'll get acquainted with the overarching principles of tai chi. Rather than being a strictly physical martial art, tai chi relies on a combination of the mental and the physical to create a harmonious set of movements. We'll also touch on the tai chi routine we'll be working on throughout the rest of this course.

Introducing Tai Chi

- *Tai chi* means “harmony,” the best thing in the universe. *Tai chi chuan* is the “secret” art of harmony. Harmony has many benefits, including health, longevity, creativity, self-protection, self-confidence, success, and relationship benefits. The ultimate goal of tai chi is to achieve a lifestyle of harmony, balance, and inner peace.
- Tai chi has a rich tradition of organizing principles. These principles originally passed orally from teacher to students. Eventually, they were written down and collected into the tai chi classics.

Principles of Tai Chi Chuan

- Tai chi chuan (also known as *taijiquan*) is a beautiful Chinese moving meditation, self-development philosophy, and martial art that is practiced all over the world by people in almost every country and culture. How is it that all these people can practice it so consistently and with relative uniformity? The answer is that tai chi is based on a definite set of organizing principles, universally recognized by tai chi practitioners worldwide.



Practicing tai chi can bring a host of benefits, including developing closer and more harmonious relationships.

- The “authority” on these principles is called the tai chi classics, a compendium of short essays and notes supposedly written by the tai chi masters of the past.
- The principles of tai chi are the distilled teachings of the past masters and creators of this art. They express not only the organizing ideas for the physical structure of the movements, postures, and martial techniques but also how to use tai chi for personal development.
- All of tai chi—meaning reading the classics and practicing the form—is both literal and metaphorical. It is external and internal. And in both cases, the interpretation must be practical and effective. There is a reason that tai chi is called “a living philosophy.”

- When you read the classics, read it with an interpretation that substitutes “life situation” for “opponent.” Or better yet, remember that the most challenging opponents you will ever meet are your own doubt, fear, and prejudice.
- The remarkable thing about tai chi is that it is philosophy for the whole person. We learn this philosophy with our bodies by learning the movements of the tai chi forms.

Getting Started

- The tai chi forms introduce you to basic principles through the agency of your body, as well as your thinking mind. Such a principle as “alignment” can mean many things, both literal and metaphorical. But tai chi takes the approach of giving you a chance to experience alignment—feeling it in your body, comparing that feeling to the feeling of misalignment, and finding out the consequences and side effects of misalignment.
- The forms are also a rehearsal method, a portable classroom that you take with you wherever you go. They come in various lengths, styles, and levels, from easy to advanced. The routine we are learning in this course is known as the Yang style 40 form.

The Bow Step

- The first basic position to learn is the bow step. This is a lunge position in which the front foot carries 60 to 70 percent of the body weight, and the back foot carries only 30 to 40 percent of the body weight. The toes of the front foot point straight forward; the toes of the back foot turn in at a 45-degree angle. Both knees are bent, softening the outer curve of the leg position and rounding the inner thighs and groin. Finally, there is a “channel” or gap between the two feet, as though you were standing with each foot on a separate rail of railroad tracks.
- Each time you step out to create a new bow step, you will pay attention to the roundedness of the legs, the weight distribution

(we call this distinguishing empty and full), and appropriate adjustment of the feet.

The T-Step, Empty Step, and Holding the Ball

- The next position is called the t-step. In this position, you are essentially standing on one foot. The other foot is placed—toes lightly touching the ground—right next to the supporting foot. From below, this position is supposed to look like an inverted T.
 - In actuality, the t-step doesn't really exist. It's not a stance or martial position. It represents a midway point during the transition between many of the moves in the tai chi routine. It is the most yin position between the yang of the previous and upcoming techniques.
 - You can stop in the t-step to catch your balance or rest for a split second, but most of the time, you glide through this space on the way smoothly to the next step.
- The empty step is a foot position in which you stand on one leg, similar to the t-step. Here again, all the weight is on one foot



(called the full foot). The other foot (the empty foot) has no weight on it. The empty foot is in front of the full foot, with the ball of the foot lightly touching the floor.

- A basic position of the hands is a posture called “holding the ball.” Like the t-step, this is a transitional posture rather than a final position of an actual tai chi technique. In fact, you’ll often make hold the ball above and form the t-step below at the same moment. The position is created just as if you were holding a big beach ball against your chest. The two palms face each other. The top arm lines up with the collarbone, and the bottom arm lines up with the top of the pelvis. The arms are held a bit away from the bottom to make the position three-dimensional.

Suggested Reading

Davis, *The Taijiquan Classics*.

Questions to Consider

1. What is the one thing you have done the most for the longest time in your life?
2. What is one thing you wish you could do that you have experienced the least in your life?

Harmony Is the Ultimate Goal

Lecture 2

In this course, we're learning movements of the Yang style 40 form. This lecture begins to introduce the actual moves of the form. We'll learn the first movement of the form, which sets the stage for all the movements to follow. Then, we'll move on to a compound move, breaking it down into parts. Finally, we'll close with a look at the tai chieentric concept of yin and yang.

The Commencing Form

- The first movement of the routine is called “the commencing form” or “the first move.” Another name for this movement is “opening the door.”
- In this movement, the waist and hips are stable and point straight forward. Start with the feet together, knees slightly soft, hands relaxed by your sides. Shift the weight down into the right foot, emptying out the left foot. Step out approximately hip width with the left, then center the weight evenly over both feet. Raise both arms, palms down, until they are even with shoulders. Then, drop the elbows and let them pull the hands down until the hands line up with the hips—palms still down, fingertips pointing forward.

Grasp the Bird's Tail

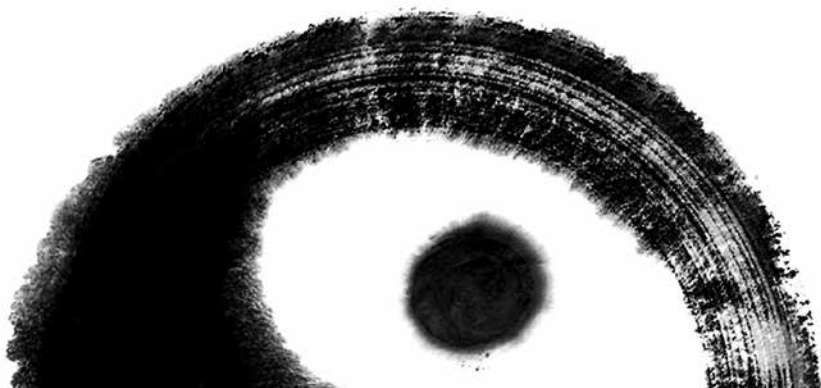
- The next move is “grasp the bird's tail.” It's a compound move, with many sections, but we can break it down.
- Shift the weight to the left foot and pivot to the right, turning the right foot out 45 degrees. Sink down as you shift the weight to the

right foot and circle the arms around to a holding-the-ball posture with the right hand on top.

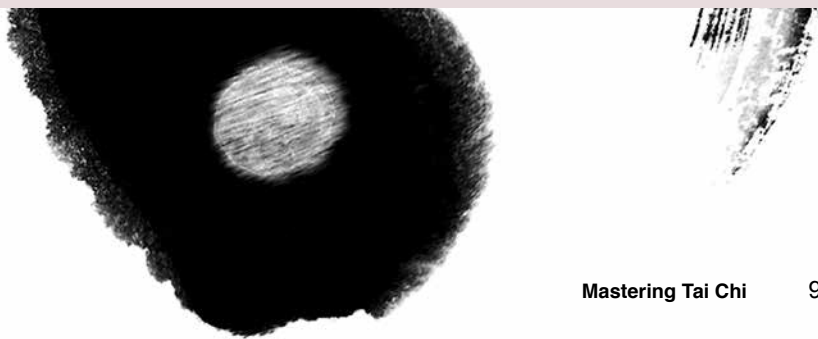
- Face front, step the left foot to the front and shift the weight into a bow step with the left foot forward. The left hand expands outward (palm facing in) into “ward off,” with the left hand down by the hip. As you complete the ward-off position, turn the body to the right and look toward the right.
- Turn slightly back to the left; after a small shift back onto the right foot, shift forward and step up with the right foot as you circle the hands into a holding-the-ball position, left hand on top. Step to the right side with the right foot, form a bow step, and expand the right arm into a ward-off position. The left hand follows the right hand, ending with the fingers just below the right wrist.
- Turn slightly to the right and rotate both arms; the right arm rotates in (palm facing down), and the left arm rotates out (palm facing up). Sink the elbows and turn the waist to the left, carrying the arms along to the left side; this is “roll back.” Complete an arc, or “fish-tail,” by turning the waist back to the right and rotating the arms again. This time, the right arm rotates out—palm facing in—and the left arm rotates in—palm facing forward; then, place the left palm against the right wrist.
- Shift straight forward to a right-foot-leading bow step, expanding the ward-off position as you go.
- Slide the left hand over the top of the right wrist and separate the hands to shoulder width. Shift the weight as much as possible to the back foot, drawing both hands in and downward to hip level. Shift the weight forward into a bow step one last time, pushing the hands upward and forward. Remember to keep the arms rounded in the final position.

The Marriage of Yin and Yang

- The phrase *taiji chuan* is made up of three individual words: *tai*, meaning “very big” or “supreme”; *ji*, meaning “central” or “ultimate”; and *chuan*, usually translated as “fist” but more generally understood to mean “martial art system.” In China, tai chi is commonly revered as the highest level of kung fu.
- But these words also have other meanings in Chinese culture. The phrase tai chi refers to the philosophy of balance and harmony. It is the supreme ultimate of life—the highest ideal that a human being can aspire to, becoming one with the way of nature. *Chuan* is a word that has many subtle meanings. The ideogram, or Chinese character, shows a hand within a hand. A secret method hidden within an outer art form.



The yin-yang symbol represents the two complementary forces that make up all aspects of life: heaven and earth, inner and outer, and more.



- Tai chi is the marriage of yin and yang, including heaven and earth and inner and outer. In this course, we will have a chance to learn the inner principles, once considered “secrets,” that exist as complements to the basic level of those principles, which in tai chi are called outer or external principles.
- What is the secret that this art called tai chi chuan teaches us? It is that the attainment of harmony is a process and that maintaining harmony is done by a daily practice. As mentioned earlier, we'll work through this process in a series of 40 movements.
- The important thing to remember is this: All the forms, no matter their length, are simply tools for rehearsing the guiding principles of tai chi—the step-by-step method of achieving, maintaining, or restoring harmony in your life. We do it as a choreographed routine because—in addition to gaining physical health benefits—we want to experience the philosophy with our whole body. The principles must work in three dimensions, or they are no more than an interesting theory. Forty movements gives us a nice block of time to practice these principles every day.
- Throughout this course, we will look into the guiding and organizing principles of tai chi so that we can better explain how and why tai chi so consistently and effectively delivers its life-changing benefits: improved physical and mental health, longevity, martial skill (for those who wish to pursue that aspect), success in achieving your dreams and goals, and the ability to become a more compassionate, centered, and peaceful person.
- When we consider diving headlong into the study of the inner principles of tai chi, we might ask, “Why? What will harmony give me?” The answer is simple: When you are in balance and harmony, everything in life just works better. The more balanced your life becomes, the smoother and more effortless it feels. But when your life is out of balance, that's when things begin to fall apart. That's when we struggle and age. And the farther out of balance we become, the more that struggle takes its toll on us.



Suggested Reading

Jou, *The Dao of TaijiQuan*.

