

Taijiquan 10 Important Points (narrated by Yang Chengfu)¹

太極拳十要 (楊澄甫口述)

Translated and interpreted by Sam Masich (馬希奇)

1. Empty Neck, Raise Spirit	xū lǐng dǐng jìn	虛領頂勁
2. Contain Chest, Raise Back	hán xiōng bá bèi	含胸胸背
3. Loosen Waist	sōng yāo	鬆腰
4. Differentiate Empty Full	fēn xū shí	分虛實
5. Sink Shoulders, Drop Elbows	chén jiān zhuì zhǒu	沉肩墜肘
6. Use Intention not Exertion	yòng yì bù yòng lì	用意不用力
7. Upper Lower Mutually Follow	shàng xià xiāng suí	上下相隨
8. Inner Outer Mutually Harmonize	nèi wài xiāng hé	內外相合
9. Continue without Interruption	xiāng lián bù duàn	相連不斷
10. Move from Centre, Seek Calm	dòng zhōng qiú jìng	動中求靜

Taijiquan 10 Important Points with original commentary

1. Empty Neck, Raise Spirit	xū lǐng dǐng jìn	虛領頂勁
-----------------------------	------------------	------

Ding jin means: the head is held upright so the *jin* might pass though to the top. One must not exert: exertion will stiffen the nape of the neck and the *qi*² and blood will not circulate. One must be possessed of an open, spirited and natural intent. Without this open, spirited and natural intent, the *jingshen*³ cannot be raised.

2. Contain Chest, Raise Back	hán xiōng bá bèi	含胸胸背
------------------------------	------------------	------

Han xiong means: the chest is slightly restrained, enabling the *qi* to sink to the *dantian*. Avoid sticking the chest out: a protruding chest compels the *qi* surge into the torso. If one is top-heavy but light underneath, one's footing is prone to instability⁴. *Ba bei* means: *qi* adheres to the back. If one is able to contain the chest then one can raise the back. If one can raise the back, one can emit power from the spine and become unassailable.

3. Loosen Waist	sōng yāo	鬆腰
-----------------	----------	----

The *yao* governs the entire body. If one can loosen the waist, the feet will be powerful and the base stable. That empty and full transform, is entirely due to waist-turning; thus it is said, "Direct the will to the source at the waist-rift." If one cannot achieve power, one must seek the defect in the waist and legs.

4. Differentiate Empty Full	fēn xū shí	分虛實
-----------------------------	------------	-----

The art of *taijiquan* gives *fen xu shi*⁵ primary significance. If the body's entire weight sits on the right leg, then the right leg is 'full' and the left leg is 'empty'.⁶ Whole body weight sitting on the left leg means, the left leg is 'full' and the right leg is 'empty'. If empty and full can be differentiated, turning can be light and quick and without wasted effort. Unable to differentiate, one's footwork is heavy and stagnant, one's stance is unstable and furthermore, one's movement is easily influenced.

5. Sink Shoulders, Drop Elbows	chén jiān zhuì zhǒu	沉肩墜肘
--------------------------------	---------------------	------

Chen jian means: the shoulders are loose, open and allowed to hang down. If one cannot allow the two shoulders to let go, they will rise up; the *qi* will also follow upward and the whole body will be deprived of power. *Zhui zhou* means: the elbows drop loosely downward. If the elbows are strained upward, the shoulders cannot sink and an opponent cannot be sent very far. This is like the short, broken power of the external schools.

6. Use Intention not Exertion

yòng yì bù yòng lì

用意不用力

In the ‘Taijiquan Treatise’⁷ it says, “All movements are motivated by *yi*⁸, not external form.” In training *taijiquan* the whole body must remain loose, avoiding even the slightest expression of crude force and the resulting stagnation which causes constriction of the sinews, bones and blood vessels. Consequently, one is capable of light, spirited transformations and can turn the circle smoothly. Some question: “Without exerting power, how can one extend power?” The human body possesses the *jingluo*⁹ which can be likened to irrigation channels: if the irrigation channels are unblocked, water can flow through; likewise, if the *jingluo* are unobstructed, *qi* penetrates. If, from head-to-toe, the energy is stiff and the *jingluo* are blocked up, the *qi* and blood stagnate and body turning will not be nimble—when one place is tugged the whole body is pulled with it. If one does not exert, but rather uses intention, then when the *yi* arrives, the *qi* appears simultaneously. If the *qi* and blood flow fully—pervading and circulating daily throughout the entire body—there will be no stagnation. A long period of training this way will result in genuine internal power. Another quote from the ‘Taijiquan Treatise’: “From extreme softness, comes extreme hardness.” Practitioners skilled in *taijiquan gongfu* possess arms that are like iron wrapped in silk—extremely substantial. Those training in external schools of martial arts exert themselves and the strength is obvious; but as a rule, when not straining, they float superficially. It is obvious strength, merely superficial and external in its expression. Not using *yi* but rather only *li*¹⁰, it is easy to become agitated emotionally—this is not worthy of respect.

7. Upper Lower Mutually Follow

shàng xià xiāng suí

上下相隨

Shang xia xiang sui means: The ‘Taijiquan Treatise’ says, “The *jin* should be rooted in the feet, generated from the legs, controlled by the waist and expressed through the fingers. From the feet through to the legs and waist, the *qi* must always be integrated without any gaps.” Hand, waist and foot actions, and the expression in the eyes, likewise follow this movement. Following this principle can be described as: ‘Upper lower mutually follow.’ If one part does not move, instantly all is scattered and chaotic.

8. Inner Outer Mutually Harmonize

nèi wài xiāng hé

內外相合

Taijiquan trains the *shen*. Therefore it is said, “the *shen* is the commander and the body serves as a messenger.” If the *shen* can be raised, one’s actions will naturally be light and agile. The outer frame is nothing more than: ‘empty, full; open, close’. What is called ‘opening’ refers not only to the opening of hands and feet: the *xin yi*¹¹ simultaneously opens. What is called ‘closing’ means, not only the hands and feet close: the *xin yi* simultaneously closes. To be able to harmonize inner and outer, thus unifying the *qi*, this must happen perfectly without gaps.

9. Linked without Interruption

xiāng lián bù duàn

相連不斷

In the external schools of martial arts, the power is *houtian*—crude strength.¹² Therefore, in starting there is stopping; in flow there is interruption. When the old strength is already exhausted and new strength has not yet been born—in this moment it is most easy to be taken advantage of. *Taijiquan* uses *yi* not *li*; from start to finish, without end, it circles continuously without exhaustion. The original theory states: “Just as the *Chang Jiang* flows to the sea, it flows