Questions to Consider

1. What do balance and harmony mean to you?
2. What are the three basic foot positions called? Can you reproduce them?

The impression that tai chi is a slow-moving dance is one of the first things that people notice, and in fact, it is one of the basic principles of tai chi. Perhaps the easiest way to understand how we move in tai chi is to imitate a cat. Moving like a cat brings us to an essential theme: moving slowly and exhibiting patience.

Dān biān (“Single Whip”)

- In this lesson, we’ll begin by learning a movement called *dān biān* (“single whip”).
- From the final position of grasp the bird’s tail, sit back onto the left foot and pivot to the left, turning the right toes in 90 degrees to face front. Turn the waist to the left, and sweep both arms to the



left. The arms rotate slightly so that both palms face outward as you move with the waist from right to left.

- Shift back to the right foot and step into a t-step. As you begin the weight shift, the waist turns right, and the right hand is carried across to the right corner where it will make a hook. The left hand arcs down and up to finish near the right wrist, in preparation for the single whip.
- The right hand holds a hook during this entire move. The left foot steps out to the side into a bow step. (Remember to create a channel.) The waist will naturally turn to the left, and the left hand and arm will sweep across, palm facing in and pressing out with the back of the hand. As the elbow of the left arm aligns over the left knee, the left palm will turn out. This is the single whip.

Tí shǒu shàng shì (“Lift the Hands and Step Out”)


- The next movement is called *tí shǒu shàng shì* (“lift the hands and step out”).
- From single whip, shift the weight to the right foot and empty the left foot. Turn the waist to the left and pivot the left foot inward 45 degrees.
- Shift the weight to the left foot, and set the right heel down in front of the body, toes relaxed and pointing toward the south. Maintain the right-hand hook until the weight begins to shift back to the left foot. Release the right-hand hook and open the palm. Sink the elbows and rotate the right forearm outward until the palm is facing the centerline of the body and the hand is held at shoulder height. The waist turns slightly to the left, aligning the torso to 45 degrees from center (from the open-the-door position).
- As the right foot touches the floor, sink the left elbow down and rotate the forearm slightly inward so that the palm angles toward the ground (45 degrees) and lines up below the right elbow and above the right knee.



Tai chi movements are performed slowly, with the least amount of effort, as one way of counteracting the stress and tension we experience every day.

Slowness

- Slowness is a consistent characteristic of tai chi. The slowness of tai chi is not so much a principle itself as it is a way of learning, practicing, and performing the other principles. Tai chi puts the principles into action—literal motion. But many of the principles are concepts that are new, unfamiliar, or undeveloped in us.
- For example, tai chi asks us to perform movements with a soft and relaxed upper body, exerting the least amount of effort. Yet the events of every day make us so stressed and tense that one-third of all adults in the United States have high blood pressure. How are we supposed to drop all that tension with a snap of the fingers? Further, the very desire to do well creates stress and tension.
- To make sure you have enough time to check the body for pockets of tension, to do breathing techniques to relax, and to let go of muscle contractions that are not needed, you need to slow down considerably and stretch out the movements.

- One way to slow motion is by “stepping like a cat.” This is a way of walking that slows down every step in order to maximize mindful motion. Below are some helpful guidelines to stepping like a cat:
 - Completely shift the weight before you start to take a step.
 - Keep the torso in a relaxed but neutral position.
 - Sink down first. Sink down before stepping out and before stepping in.
 - Follow this pattern of activation: hip, then knee, then foot.
 - Always put the heel or toe down first—like a cat testing the ground—before committing the weight.
 - Position the feet well—make your channel, for example—so that when you finish your step, you’ll be in a strong, stable position.
- 

Suggested Reading

Fu, *Mastering Yang Style Taijiquan*.

Activities / Questions to Consider

1. Take a walk across the room. See if you can tell where your center of gravity is as you walk.
2. Try balancing a book on your head while you practice your cat-stepping across the room.
3. Some parts of the cat-walking step may be harder or easier than others. What is the hardest part for you?

This lecture adds two new moves to our repertoire. First up a move called “the white crane spreads its wings,” which picks up where the last move we learned leaves off. Then we learn a compound move that looks complicated but is easy to understand when broken into parts. After we’ve covered those two moves, we’ll take a look at a core idea of tai chi: that the secret to mastering it is practicing without struggle.

Bái hè liàng chì (“The White Crane Spreads Its Wings”)

- In this lecture, we’ll first learn a movement called *bái hè liàng chì*, which in English means “the white crane spreads its wings.”
- From the final position of the raise the hands move we learned in the previous lecture, turn the waist toward the left and step back with the right foot (to the west). Shift the weight entirely onto the right foot.
- Circle the right hand around (right, down, left) and circle the left hand (down, left, up, and right) to form a hold-the-ball position, left hand on top. Let the right arm rise up until the forearm touches the left fingertips. The waist turns right to 45 degrees and returns to face east.
- As the waist turns to the right, rotate the right arm outward so that the palm faces out. As the waist turns back to the left, sink the right elbow. (Palm is head high.) The left hand pulls down to the left hip, palm down and fingers pointing forward.




- The left foot momentarily picks up; then, the toes are replaced on the ground to create an empty step. Make sure the knee is relaxed.

Zuǒ yòu lōu xī ǎo bù (or “Brush Knee in Twisted Step [Left and Right]”)

- The next move in this lesson is *Zuǒ yòu lōu xī ǎo bù*, or “brush knee in twisted step [left and right].” It’s a compound move, with numerous sections.
- From the end of white crane, turn the waist to the left 45 degrees, then to the right 90 degrees. As the waist completes its turn to the right, bring the left foot next to the right to make a t-step.
- As you turn the waist to the left, circle the right arm inward and downward across the torso, rotating the forearm outward so that the palm first faces the body (coming across), then faces up (as the arm drops down). The right arm continues to loop around until it extends into the southwest corner with the palm up. Sink the elbow at the finish.

- Simultaneously, circle the left arm out, up, and across the body until it also extends toward the southwest corner with the palm down. (Remember to keep both arms rounded.)
- Step out with the left foot (toward east) to form a bow step, remembering to leave a channel. As you shift your weight into the left foot, the waist will turn to the left until the hips and torso are squarely facing the east.
- Press the left palm and arm down across the torso, then sweep it in an arc from right to left as the waist turns. In fact, the waist turn carries the arm, rather than the hand moving independently. The palm passes over the top of the knee, then withdraws finally to a position hip high near the top of the left thigh.
- At the beginning of the left-foot step, the right elbow folds, bringing the right palm past the chin. As the weight shifts into the final bow step, the right elbow slowly extends, although it never completely straightens. As the elbow nears its extension, flex the wrist so that the palm “pushes” toward the front.
- This movement has three steps, so alternate the left and right foot.
- Empty the front foot and shift the weight to the back foot. Turn the waist in the direction of the front foot (alternating left or right, as appropriate) and pivot the front foot out 45 degrees. As the waist completes its turn, bring the rear foot up next to the front foot to make a t-step.
- Bring the lower hand up until it extends toward the rear 45-degree corner, palm up. Simultaneously, arc the pushing hand slightly upward, then over and down until it also extends towards the rear 45-degree corner, palm down. Remember to keep both arms rounded and a gap under each armpit.

Practicing without Struggle

- One tai chi concept that may be hard for some students to grasp is that softness does not mean weakness. In fact, the opposite is true. Being softer means letting go of stress and tension.
 - What's more powerful than your physical strength? The answer is letting go of struggle and using another capacity. In tai chi, that capacity is intention or willpower. The tai chi saying goes, “*yong yi, bié yòngli*,” which translates roughly to “intention not exertion.”
 - Physical exertion strangles your chi. But intention guides, invites, and manipulates the chi. This is the secret to mastering tai chi: Intention is a better investment than exertion.
- 

Suggested Reading

Liao, *T'ai Chi Classics*.

Questions to Consider:

1. We've all heard the expressions “beating a dead horse” and “beating your head against the wall.” They both mean working as hard as you can but making no progress. Where in your life have you worked extra hard, only to have little to no result?
2. What do you think about the idea of trying softer instead of harder? Have you ever tried to use this technique? If so, how did it turn out?

We've all heard of the phrase, "the monkey mind." The monkey represents our uncontrolled impulses, our uncontrolled thoughts flying from one side to another. The monkey mind creates our drive for instant gratification, desires, and fight or flight responses. In tai chi, we learn to tame the monkey mind. And in this lecture, we'll take a look at how, along with learning two new moves.

Empty and Full

- When we learned to walk like a cat in an earlier lecture, we learned that the first step is to shift the weight entirely. This is called emptying and filling. On the external level, *empty* and *full* refer to weight distribution.
- The foot that bears weight is full. The foot that has no weight is empty. The principle is to separate or to distinguish. To distinguish or to make distinctions is to identify what something is and what something is not.
- The body is divided into three sections: upper, lower, and middle. The lower body is heavy, solid, rooted, and continuously moving back and forth between empty and full. By contrast, the upper body is light, soft, and insubstantial. The middle is flexible; it turns and rotates.
- Another tai chi principle is to loosen the back. A reason the low back might not rotate enough is that it is tight.

Shǒu huī pípá (“The Hands Strum the Lute”)

- We'll start with a movement called *shǒu huī pípá*, or “the hands strum the lute”). The actual name of the musical instrument here is *pípa*, which is similar to the lute. It is typically played in a seated position, with the sound box on the lap or knee and the neck pointing up. One hand (usually the left) makes chords on the neck, while the other hand plucks the strings.

The *pípa*, similar to a lute, is often played to accompany tai chi practice, in part because its rippling, continuous music mimics the look of tai chi movements.



- The *pipa* is often played to accompany tai chi practice, and many songs are composed on the *pipa* especially for tai chi. Partly, the reason for this is that the name appears in the list of fundamental tai chi postures. The music of the *pipa* is also rippling, mellow, and continuous; many people say that the *pipa* sounds the way that tai chi movement looks. Finally, many masters point out that the tai chi body is aligned in the same way that the neck and head of the *pipa* aligns straight over the body.
- From the final bow step of brush knee, shift the weight entirely onto the left foot and bring the right foot halfway closer. Step down onto the right foot entirely, picking up the left foot, then replacing it down lightly on the left heel, making an empty step.
- As the weight returns to the right foot, the waist will turn to the right 45 degrees. As the left foot replaces, the waist turns back to the left until the hips and torso are squarely facing east.
- As the waist turns to the right, the left arm floats up until it is shoulder high. As the waist returns to the left, the left elbow sinks, and the forearm rotates outward until the palm faces in toward the centerline of the body.
- During the waist's right-left rotation, the right arm arcs slightly outward, downward, and inward until the palm lines up just below the left elbow (but four to five inches to the right). As the arm arcs outward, the forearm rotates inward so that the palm faces down. As the arm arcs downward, the elbow sinks, and the forearm rotates outward until the palm faces in toward the centerline of the body.

Jìn bù bān lán chuí (“Travel Forward and Back Fist” [*bān*], “Parry” [*lán*], and “Punch” [*chuí*])

- The next move in this lesson is *jìn bù bān lán chuí*, which in English translates to “travel forward and back fist” (*bān*), “parry” (*lán*), and “punch” (*chuí*).

- Pivot to the left, turn the waist to the left, and turn the left toes out 45 degrees. Then, step down onto the left foot and bring the right foot up to form a t-step. Step out with the right foot, landing lightly on the heel. Turn the waist to the right; pivot to the right on the right heel, turning the right toes out 45 degrees; and step forward with the left foot to form a bow step. Don't forget to leave a channel between the feet.
- As the waist turns to the left, rotate the right forearm inward, angling the arm downward, and form a loose fist. Sweep the right fist upward, and as the waist turns to the right, extend the elbow to make a back fist, striking with the back of the fist nose high.
- As the weight transfers to the right foot (in preparation for the left foot stepping out to a bow step), the waist turns to the right and the right fist withdraws to the right hip.
- When the waist first begins to turn left and the left toes pivot out, the left forearm rotates inward, turning the palm slightly downward. As the right hand executes the back fist, the left elbow slightly sinks down. When the waist turns to the right and the right fist withdraws to the hip, the left elbow extends forward (though not completely; keep the elbow rounded). The left palm actually pats downward as if blocking.
- As the weight shifts forward to complete the bow step, punch forward with the right fist, finishing just past the left palm.

The Monkey Mind

- Every time that qi energy circulates around the body it refines itself. This process is known as cultivation, and cultivation is how a tai chi master gains power.
- The opposite of willpower is whim power. Willpower correlates with intention, while whim power correlates with impulses caused by the monkey mind.



- If you learn to control your impulses by focusing on your intention, you actually gain mastery over your life and your qi. We have to gain mastery to practice.
- The body is cultivated through physical practice. It's not always easy, and it's not always fun—like getting up early in the morning to stretch—but it's necessary.
- Character, meanwhile, is cultivated by merit and virtue. Merit is an external attribute, and virtue is an internal one. We accumulate virtue by performing meritorious acts like acts of compassion

and benevolence. These meritorious acts are done because we contain the monkey mind. We use our intention to be mindful.

- Struggling strangles the flow of qi, and can prevent someone from being a compassionate person, a meritorious person. Hanging onto thoughts, ideas, preconceptions, and prejudices also strangles the flow of qi.



Suggested Reading

Liao, *T'ai Chi Classics*.

Activities

1. Practice the counting meditation. Sit in a quiet place, dim the lights, and close your eyes. Now begin counting slowly and silently to yourself. Should you discover yourself having any thought other than the next number, return to the number 1. Can you empty your head of thoughts?
2. Stand in your tai chi commencement position. Now imagine that you had a long braid that was tied to the rafters above your head. Let your neck feel longer, lifted up by the braid. Now imagine that you had a long tail as well. Feel your spine stretching, dragged down by your tail. Can you practice your moves and maintain this posture?

You've no doubt heard the saying "where there's a will, there's a way." The ancient masters of tai chi probably coined that phrase. The principles of tai chi imagine that all things are possible if the will is strong. Unfortunately, the will is like a muscle, and if not exercised continuously, it will atrophy. Many forms of martial arts train the body and develop speed and strength in order to defeat an opponent. But what if your opponent is yourself, your long-rehearsed yet unconscious habits of perception, thought, point of view, and behavior? No amount of muscular strength will avail you in that struggle. Only the willpower can stand up to that challenge.

Rú fēng shì bì ("Sealing and Closing")

- In this lesson, the next movement we'll learn is called *rú fēng shì bì*, which in English means "sealing and closing."
- While still in the final position of chop downward, parry, and punch, rotate the left forearm outward, turning the palm up and crossing the wrist under the right forearm. Simultaneously, rotate the right forearm out slightly to turn the right palm up. Separate the two arms by a shoulder width.
- Shift the weight to the rear leg and foot. As you do so, rotate both forearms inward until the palms face each other and sink both elbows.
- Shift forward to the left leading bow step and extend the elbows slightly, rotating both forearms inward so that the palms face east, and push.

Just as the branches and leaves of a tree move when the trunk moves, the shoulders, arms, and hands move when the whole upper body moves in tai chi.



Xié fēi shì (“Diagonal Flying Posture”)

- The next move is *xié fēi shì*, meaning “diagonal flying posture” or “slanted flying posture.” To begin, sit back, emptying the weight out of the left foot and shifting the weight entirely onto the right foot. Turn the waist to the right and pivot on the left heel, turning the toe in 90 degrees.
- Separate the right hand away from the left as you turn the waist to the right until the palm extends to the southwest corner. Note that the left hand will come with you and now faces the southeast corner.
- Now, shift the weight back onto the left foot and circle both arms around to form a hold-the-ball position, left hand on top. Step the right foot steeply into the northwest corner (65 degrees) to form a bow step. Simultaneously, chop diagonally upward with the right hand, ending when the right hand (palm obliquely upward) is shoulder high. The left hand withdraws downward to the hip, palm down, fingertips pointing forward.


Willpower and the Bow and Arrow

- In the last couple of lectures, we brought up intention. But what is intention, how does it operate, and how do you get it to work for you? The two step process is much like what we call a bow and arrow.
- Imagine an archer holding the bow, drawing the string back and releasing the arrow. The intention is like the archer who draws the bow and releases the arrow, but first the archer has to find the arrow and what that arrow is. The arrow is known as the *shin*; it's the idea, the concept, the desire, or the picture. *Shin* can translate to “heart mind.”
- The heart mind is like crafting or choosing your arrow. A weak or evil desire is a crooked arrow, but a strong or noble desire is a straight and true arrow. The tai chi master is like the archer who never misses his target. He creates the idea, the intention,



the picture, the concept, or the desired outcome. Then he sends it into the bow, draws back the string, and releases all in one smooth movement.

- Our minds have prejudices, thoughts, confusions, desires, and impulses. How do we control those? In tai chi, we have the concept of accumulating merit and virtue. As you become a more virtuous person, you become the kind of person that can just think and then see your actions create the outcome you want. Examples of good outcomes: healthy relationships, or good health for your family, or prosperity for your community.
- To get to that kind of virtue, you have to perform meritorious actions. The meritorious actions are themselves very difficult to be consistent with. It's so easy to go with bad habits—to follow the monkey mind. It's much more difficult to get past instant gratification and familiarity with action and disconnection from feeling.

- It's difficult to perform this work while participating in real communication or allowing yourself to be vulnerable in relationships, but those are the kinds of actions that build up character. Those are the kind of meritorious things that we do that increase our martial virtue.
 - Focused intention is the power of the tai chi master. When you follow the path of mastering tai chi, you're following the path that brings you to a clear vision. The vision translates into the intention like an arrow the bow pulls back and releases.
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Suggested Reading

Xiaowang and Schulz, tr., *The Five Levels of Taijiquan*.

Activity

Take a look at yourself in the mirror (or better yet, tape yourself with your smartphone). Can you say that all your final positions are rounded like the bow in both arms and legs?

Practicing in a Small Space

We have now completed the first section of the Yang-style 40-movement form. In this lesson, we'll take a break from introducing new tai chi movements to review what we've covered so far. But we will introduce some new ideas: a warm-up sequence from qigong called eight pieces of brocade, and some tips on how to practice in a small space.

Review

- We'll begin by reviewing the 10 movements of the Yang style that we've learned so far.
- These movements are:
 - Commencing
 - Grasping the bird's tail
 - Single whip
 - Step up and raise hands
 - The white crane spreads its wings
 - Brush knee and twist step
 - Right hand strums the lute (*pipa*)
 - Parry and punch
 - Sealing and closing
 - Diagonal flying


Eight Pieces of Brocade

- Eight pieces of brocade is a warm-up sequence borrowed from qigong, often done in conjunction with tai chi routines.
- Start off with your feet apart and your hands relaxed by your sides. Breathe in and let the arms float out to the sides and gather in to the center. Turn your palms down and press into the earth. This is called sinking the qi.
- Next, float your hands out in front. Round your arms out like you're hugging a big tree. Open then scoop down. The fingers interlace. Then bring both hands up the front of the body.
- At chest high, turn your palms up and reach out overhead. Look up at the hands for a moment, then look forward, and release all the way down, once again interlacing the fingers. Breathe in. Turn the palms up.
- Continue breathing in. This is a long inhale all the way to the top. Then look forward and breathe out as the hands come down. Now, you can also soften the knees, sinking down. Interlace the fingers and breathe in. This movement is called holding up the heavens like a pillar.
- Finally, we're going to reverse direction and sink the qi one more time. Breathe in. Gather in. Breathe out. That's the end of the movement.

Practicing in a Small Space

- One of the great things about something like the eight pieces of brocade is that it is something that you can do in a small space. Here are some strategies that can help when you're practicing in a small area:
 - Eliminate repeated movements; one will suffice
 - Take smaller steps
 - Turn around after each technique and reverse direction



- Practicing in a small space teaches us to break our reliance on having a large studio. In turn, that eliminates an excuse for not practicing, which is a very good thing: If you don't continually practice, you will get worse.
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Suggested Reading

Huang and Ko, *Essential Tai Ji*.

Activities

1. Using the video lecture as a guide, practice the eight pieces of brocade every day this week. Use it as a warmup prior to your tai chi study.
2. Using the cat-walking pattern of footwork, practice the movements of the 40 form, turning around 180 degrees instead of progressively stepping down the line. This is an effective method of practicing in a small space.

Hips and Waist: The Center Is the Commander

Lecture 8

This lecture introduces two new moves, picking up at the end of the flying diagonal move. The movements aren't difficult, but they do have a lot of parts. After we've learned those two movements, we'll close with a look at how important the waist is to tai chi practice, and how gut feelings can lead toward meritorious action.

Fist under Elbow

- First we'll cover the footwork for this move, then the hands. Start this movement standing at a diagonal angle with a bow step. Turn back, reversing 270 degrees. Empty out the front foot, using the cat-walking step with an inward rotation. As the waist turns, the toe pivots in. Step in. Pivot around. Take a step behind. Then empty step in front with the heel down and the toe up.
- Now for the hands: As you turn inward, let one hand float all the way across. The palm rotates, turning the palm down to make the top of an embracing-the-moon position. From this position, slide the hands over each other.
- The top hand circles around and comes in. The bottom hand circles out and extends. That will take about halfway through the turn. Come back, circle around, and gather. The bottom hand extends out. It continues the turn.
- The right hand comes up over the top, making a fist, and the left hand comes from the hip. It comes up past the hip and rotates.

Turn the palm so that the fingertips form a knife-edge in front of you. The elbow is bent above the fist.

Dào niǎn hóu (“Trip Up the Monkey” or “Repulse the Monkey”)

- The next move in this lecture is *Dào niǎn hóu*; in English, that translates to “trip up the monkey” or, more commonly, “repulse the monkey.” This movement has two steps.
- From the final position of fist under elbow, turn the waist slightly to the right and sweep the right arm in an arc downward, then upward until it extends to the southwest corner, palm facing up. Remember to keep both arms rounded during this move.
- Fold the right elbow so that the palm pushes past the ear. As the elbow folds in, step back with the right foot. Shift the weight entirely onto the left foot, allowing the right foot to create an empty step.
- As the weight shifts onto the left foot, turn the waist to the left until the torso is at a 45-degree angle open to the north side. The turning waist will help push the right hand forward past the face until the arm is extended out. As the arm finishes its extension, the palm flexes into a push. At the same time, the left hand drops and withdraws to the left side of the belly, palm up. Again, remember to keep both arms rounded.
- The second step is to turn the waist slightly to the left and sweep the left arm in an arc downward, then upward until it extends to the northwest corner, palm facing up—with both arms rounded.
- Fold the left elbow so that the palm pushes past the ear. As the elbow folds in, step back with the left foot. Shift the weight entirely onto the right foot, allowing the left foot to create an empty step.
- As the weight shifts onto the right foot, turn the waist to the right until the torso is at a 45-degree angle open to the south side. The turning waist will help push the left hand forward past the face until




At a certain point, the emphasis in tai chi shifts from the external to the internal, bringing the mind and body into a state of flow.

the arm is extended out. As the arm finishes its extension, the palm flexes into a push. At the same time, the left hand drops and withdraws to the left side of the belly, palm up.

Waist Movement and the Gut

- The movement of the waist and the movement of qi are interconnected. As the waist moves, turns and rolls, the qi also

turns and rolls, spinning around and around. The qi moves through the body as the body continues its spinning action.

- But the waist can't do everything. A tai chi master lets go of the waist and leads with the gut. Many cultures have a concept that the gut is the seat of intuition. There's a certain kind of knowledge or intuition that resides there. That's why we say, "What does your gut tell you?" Lead with your gut.
 - Your gut feeling can be like a compass needle. It can help you be clear about your direction of travel and technique. Following the gut can be a way toward martial value and meritorious action.
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Suggested Reading

Wayne, *The Harvard Medical School Guide to Tai Chi*.

Activities

1. Find a ball. A soccer ball or volleyball will do, although a weighted qi ball is best. Standing in a bow step, shift the weight from the front to the back of your feet. With each shift, roll the ball with your hands in the direction of your shift.
2. Once you've done number 1 above, add to the exercise by trying to feel your waist rolling back and forth in the same way as the ball in your hands.

Feet: Separate Empty from Full

Lecture 9

In this lecture, we'll introduce two new movements: fair lady works at the shuttles and part the horse's mane. Both involve the upper and lower body moving in concert, so we'll break down the moves into pieces. After that, we'll turn to this lecture's closing lesson: the concept of separating empty from full.

Yù nǚ chuān suō ("Fair Lady Works the Shuttles")

- The first movement we'll learn in this lesson is called *yù nǚ chuān suō*, which in English means, "fair lady works the shuttles." It picks up at the end of repulse the monkey, and we'll cover the footwork first.
- At the end of repulse the monkey, all your weight is on the right foot. The left toe is tapping the ground. It's an empty step. Pivot on that left toe, turning the heel outward.
- The weight is still on the right foot until that toe turns out. The waist turns to the right, the toe stays down, and the heel goes with the turn. Now shift back to the left foot, turn the waist toward the right some more, and pivot on the toe once again.
- Next, step down onto the right foot and step forward, so that your left foot is now stepping into the corner and bow step. Your ultimate goal is to come from facing east to facing southwest.
- As for the hands: From the end of repulse the monkey, you'll have one hand pushing forward. The right hand will be by your belly,

and you'll come to a hold-the-ball position briefly while the right hand lifts up, circles around, and comes back down to the belly again. It'll be a complete 360-degree circle. Combine that move with the step.

Zuoyou yémǎ fēnzōng ("Part the Horse's Mane")

- The next move is *zuoyou yémǎ fēnzōng*, which translates to "part the horse's mane." Again, this is a two-step movement.
- From the last position of fair lady works the shuttles, sit back and empty the right foot, then shift all the weight into the right foot to create a t-step.
- As you shift to the left foot, turn the waist slightly to the left. As you shift forward, turn the waist back to the right until you are facing the northwest corner.
- As you turn the waist to the left, circle the left arm and hand outward and downward to create the bottom half of the holding-the-ball posture. The left arm finishes its arc as the waist turns to the right, and the left forearm rotates outward to turn the palm up.
- As the waist turns left, the right arm simply travels with the turn of the body. As the waist turns back to the right, the right forearm rotates outward to turn the palm down and descends slightly to form the top of the hold-the-ball posture.
- Open the left hip and step out wide (60 degrees) with the left foot into the southwest corner. Shift the weight forward to create a bow step. As you shift 60 percent of the weight into the left foot, the waist turns to the left 45 degrees. In this position, the torso will face squarely west.
- The left hand chops upward diagonally from the bottom of the ball to extend out to the southwest corner, with the hand at shoulder height. (Be sure to sink the elbow.) At the same time, the right


hand pulls down to the hip level, palm down, close to the front of the left thigh.

- For the second step of the movement, without shifting back, shift forward onto the left foot to make a t-step. Then, step out with the right foot to make a bow step facing west, this time, forming the regular channel.
- As you step forward to make the t-step, rotate the right forearm outward so that the palm turns upward, and scoop the right hand under to form the bottom of the hold-the-ball position.
- Simultaneously, rotate the left forearm inward so that the palm is up and curve it over to form the top of the hold-the-ball position. As you step out to make the bow step, the right hand chops upward diagonally from the bottom of the ball to extend out to the northwest corner, with the hand at shoulder height. (Again, be sure to sink the elbow.) At the same time, the left hand pulls down to the hip level, palm down, close to the front of the left thigh.

Somewhat paradoxically, tai chi is a moving meditation; although we are in continuous external movement, we are also seeking internal stillness.



Separate Empty and Full

- One important principle in tai chi is knowing empty versus full. Tai chi has built into it a series of tests. There are tests that you do in your individual, personal practices. There will also be tests that you do with partners. Each time you take a test, you get a chance to see whether or not you're really doing what you think you're doing.
 - If you think you're doing something with a particular intention, you have to see what the result of that action is. If the results match your intention, you know that you have had a good idea. You know that you have clearly distinguished empty from full.
 - If you have an idea, you put it into your intention, you act on it, and the results are not what you expected, then maybe you're double-weighted.
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Suggested Reading

De Graffenried, *Anatomy of Yang Family Tai Chi*.

Activity

Practice your transitions. Can you point out the empty and full moments? How about open and closed?

Shoulders: Finding Reasons to Let Go

Lecture 10

This lecture introduces another two components of our 40-movement routine: cloud hands and single whip. Cloud hands picks up where parting the horse's mane leaves off. After we've covered those two movements we'll move on to close with a somewhat counterintuitive concept: Tai chi should be easy.

Yúnshǒu ("Cloud Hands")

- In this lecture, we'll begin with a three-step movement called *yúnshǒu*, meaning "cloud hands."
- From the final position of parting the horse's mane, sit back and shift the weight onto the left foot and turn the body to the left. At the same time, scoop the right hand downward toward the belly and lift the left hand upward, rotating the left forearm outward so that the palm turns up toward the face.
- Shift the weight onto the left foot and turn the body gradually to the left. The left hand makes a curve past the face, with the palm slowly turning outward. The right hand moves in a curve past the belly, then upward to the shoulder, with the palm turned in. The left hand drops and moves in a curve past the belly; it then circles upward to the right shoulder, palm turned in. Meanwhile, bring the right foot to the side of the left foot so that they are side by side. Look at the left hand.
- For the second step of this move, turn the waist to the right and shift the weight onto the right foot. The right hand continues to

move to the right—past the face—with the palm turning slowly outward. At the same time, the left hand makes a curve past the belly and upward to the right shoulder. While all this is going on, the left foot makes a step outward to the left.

- Repeat this pattern two more times, finishing with the right foot stepping in side by side with the left.


Dān biān (“Single Whip”)

- Our next move is *dān biān*, or “single whip.”
- First, shift the weight onto the right foot. At the same time, press the left hand down and arc it into the belly. The right hand curves past the belly and up to the left shoulder.
- Turn the torso to the right. At the same time, the right hand moves to the southwest corner (45 degrees) to form a hook hand. The left hand curves past the belly, then upward to the right shoulder—palm turned inward. Look at the left hand.
- Turn the body slightly to the left while the left foot steps east to form a bow step; don’t forget to leave a channel. While shifting your weight into the left foot to form the bow step, press the back of the rounded left arm in an arc past the face and to the left, turning the palm out to face east at the end.

Counterintuitive Difficulty

- An important idea to keep in mind is that tai chi is easy, even though it might not seem like it. You always have to overcome homeostasis, not only with your body, but also with your mind and energy.
- Little by little we circulate and cultivate the qi energy. Little by little we change the body. Little by little we change the way we think.



- That can feel very frustrating. How do you keep yourself motivated? The ancient tai chi masters had an answer: Understand why you're doing it. Keep the outcome you want to achieve in mind.
 - Sometimes the outcome is very personal: You want to get something. Sometimes the outcome is more altruistic: You want to give something back. It doesn't matter what the reason is as long as you have one, because reasons are what drive you to overcome the resistance.
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Suggested Reading

Liao, Waysun. *T'ai Chi Classics*.

Activities

1. With a finger, trace a line straight up from the nipple to the top of the shoulder. This point is known as the shoulder well. Draw downward on the point as much as you are able without straining. Now keep that position as you practice your form movements.
2. Imagine draping a pair of heavy boots, tied together by the shoestrings, across your elbow. Feel how heavy the elbows are. Now keep that position as you practice your form movements.

Inside Reflects the Outside

This lecture will continue our progression in the Yang-style 40 form by introducing a pair of new movements: high pat on horse and kick with heel (right). But first, we'll cover a new concept: that of *shen*, or spiritual energy, which guides our intentions.

Shen

- What tells us whether our intentions are good or bad? According to tai chi, that faculty is called the *shen*, which means “the spirit.” The ability to raise up the *shen* is an advanced technique in tai chi.
- The shen guides everything else. The tai chi classics refer to the *shen* as the commander. The classics say the spirit is the boss and the body is like soldiers doing all the work.
- What are you trying to express when you're doing your tai chi? That guides the way the intention is flowing. In turn, the intention guides the qi, and the qi pushes the body. Bear that in mind when we go over the new movements in this lecture.

Gāo tàn mǎ (“High Pat on Horse”)

- In this lesson, we'll start with a movement called *gāo tàn mǎ*, which in English means “high pat on horse.”
- From the final position of single whip, take a half step forward with the right foot, then shift the weight completely back onto the right foot. Lift the heels of the left foot slightly to form an empty step.




Open the right-hand hook and turn both hands palm up, elbows slightly bent.

- Turn the body to the left; draw the right hand past the ear and push it forward, palm facing out. At the same time, withdraw the left hand down to the left hip, palm up and fingertips pointing forward. Meanwhile, replace the left toes slightly forward on the floor. Look at the right hand.

Yòu dēng jiǎo (“Kick with Heel [Right]”)

- The next move is *yòu dēng jiǎo*, “kick with heel (right).”
- Turn the waist to the right and sweep the right arm out to the right; then, scoop down and past the belly and up to the left forearm. As the right hand passes the belly, withdraw the left foot in preparation for the step into the northeast corner.

- Step the left foot out into the left corner and bring the right foot up to make a t-step. Simultaneously, stroke the right hand over the top of the left forearm, then slightly upward and to the right, while the left hand curves slightly downward and to the left.
 - The two arms continue to circle—right hand downward, then upward; left hand upward—until they cross again at the wrists. Both hands are palms up, right hand underneath. As the wrists come together, the right knee lifts up and points into the southeast corner.
 - The two forearms rotate outward. The right hand separates into the southeast corner (over the leg), and the left hand separates into the northeast corner (90 degrees away). Simultaneously, the right leg extends, kicking the foot into the southeast corner.
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Suggested Reading

Goldfarb, *Tai Chi and the Art of Mindfulness*.

Questions to Consider

1. What is the difference between will and willpower?
2. What is the difference between desire and intention?

Lecture 12

Chest, Posture, and the Natural Curve

We're starting to get fairly far in our 40-movement progression. Today we'll continue to advance by learning two new moves: box both ears and separate the left foot. Then, we'll turn to a new tai chi principle: that the body resembles five bows, always naturally curved.

Shuāng fēng guān ěr ("Box Both Ears")

- We'll begin with a movement called *shuāng fēng guān ěr*, meaning "box both ears."
- Bend the right knee and withdraw the right foot. Rotate both forearms outward so that the palms face in and close both armpits so that the palms face the body, fingertips pointing up. (Be sure to keep the arms rounded.) Turn the body to the right and bring both hands down in a curve to either side of the right knee, palm up.
- Step out into the southeast corner with the right foot to form a bow step. As the heel touches down, lower both hands to the sides and gradually make two loose fists. As you shift the weight forward into the bow step, sweep the two fists outward, upward, and inward in a pincer movement.

Zuǒ fèn jiǎo ("Separate the Left Foot")

- The next movement is called *zuǒ fèn jiǎo*, which means "separate the left foot."
- Sit back onto the left foot and turn the waist to the right, pivoting the left toes to the front as you go. At the same time, open both




fists and separate the hands in a circular manner; extend them sideways a little above shoulder level, palms facing forward.

- Shift the weight forward onto the right foot and bring the left foot up to create a t-step. At the same time, circle the arms downward, inward, and upward, crossing at the wrists in front of the chest.
- Lift up the left knee (pointing it to the east) and extend the leg, kicking out with the toes. Simultaneously extend both arms out: left arm to the east over the kicking leg and right arm to the south (at a 90-degree angle). Remember to keep both arms rounded.

The Five Bows

- As you practice this lecture's moves, keep this tai chi principle in mind: The body is carrying five bows. Both arms and both legs naturally curve, as does the spine; all five mimic the curvature of a bow.

- A bow has power to shoot an arrow out because a string draws back, shortening the bow and creating tension. As it releases, the bow springs back into its original position and shoots the arrow out.
 - There is a place in the bow's curve where there's not enough tension, and there's a place in where there might be too much tension. When the string is slack, and there is not enough tension, there's nothing to pull back, so there is no force to send the arrow out. On the other hand, if you pull the string too strongly and you bend the bow too much, it might break.
 - Metaphorically, the springiness of the bow is played out in the springiness of our body. Many of the techniques of tai chi are dependent upon some kind of springy action.
 - The body follows curves of nature. And no matter the move, tai chi creates curves in the body.
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Suggested Reading

Jou, *The Dao of TaijiQuan*.

Activities

1. Stand with the feet shoulder width apart, and raise your arms in front of you as though you were hugging a big tree. Drop one of your arms, and notice that now you are holding one "bow." By adjusting the position of the elbow and wrist without changing the curvature you should be able to make all the postures you are learning in the 40 form. Try these:
 - Ward off
 - Single whip

- Crane spreads wings
 - High pat on horse.
2. Go back to the hug-the-tree pose. Notice that by holding the arms in front, you actually create a small concavity in the center of the chest. Practice the first section of the routine, but pay attention to keeping the feeling of this small hollow chest.

Tai chi, if not musical, is at least rhythmic. It has its own notes: the individual moves or techniques. But what of the spaces in between the moves? Are they empty? We'll find out in this lecture, and we'll take a break from introducing any new movements. Instead, we'll dive into the spaces in between the moves by taking a look at how tai chi flows from one movement to the next.

The Progression So Far

- As a refresher, here is the sequence we've covered:
 1. Commencing form
 2. Grasp the bird's tail
 3. Single whip
 4. Step up and raise hands
 5. White crane spreads wings
 6. Brush knee and twist step
 7. Right hand strums the *pipa*
 8. Sealing and closing
 9. Parry and punch
 10. Diagonal flying

11. Punch under elbow
12. Repulse the monkey
13. Fair lady works at the shuttles
14. Part the horse's mane on both sides
15. Cloud hands
16. Single whip
17. High pat on horse
18. Kick with right heel
19. Box both ears
20. Separate left foot

Tai Chi's Flow

- An important principle in tai chi is continuously moving without a break, also known as flow.
- From a practical point of view, how do we make sure that we're getting this smooth, continuous motion? The way is by learning to make more curves.
- It's very typical that when you're first learning a new movement, there are angles, and there are breaks in the movement. For example, when we learned brush knee, we started out with one hand pressed down, one hand folded in, then stepped out and pushed forward. Those movements aren't that smooth. They're very angular. We call that segmented motion.
- Imagine that you have a square piece of wood, and for a while, the square piece of wood is fine. But then you come along one day and you cut off the edges of the square corner, and now you've got something that's a little bit more rounded.

- Then after a while, you cut off the square edges of each one of those corners, and then do it again, and then again, until finally you have a round shape. Then you come along with sandpaper and you smooth the edges around until you have a complete circle, smooth all the way around. That's the way that your tai chi movements are smoothed out.


The Slide

- One way to work on flow is with something called the slide. In hug the knee and push, for example, when the left hand pushes down to hug around the knee, it doesn't just push down and then go out around the knee. It slides through.



In tai chi, one move flows into another, like the waves of the ocean.



- In box both ears, there is also a slide. After you step up and expand, you fold in, but there's no stopping right there. After you fold in, you slide straight on down. The move doesn't pause at the hips, but rather swishes on past the hips and around to box both ears.
 - There's a completion point here, but there's no pausing. It finishes, and then a new move begins, like another wave on the ocean.
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Suggested Reading

Olson, *Taijiquan Treatise*.

Questions to Consider

1. In the *Taijiquan Treatise*, read the passage about the favorite pastimes of Zhang San-feng (pp. 14-15). Have you ever gotten up to play tai chi in the dark? How do you think Zhang San-feng came up with this idea?
2. Which of the movements still feel like there are sharp angles and corners? What could you do to shave off the edges and make the movements rounder?

Lecture 14

Transitions as Smooth as Silk

In this lecture, we'll learn two new movements: turn body and kick with heel, and needle at the bottom of the sea. In each movement, it's important to have all of your maneuvers flow into one another. Think about the idea of the movements being as smooth as silk. All the movements may exist separately, but to make a coherent whole, they need to flow like silk strands being woven together.

Zhuǎn shēn yòu dēng jiǎo ("Turn Body and Kick with Heel")

- The first movement we're going to learn is called *zhuǎn shēn yòu dēng jiǎo*, which in English means "turn body and kick with heel."
- Bend the left knee and withdraw the foot, stepping across the body to the right. Touch the toes of the left foot down on the same east-west line as the right foot.
- Turn the waist to the right, rotating 180 degrees until you face the northeast corner, pivoting on the toes of both feet as you go. The arms maintain their position from the end of the last kick (extended out 90 degrees to both sides) until the very end of the turn, when they fold in and cross at the wrists chest high. The right wrist should be on the bottom.
- Lift up the right knee, and then extend the leg and kick with the heel to the east. Simultaneously extend both arms out. The right arm goes to the east over the kicking leg, and the left arm goes to the north at a 90-degree angle. Remember to keep both arms rounded.


Needle at the Bottom of the Sea

- The next movement we're going to learn in this lecture is called "needle at the bottom of the sea."
- Bend the right knee and withdraw the foot. Step the right foot back a full pace behind the left foot on the same east-west line, and shift the weight to the right foot to create an empty step. As you complete the weight shift into the right foot, lift up the left heel slightly.
- Turn the waist to the right so the torso faces the southeast corner at a 45-degree angle. As the waist turns, the left rounded arm accompanies the turn, but doesn't change position yet. The right hand, however, drops and withdraws to the right hip, palm up.
- Turn the waist slightly to the left and draw the right hand up alongside the ribs. Simultaneously press the left hand down in front of the torso, withdrawing to the side of the hip, with the palm down. Keep the arm rounded.
- Sink the body down over the left knee, and pierce down with the right hand—fingers angling downward—reaching out over the right foot.

The Takeaway

- The lesson you should take from these movements is that everything is kind of like silk: It's all

strung together. When we make silk clothing, the strands become threads, and the threads become cloth, and the cloth becomes a suit.

- Every different movement and principle can be picked apart, but in tai chi they must intertwine. The threads of all the movements, the threads of the principles, and the threads of the energy and spirit all weave together to make tai chi a whole cloth.
 - Your life is exactly like that, too. Think about the threads of your family, the threads of your occupation, and the threads of your community. They may be picked apart, but to make a whole cloth of life, you have to bring them all together and weave them into a special suit.
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Suggested Reading

Olson, tr., *The Intrinsic Energies of T'ai Chi Ch'uan*.

Activities

1. Practice the twining exercise 10 times on each side with one hand, while holding the other hand akimbo at the hip.
2. Add the second hand to create a double silk reeling exercise. It should look just like cloud hands. Pay attention to the rotation of the arms as you circle from side to side.
3. Reverse the direction of the cloud hands and observe how the arms will spiral in the opposite direction.

Legs to Arms: Connecting Upper and Lower

Lecture 15

This lecture will continue to build our 40-movement routine with a pair of new moves: open arms like a fan and snake sticks out its tongue. Then the lecture discusses mindfulness, using tea as an example. Tea has a very long history in China, and mindfully drinking it can be a great complement to tai chi practice.

Shǎn tōng bì (“Open Arms Like a Fan”)

- Our next movement is called *shǎn tōng bì*, which in English means “open arms like a fan,” or “sliding through the back like a fan opens.”
- Turn the body slightly to the right. Take a step forward with the left foot to form a bow step. At the same time, raise the right arm until the hand stops just above the right temple. (Keep the arm rounded.)
- Turn the palm upward with the thumb pointing downward. Raise the left hand slightly and push it forward at nose level with palm facing forward.

Zhuǎn shēn bái shé tǔ xìn (“Snake Sticks Out Its Tongue”)

- The next movement we’re going to learn is called *Zhuǎn shēn bái shé tǔ xìn*, which in English means “snake sticks out its tongue.”
- From open arms like a fan, sit back and turn the waist to the right, pivoting the left toes inward. Both arms float along with the body.


- Shift the weight to the left foot and circle the right arm downward, forming a loose fist as you go. Step the right foot out wide into the northeast corner at a 60-degree angle to create a Bow Step.
- Draw the fist up the torso to the chest. As you step into the northeast corner, extend the arm in a back fist. This will take you halfway to the bow step. Meanwhile, withdraw the left hand to the front of the left belly, palm down.
- As you complete the bow step, withdraw the right hand to the side of the right hip and palm strike forward with the left hand, keeping your nose high.

Tea and Mindfulness

- Tea is everywhere in China, and is often consumed before and after tai chi practice.

Legend has it that tea was first discovered by Emperor Shennong of China thousands of years ago.



- One way to improve your enjoyment of tea is to not drink it until you've had enough time to smell it. This gives you a completely different kind of experience, and leads to something that we use to make ourselves better at tai chi.
 - The philosophy of tai chi is about finding harmony, balance, and our authentic self and using mindfulness techniques to get there. Mindfulness, in turn, is an expanding of our powers of awareness. Our powers of awareness are much more than thoughts, imagination, and attention. The powers use all the senses, especially the sense of smell.
 - A tai chi teacher might have incense burning in their studio. The studio itself might smell like rubber shoes or sweaty shirts. An open window might let smells of the surrounding area in. Take care to notice all of these, because the more you use your senses, the more your awareness expands.
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Suggested Reading

Hunter and Zhang, *Wild Tea Hunter*.

Questions to Consider

1. Have you ever been to a Chinese tea house? How many kinds of Chinese or Japanese teas have you tasted?
2. When eating or drinking, do you take time to thoroughly smell your food or beverage? If not, why not? What could it add to your eating/drinking experience?
3. When moving through space, do you take time to notice the air against your skin, face, or clothing? If not, why not?

The groin and the hip joints are two of the secret tools of tai chi. They are essential elements, and in this lecture we will explore how to hold the lower body to develop maximum power. To accomplish that, we'll look at two new moves: turn and pat the foot, and ride the tiger. We'll close with a look at how practicing tai chi can help you find tranquility in chaos.

Zhuǎnshēn pāijiǎo (“Turn and Pat the Foot”)

- In this lecture, the first movement we're going to learn is called *zhuǎnshēn pāijiǎo*, which in English means “turn and pat the foot.”
- From the last position of snake sticks out its tongue, turn the waist to the left and sweep the left arm in an arc downward and outward. Turn the waist back to the right, rotate the right forearm outward so that the palm turns up, and sweep the left arm upward and rightward until the two wrists cross, with the left wrist on top.
- Raise the right knee and quickly extend the leg, pointing the toe. Pat the right foot with the right palm while extending the left arm out to the south at 90 degrees.

Zuǒ yòu dǎ hǔ shì (“Ride the Tiger”)

- The next movement we're going to learn is called *Zuǒ yòu dǎ hǔ shì*, which means “strike the tiger (left and right),” or more simply, “ride the tiger.”

- Withdraw the right foot to the floor and lift the left foot. Meanwhile, both hands reach horizontally to the right, palms down. Look at the right hand.
- Turn the waist to the left and step the left foot into the southeast corner at a 45-degree angle. Straighten the leg to form a left bow step. At the same time, bring your palms downward past the belly to the left in an arc while the fingers clench into fists.
- Bend the left elbow to bring the fist to the left side of the forehead, while the right arm bends across the chest, with the back of both hands facing obliquely inward. Look to the right.
- Next, sit back, turn the waist slightly to the right, and turn the left toes inward slightly. Shift back to the left foot, pick up the right foot, and step the right foot to the west to form a bow step. At this point you will be back on the regular east-west line. Be sure to leave a channel between the feet.
- As you shift to the left foot, push both hands outward toward the left (south). As you shift your weight into the bow step, turn the waist to the right. Bring both palms downward past the belly to the right in an arc, forming two loose fists as you go.
- Bend the right elbow to bring the fist to the right side of the forehead, while the left arm bends across the chest, with the back of both hands facing obliquely inward. Look to the left.

Tranquility in Chaos

- The philosophy of tai chi says that you don't have to have give yourself tranquility because it's already there. It's already inside you. It's an inherent human property.
- In fact, the philosophy says that everything that you'll ever need in life is already inside you. Your authentic nature gives you everything that you actually need.



- Flow is an example. The continuous, harmonious connection of the body, mind, and spirit is inside you. It's an inherent human property. Happiness and joy are also inherent.
- You don't need to go any place else to find these properties, but you do have to practice looking for them and finding tranquility inside of chaos. Then, once you've found your tranquility, find the movement of your spirit inside that place.

Suggested Reading

Barrett, *Taijiquan through the Western Gate*.

Activities

1. Try tying your shoes using needle at sea bottom. (Hint: You can always put your foot on a step or stool.)
2. One reason for taking your tai chi practice outdoors is to learn the principle of finding tranquility inside movement. Start taking your tai chi into progressively more public places; your own back yard is a good place to begin. Then move to the park in a quiet spot. Then move to a spot near more activity. When you can do it on a busy street corner (like millions of people do in China) you'll have turned your practice into a movable meditation.

We're getting pretty far into our 40-movement routine, and in this lecture, we'll continue to advance with a new move: snake creeps down. We'll also begin a discussion of something called the eight original intentions of tai chi. We'll focus on the first four intentions, which have practical applications for real-life defense.

Snake Creeps Down


- The next movement we're going to learn is snake creeps down. From the end of riding the tiger, sit back, turn the waist to the left, and circle the hands. The right hand goes upward and across the chest; the left hand goes downward and outward, then upward.
- Bend the left leg to form a crouch step and turn the waist to the right, raising the left hand up in a hook hand (shoulder high) as you sink. Meanwhile, drop the right hand down past the ribs as you sink, then along the inner side of the right leg with the palm facing out, fingertips pointing to the west.
- Shift the weight onto the right foot to form a bow step. Raise the right palm to shoulder level, while the hook hand drops behind your back, fingers pointing up.

The Eight Original Intentions

- Drawn from the tai chi classics, the eight original intentions are given as a starting point for tai chi movements.

- They can be thought of as the eight original conflict-management strategies. Here they are:
 1. *Peng*: ward off
 2. *Lu*: roll back
 3. *Ji*: press
 4. *An*: push
 5. *Tsai*: yank down
 6. *Lieh*: splitting apart
 7. *Chou*: give the elbow
 8. *Kao*: give the shoulder
- You can see the first four intentions in the move grasp the bird's tail. We'll discuss the final four intentions in a later lecture, but the first four have practical real-life uses.



- Any fight or martial art is really about conflict management. A fight is really nothing more than a relationship gone horribly wrong for the moment. What do you do when you're in a moment of conflict that you want to manage?
 - When somebody comes at you with a verbal, physical, or emotional attack, the first thing you could do is create a bubble around yourself. Essentially, that's what ward off (*peng*) is all about: bouncing energy away.
 - Maybe that technique doesn't work, so you absorb their attack, but deflect it off to the side (*lu*). Not everyone can do that, but if you can, that's a great conflict management strategy.
 - Say that one doesn't work. The next thing you can try is to realize this conflict really has nothing to do with you. The anger is coming from someone else, so you can try to gather it all up and send it back (*ji*).
 - If that doesn't work, you can try to realize that maybe the argument isn't about what it seems to be about on the surface. There could be something deeper going on. Take it in, let it lift you up, and let it go (*an*).
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Suggested Reading

Guang Yi, *Taijiquan*.

Questions to Consider

1. What is the “neutral point” in any argument or conflict?
2. Have you ever “won” an argument, but felt like you really lost?

The Peaceful Warrior

In this lecture, we'll learn two new moves: golden rooster stands on one leg, and step forward and punch opponent's groin. We'll also finish our discussion of the eight original intentions by examining the final four and how they relate to tai chi moves we've already learned.




Yòu zuǒ jīn jī dú lì (“Golden Rooster Stands on One Leg [Left and Right]”)

- Next up is the move called *yòu zuǒ jīn jī dú lì*, which in English means “golden rooster stands on one leg (right and left).”
- Shift the weight entirely onto the right foot, and raise the left knee slowly. The left hand opens into a palm and swings past the outer side of the left leg and then upward to the front, until the bent elbow is just above the left knee, with the fingers pointing up and the palm facing inward. At the same time, lower the right hand to the side of the right hip, palm down.
- This is a two-step movement. Step down with the left foot and shift the weight entirely onto it. Raise the right knee slowly. The right hand swings past the outer side of the right leg and then upward to the front. Keep going until the bent elbow is just above the right knee with the fingers pointing up and the palm facing inward. At the same time, lower the left hand to the side of the left hip, palm down.

Jìn bù zhǐ dāng chuí (“Step Forward and Punch Opponent’s Groin”)

- Our next move is *jìn bù zhǐ dāng chuí*, which in English means “step forward and punch opponent’s groin.”
- Slowly step the right foot down and slightly ahead, turning the right toes out toward the north. Shift the weight onto the right foot and turn the waist to the right. Circle the right hand outward and then down to the belly, forming a loose fist with the right hand. Meanwhile, the left hand circles out and then to the front (the west).
- Step forward with the left foot to form a bow step. At the same time, brush around the left knee with the left hand and punch downward at belly height with the right hand.
- After this move, the next movement in the routine is a repetition of grasp the bird’s tail.

The Next Four Intentions

- As a reminder, the first four intentions we learned about were *peng* (ward off), *lu* (roll back), *ji* (press), and *an* (push). Up next are *tsai* (yank down), *lieh* (splitting apart), *chou* (give the elbow) and *kao* (give the shoulder).
 - *Tsai* means to take hold of something and draw it downward toward the ground in a sharp and sudden fashion. You can see this action in the move needle at the bottom of the sea. In the routine, you do it in a slow, controlled manner, but it's a sharp move nonetheless.
 - *Lieh* means to send your opponent's body in two directions at once. A movement that involves this is parting the horse's mane.
 - *Chou* means giving the elbow. It's a particularly interesting technique because it can go around corners; for instance, it can reach around an opponent's guard. We saw this action in snake sticks out its tongue.
 - *Kao* involves giving the shoulder. This is what you use when there's a distance between you and your opponent. Use of the shoulder is hidden within several tai chi techniques. In the old traditional routine, the shoulder move comes just before the crane spreading its wings.
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Suggested Reading

Olson, tr., *The Intrinsic Energies of T'ai Chi Ch'uan*.

Activities

1. Here is a new sequence to practice: part the horse's mane; elbow stroke; shoulder stroke to crane spreads wings; and needle at sea bottom. Practice these in your regular slow tai chi tempo for the first week.
2. In the second week, practice the new sequence, but add an explosive finish to the end of each movement.

This lecture contains a review of the moves we've learned so far. The progression is getting pretty long, so we'll take a break from introducing any new moves. Instead, we'll go over some aspects of breathing that you can incorporate into meditation and tai chi practice. We'll also go over a brief exercise from qigong.

The Sequence So Far

- Here are the moves we've learned to far, in order:

1. Commencing form
2. Grasp the bird's tail
3. Single whip
4. Step up and raise hands
5. White crane spreads wings
6. Brush knee and twist step
7. Right hand strums the *pipa*
8. Sealing and closing
9. Parry and punch
10. Diagonal flying
11. Punch under elbow
12. Repulse the monkey
13. Fair lady works at the shuttles
14. Part the horse's mane on both sides
15. Cloud hands
16. Single whip

17. High pat on horse
18. Kick with right heel
19. Box both ears
20. Separate left foot
21. Turn body and kick with heel
22. Needle at the bottom of the sea
23. Push through the back
24. Snake sticks out its tongue
25. Slap right foot
26. Riding the tiger
27. Snake creeps down
28. Rooster stands on one leg (both sides)
29. Punch groin
30. Grasp the bird's tail

Meditation Breathing

- Our breathing should have four key characteristics: It should be deep, long, gentle, and continuous.
- Deep breath means it feels like you are breathing down low in the belly, rather than up high in the chest. Try this: Put your hands on your belly below your navel. Now inhale; you should feel your belly expand and fill into your palms. Exhale, and you will feel the belly relax and contract somewhat. Once you find it, try to keep the breath down low.
- Long breath means you can actually count out how long it takes to breath. Let's try: First of all, exhale completely. Now inhale, counting to 5. Now exhale, counting to 6.
- Gentle breath allows us to breathe in longer, rather than filling the lungs up all at once. Sometimes we call this sipping the breath rather than gulping it.
- Continuous breath means you shouldn't hold your breath, although you will probably discover that in between the inhalation




Breath is the connecting principle of everything that happens in tai chi.

and exhalation there is a relaxed place where you don't yet need to breathe. However, that space is not the same as holding your breath.

Standing like a Tree

- Now let's do a short sample of an exercise borrowed from qigong, known as standing like a tree.
- Stand with your feet about shoulder width apart. Soften your hips and knees just a little bit and sink down into the ground. At the same time, keep your head feeling light and alert.
- Now raise your arms up and round them out like you're hugging a big tree. Hold them there, and imagine a ring of light that encircles your body, passing through your arms and around your back.

- Next, let that image fade away, and just tune into your breath. Feel it deep down into your belly as you gently inhale and softly exhale. Count the length of your breath. Do this for a total of 10 breaths.
 - You can continue to build this up: If you can get up to 100 breaths, you'll be getting a great standing meditation.
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Suggested Reading

Cohen, *Inside Zhan Zhuang*.

Activities

1. Stand quietly with your hands covering your belly. Set a timer for three minutes. Breathe in to a 5-count, and then breathe out to a 6-count.
2. Start with a short combination of moves, like the first section of the 40 form. Practice the sequence using the flow method. After stepping into any position, simply repeat the basic motion of the hands and body three to five times before moving on to the next move. Focus on trying softer.

Lecture 20

Partners: The Whole Body Is the Hand

In this lecture, we'll start by revisiting a move we've already learned, as a repetition of it is the next step in our progression through our 40-movement routine. Next up are some brief tips on practicing with a partner. After that, the activity section at the end of this lecture includes a push hands routine you can perform with a partner. (See the video lecture for reference on the original push hands game.)

Dān biān (“Single Whip”) Revisited

- The next movement in our progression is to revisit an earlier move: *dān biān*, which in English means “single whip.”
- A refresher: Sit back onto the left foot and pivot to the left, turning the right toes in 90 degrees to face the front. Turn the waist to the left, and sweep both arms to the left. The arms rotate slightly so that both palms face outward as the move with the waist from right to left.
- Shift back to the right foot and step in to a T-step. As you begin the weight shift, the waist turns right, and the right hand is carried across to the right corner where it will make a hook. The left hand arcs down and then up to finish near the right wrist.
- The right hand holds a hook during this entire move. The left foot steps out to the side (remember to create a channel) into a bow step. The waist will naturally turn to the left and the left hand and arm will sweep across, palm facing in and pressing out with the



back of the hand. As the elbow of the left arm aligns over the left knee, the left palm will turn out.

Tips for Practicing with a Partner

- When practicing with a partner, start out by giving a sign of respect with a traditional tai chi salute.
- To figure out how far apart to stand, each of you should extend a fist, and then walk toward each other until the fists are touching.
- Flow applies to partner practice just as it does to solo practice: Each movement should smoothly continue into the next.
- Keep in mind that in tai chi, a master considers it a deeper victory to sometimes lose a point to someone else.



Suggested Reading

Chen, *Way of Hunyuan*.

Activities

1. Practice the simple move push hands with a ball. With a partner, stand facing each other in a moderate lunge, right foot forward on each side. Each partner extends the right hand forward, so that the two of you together are holding a kid's rubber ball. Now move your hands in gentle large circle. Only two rules apply: Don't drop the ball, and don't squish the ball!
2. Look for a situation in your daily life where you can give up being the winner. This is different than giving up, or letting someone else win. It means can you participate in the activity (even at work, or with your family) and not care about winning or losing, but just observing.

Five Stages of Mastery

In this lecture, we'll be learning two new moves: snake creeps down (in a new direction) and seven-stars posture. Those will get us most of the way through our complete 40-movement sequence. The seven-stars posture in particular is a difficult one, but doable. After we've covered those moves, we'll look at a concept known as the five stages of mastery in tai chi.

Snake Creeps Down

- Now it's time for a new movement: to the opposite side from our first snake creeps down.




- From the end of single whip, sit back, turn the waist to the right, and circle the hands. The left hand goes upward and across the chest. The right hand goes downward and outward, then upward.
- Bend the right leg to form a crouch step and turn the waist to the left, raising the right hand up in a hook hand (shoulder high) as you sink. Meanwhile, drop the left hand down past the ribs as you sink, and along the inner side of the left leg with the palm facing out, fingertips pointing to the east.
- Shift the weight onto the left foot to form a bow step. Raise the left palm to shoulder level, while the hook hand drops behind your back, fingers pointing up.

Shàng bù qī xīng (“Seven Stars Posture”)

- The next movement we’re going to learn is called *shàng bù qī xīng*, which in English roughly means “seven stars posture.”
- Take a step forward with the right foot, ball on the floor to form an empty step with the right foot. Form a loose fist with the left hand sinking the elbow, withdrawing the arm slightly.
- Meanwhile, change the hook hand into another loose fist and swing it forward and upward with the back of the hand turned inward so the that the wrists cross at shoulder level, arms rounded.

Five Levels of Mastery

- Now that we’re most of the way through our 40-movement routine, you’ve probably begun to feel changes in your ability level. Tai chi has traditional levels of development.
 - The first level is where you can do the movements.
 - The second level is where you can do the movements correctly—for instance, by linking them properly through breath.

- The third level means you can do a good job at tai chi, creating a high-quality routine.
 - The fourth level involves beginning to put your own stamp on tai chi—creating a special quality in your routine.
 - The fifth level means your way of doing tai chi is totally unique: Nobody could hope to copy you.
 - The path of mastering tai chi is one of personal evolution. Your own tai chi must continually evolve, just like the modern master Bruce Lee evolves many martial arts into his own style.
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Suggested Reading

Silver, *Zhang San-feng and the Ancient Origins of TaijiQuan Part 2*.

Questions to Consider

1. What changes (if any) do you notice to your physical body because of the tai chi techniques you've learned in this program?
2. What changes (if any) do you notice in your thoughts and attitudes because of the tai chi philosophy you've learned in this program?
3. Wikipedia is a vast and easy source of information about many topics. Take a look on Wikipedia to discover the highlights of Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist philosophy. Imagine how you would blend the best of these three systems together.

Lecture 22

Lotus Kick and Laughing Buddha

This lecture gets us even deeper into our 40-movement routine by introducing two new moves: step back to ride the tiger and the lotus kick. These are the 34th and 35th moves, so we're getting near the end. We'll close the lecture with how tai chi can serve as a form of self-development, and we'll come to a surprising revelation: Perfection is not the goal.

Tuì bù kuà hǔ (“Step Back to Ride Tiger”)

- The first movement we're going to learn in this lecture is called *tuì bù kuà hǔ*, which in English means “step back to ride tiger.”
- From the end of the seven stars posture, step back with the right foot to create an empty step on the left side. Turn the waist to the right and sweep both hands down to the sides past the hips. Open the palms.
- Turn the waist back to the left, and settle down in the empty step, with all the weight on the right foot. As you turn back to the left (facing east), flash the right palm overhead, in front of the forehead with the palm facing out.

Zhuǎn shēn bǎi lián (“Turn and Lotus Kick”)

- The next move on our list is called *zhuǎn shēn bǎi lián*, which in English means “turn and lotus kick.” Imagine you're taking a lotus flower, placing it in a vase, and displaying it for everybody to see how beautiful it is.




- Lift the right foot and swing it leftward, upward and rightward with the instep facing rightward. At the same time, with the torso turning slightly to the right and then to the left, use both hands to pat the foot. (The left palm hits first, then the right palm.)

Tai Chi and Self-Development

- When you practice tai chi, the first movement is the commencement. You get started. Then you take the first step, and you keep trying to connect everything with breath that is deep, lengthy, and continuous.
- If you let yourself play, after a moment, you'll stop worrying. Your mind will clear, and you'll find tranquility that resides inside of motion, and hopefully you'll also make a discovery that this is a way that you could live your entire life. That's the message of tai chi.
- The path of mastering tai chi is actually the path of self-development, but the direction of our development is not outward.

The direction is not to become something or someone different than who we are. It's actually an inward journey, to rediscover who we were born to be, because maybe have hidden ourselves from ourselves all along.

- This path, in the classic Chinese text *Dao De Jing* and elsewhere, is called the path of returning to the state of the uncarved block. The word that we have for this is *authenticity*.
 - When you meditate on the path to mastery of tai chi, be careful to remember that mastery does not mean perfection. Mastery is a process that just keeps going on eternally, while perfection is the final achievement of the ideal. Perfection is like the final full blossoming of the lotus flower.
 - But that moment of perfect blossoming is also the start of the decline towards death and decay. In tai chi, the masters never talk about perfecting the movements. You always want to be in the state just before that, still blossoming, still growing, still learning, and still changing.
- 

Suggested Reading

Read, *The Manual of Bean Curd Boxing*.

Questions to Consider

1. When was the last time you laughed at yourself? For the next seven days, begin each day by thinking of something that makes you smile. Make it the theme for your day.
2. In this lesson we learned about the three modes of tai chi study: learning Mode, practice mode, and play (or performance) mode. Which mode have you spent the most time in?

Conserve Your Energy

By now, we have learned almost the entire 40-movement routine. Only three small moves remain to be learned, so what is next? The principles of tai chi actually suggest that the secret to mastery is that there is no secret. In this lecture, we'll explore the importance of qi itself.

Qi's Meaning

- Qi is said to have four basic sources: food, the environment, air, and prenatal chi. Prenatal chi is a spark of chi essence that you get from your mother and your father at the moment of conception.
- The qi from these sources combines in the kidneys, according to Chinese medicine, to mix together and make qi energy for the body.
- Food, air, and environmental qi are replenishable, but prenatal qi is not. Prenatal qi slowly begins to dissipate throughout a person's life. When it's gone, we pass from the earth.

Tai Chi and Conservation

- Tai chi is known as a longevity practice. In the Middle Ages in China when tai chi was coming together, life and death were a mystery to many people. The idea that something could be done to extend life was novel and exciting.
- How tai chi can slow down the aging process and make the most of the qi that you have is the basic question that the tai chi masters were posing. The simplest way to put the answer is a question:



While many modern fitness programs focus on burning off energy, tai chi's focus is the opposite.

Are you using up your qi unintentionally or are you mindful to conserve it?

- This has relevance in the modern world because we have a culture based on consumption. We consume goods and services. We consume information and entertainment.
- In our physical culture, our concept of fitness rests on the science of metabolism. We talk about burning calories when we work out. In this model, we have to expend energy to do everything,

even think. In the world of tai chi, we find a culture based on the conservation of energy.

Circulation and Cultivation

- According to traditional Chinese medicine, which is tied to the foundations of tai chi, even more fundamental than metabolism is the cycle of qi circulation and cultivation. We want to keep our qi, not use it up.
- In addition of taking care to open up the meridians so that the qi can circulate, we also want to take care not to leak qi accidentally. One of the most common diagnoses that traditional Chinese doctors make for their patients is that there are places where they are leaking qi out.
- Often this is happening right at one of the main energy gates in the body, the big acupuncture points along the meridians, or channels, of qi circulation. The most notorious of these is known as the gate of illumination or gate of life. It's located in the low back, between the adrenals and the kidneys. According to Chinese medicine, qi leaking from there is the reason why low back pain disables so many people.
- Another place where we leak qi is through the mouth. There's a stereotype of the tai chi or kung fu master as silent, dour, and inscrutable. This leads to the assumption that they are secretive and only share what they know with specially selected students, if at all. This is not always true. Another way to view the masters is to keep in mind that they know that talking leaks energy. They call it spitting out qi.
- The lesson of conserving qi is a conscious metaphor about not wasting life. Cultivating qi is how you become a better person. It raises your spirit and energy so that you can become a person who can make a contribution to the world that you live in. Qi is life, and life is precious. Don't waste either.



Suggested Reading

Cohen, *The Way of Qigong*.

Questions to Consider

1. The flow of qi is strangled by tension. Stress creates tension, so make a list of the top five stressors in your life.
2. Looking at your list, where in your body do you feel each stressor? The feeling of tension is an indicator of blocked qi. This is precisely the place to let go and let loose.

Another River to Cross

In this lecture, we're going to start with a new move: shoot the tiger. Then we have a repetition of two previous moves: parry and punch, and sealing and closing. After that comes the cross hands move. We'll reach the end of the Yang-style 40 form with a closing maneuver, and we'll reach the end of our course with some final teachings tai chi has to offer.

The Full Yang-Style 40 Form

1. Commencing
2. Grasp the bird's tail
3. Single whip
4. Step up and raise hands
5. White crane spreads its wings
6. Brush knee and twist step
7. Right hand strums the lute (*pipa*)
8. Parry and punch
9. Sealing and closing
10. Diagonal flying
11. Punch under elbow
12. Repulse the monkey
13. Fair lady works at the shuttles
14. Part the horse's mane on both sides
15. Cloud hands
16. Single whip
17. High pat on horse
18. Kick with right heel
19. Box both ears

20. Separate the left foot
21. Turn body and kick with heel
22. Needle at the bottom of the sea
23. Open arms like a fan
24. Snake sticks out its tongue
25. Turn and pat the foot
26. Ride the tiger
27. Snake creeps down
28. Rooster stands on one leg (both sides)
29. Punch groin
30. Grasp the bird's tail
31. Single whip
32. Snake creeps down
33. Seven stars posture
34. Step back to ride the tiger
35. Turn body and lotus kick
36. Shoot the tiger
37. Parry and punch
38. Sealing and closing
39. Cross hands
40. Closing form

Wān gōng shè hǔ ("Shoot the Tiger")

- The next movement is called *wān gōng shè hǔ*, which in English means "shoot the tiger."
- Bend the knee on the right side of the body so that the thigh is level and the toes point downward. Turn the waist slightly to the left and then to the right. Extend both arms to the left at shoulder level, with both palms facing out.
- Turn the torso slightly to the right and step down with the right foot, setting the heel down on the floor and turning the toes out. Turn the waist to the right and shift the weight onto the right foot to form a Bow Step. Meanwhile, move both palms downward and

rightward in a curve and form two loose fists on the right side of the body.

- As the waist turns to the left, the left fist punches past the face to the northeast corner. The right fist draws back to the right temple, with the back of the hand facing backward. Both wrists are flexed. Look first at the right fist, then at the left fist.

Jìn bù bān lán chuí (Parry and Punch)

- Up next is a repetition of parry and punch.
- Sit back entirely on the left foot, turning the waist to the left and turning the left foot out. Release the left fist, rotate the left forearm outward to turn the palm up and sweep the left hand down past the hip. The right hand retains the fist, and also sweeps down past the hip.
- Shift the weight entirely onto the left foot, and step out with the right foot to the east, landing on the heel. As the right foot steps out, both hands upward and forward, the right hand leading in a back fist. The left hand will press forward with the palm open, next to the right forearm.
- Turn the waist to the right, and pivot the right toes outward (due south). Shift the weight entirely onto the right foot. Simultaneously, reach forward with the left hand (keep the arm rounded) and withdraw and chamber the right fist back to the right hip.
- Step forward with the left foot to make a bow step, and turn the waist slightly back to the left. Punch forward with the right hand as you go, past the left palm, which will finish right next to the right forearm.

Sealing and Closing

- The next movement we're going to do is a repeat of sealing and closing.

- Slide the left open palm just under the right forearm, then separate the two hands to shoulder width. As the two hands separate, both forearms rotate outward, turning the palms up.
- Sit back entirely onto the right leg, withdrawing both hands into the front of the chest. As the hands near the torso, the two forearms rotate inward and turn the palms facing out.
- Shift the weight forward to the front foot again, re-creating the bow step and push with both hands as you go.

Shí zì shǒu (“Cross Hands”)


- The next movement we’re going to learn is called *shí zì shǒu*, which in English means “cross hands.”
- Sit back onto the right foot and turn the waist to the right, pivoting the left foot to the south. Simultaneously, open both arms to the 45-degree corners.
- Shift the weight back onto the left foot and step in a half-step (to shoulder width) with the right foot. As you step in with the right foot, circle both hands and arms downward and inward to cross at the wrists. Center and sink the weight evenly over both feet, and rise up to normal standing position, lifting the crossed wrists to shoulder height.

Shōu shì huán yuán (“Closing Form”)

- The last movement we’re going to learn in this form is called *shōu shì huán yuán*, which in English means “closing form.” Simply separate the hands to shoulder width and slowly lower them to your sides. Step the left foot next to the right foot.
- That’s the end of the routine. But there’s a bit of tradition that isn’t precisely part of the choreography. When you finish the routine and give a bow, you’re bowing to a whole line of people.

- You're bowing to the person who taught you this form. You're bowing to that teacher, and to the teacher that taught them, and to the teacher behind that teacher, all the way back in an unending line to the mythical Zhang Sanfeng, who invented tai chi.

What Next?

- So what can you do now that you've learned the full Yang-style 40 form? One option is to introduce someone else to tai chi. Only a few people want to become traditional tai chi teachers, but you could share a little of what you have learned with a child, grandchild, coworker, or neighbor—someone that you care about.
 - Introducing someone to the path of tai chi is almost the most generous gift you can give to another person. It's an introduction to harmony and balance, everything in life works better when you're in balance.
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Suggested Reading

Huang, *Embrace Tiger, Return to Mountain*.

Activities

1. Teach the qi-sensing exercise with another person: Hold your hands with your palms facing each other; they should be almost but not quite touching. Circle the palms slowly. After a couple of minutes, you may start to feel a tingling in the palms of your hands, accompanied by a blotchy white and pink coloring.
2. Now do the exercise with each of holding your right hand (palm down) over the left hand (palm up) of your partner. Circle the right hands only in a slow clockwise direction. Notice the sensations that arise.



Principles of Tai Chi

1. **Yin and yang:** Harmony is achieved by the constant balancing of opposites (and all their nuances and shades of grey as well): day and night, hot and cold, male and female, internal and external. In fact, Yin/Yang balance is synonymous with the phrase Tai chi.
2. ***Xin ji bu shen ji*:** What the heart (or mind) may know, the body does not know. Of what use is theory without practice? We could flip that phrase and thought around: the body may know but not the mind (*shen ji bu xin ji*). Of what use is martial skill if one does not develop the character?
3. **Slowness, roundness, rootedness, and smoothness:** These four basic principles will start making even a beginner's motion look like tai chi. When you infuse your motion with these principles, your movement will automatically and organically begin to take on a certain appearance.
4. ***Xu ling ding jin* (“empty the head”):** The first of 10 essentials listed by the tai chi master Yang Chengfu. Externally, this relaxes the neck and upper spine, helps to align upper body, and allows the energy to reach an important acupuncture point at the crown of the head. Internally, we learn that it's hard to achieve balance when your mind is tensed up with thoughts and preconceived ideas.
5. ***Han xiong ba bei* (“humble the heart”):** Believe it or not, one is able to exert greater leverage when one slightly depresses the chest. This drops the qi down into the belly, preventing it from rising up

into the chest and making one top-heavy. Simultaneously, the qi circles down to the bottom of the torso and up the back again, and on into the head.

6. *Song yao* (“relax the middle”): The physical middle of the body is the space between the rib cage and the pelvis, and it connects the upper body to the lower body. It is supposed to be supple, relaxed, and flexible.
7. *Fen xu shi* (“recognize what is real”): The strict meaning of this phrase is to separate what is empty (insubstantial) from what is full (substantial). Externally this refers to which side of the body is bearing weight, and which side of the body is weightless (empty). Mindfully shifting the weight from foot to foot is what allows the cat-like tai chi stepping.
8. *Chen jian zhui zhou* (“drop the weight of the world”): This means drop the shoulders. We bear the weight of the world on our shoulders, or at least we often walk around as though we do. Stiff necks, tight shoulders, and pinched backs all point to the stress we carry around. Tai chi says: Just drop it.
9. *Yong yi, bu yong li* (“mind over muscle”): The previous five principles are like a map to the treasure of inner peace. But how does one effectively do all these things at once? The answer is to develop the power of the *yi*, which translates as willpower or intention.
10. *Shàng xià xiāng suí* (“as above, so below”): Externally, this means that the movements of the upper body are timed to coordinate with the movements of the lower body. Internally, we learn that there is a time and a season for all things. Life cannot be rushed.
11. *Nèi wài xiāng hé* (“outside matches inside”): Fighting ability is the lowest level of tai chi mastery. The real purpose of studying martial arts is the development of one’s character. If studying martial arts makes you a bully, then you have learned nothing.

12. ***Xiāng lián bù duàn*** (“go with the flow”): In tai chi, the movements never start or stop. When performing your routine, it should look like there is just one long and continuous movement. No matter what life will throw at you, you need not run from it and you need not fight it. Tai chi teaches us different option: to go with the flow.
13. ***Dòng zhōng qiú jìng*** (“find peace in chaos”): This is the last of the 10 essentials listed by Yang Chengfu. Perhaps it is meant to be understood as the point of practicing the other nine. If you develop some mastery of the other principles, you may be able to tap into a state that is peaceful, timeless, effortless, and without duality. That is when we truly experience tai chi as a moving meditation.
14. ***The eight jins***: *Jin* is a term that is difficult to translate into English, and therefore is often mistranslated as a special type of energy that can be generated by a tai chi master. The truth is that *jin* is actually a specific kind of intention to work with qi energy. In a treatise by Zhang San-feng, we read about eight specific and original *jin*. The first four are *peng*, *lu*, *ji*, and *an*: expanding, yielding, piercing, and pushing, respectively. The second four are *cai*, *lieh*, *zhou*, and *kao*: yanking, splitting, elbowing, and shouldering, respectively.
15. ***Yinian***: If *yi* is our intention, then *yinian* is our focused intention. The exercises of tai chi are drills for developing and strengthening the *yinian*.
16. ***The three treasures***: In ancient Chinese culture, philosophers looked at the earth and observed how harmony was expressed in nature. They looked at the heavens and imagined how harmony would be maintained in the ideal world of the gods. And then they theorized that human beings are the unique nexus between heaven and earth, and thus they are called the three treasures. In tai chi and qigong practice we also talk about another three treasures: *jing* (life essence), *qi* (life force energy), and *shen* (spirit).

17. **The martial metaphor:** As much as every movement has a practical and highly effective self-defense use, the real meaning of the martial side of tai chi is metaphorical. To truly develop one's character takes as much dedication as a master of martial arts. The kung-fu master must be able to keep his cool in the midst of chaos in order to survive. This is the same challenge for those who would master their own heart and soul.
18. **Softness overcomes hardness:** The answer to a great force is not an opposing force, but rather a balancing force. This is expressed in the tai chi principle that softness overcomes hardness.
19. **Yuan dang kai kwa:** The rounded shape is a fundamental element of tai chi. One important place that we see this is in the inner thigh and groin area, known in Chinese as the *dang*. A rounded groin is the key to opening the hip (or *kwa*), the gearbox from where the energy generated by the leg movement is transmitted into the upper body.
20. **Rooting power:** Externally, the exercises of tai chi practice build powerful legs. This is accomplished by staying low and pushing into the ground with every stance. Internally, one must visualize that the energy goes down into the ground via an acupuncture point underneath the foot called the *yong quan*, or "bubbling well point." In the same way, the energy comes back up from the earth, into the *yong quan* point and up the legs.
21. **Silken coiling energy:** According to tai chi and qigong theory, the qi does not move in straight lines like rays of light. Instead, qi moves in a spiraling path, coiling along the meridians to go from one part of the body to another. The motions of tai chi therefore are always spiraling, as we have seen throughout this course.
22. **Explosive energy:** Tai chi is not always slow, particularly when used for fighting. Obviously, you have to keep pace with your opponent. After building up the energy with the spiraling and coiling motions, it can be unleashed like a cannon. This is called *fa jin*, "explosive energy".

- 23. Having fun:** Look for the fun in your practice. Don't take tai chi too seriously, just as we learn not to take life itself too seriously. A dash of humor and beauty is the magic behind every successful relationship.

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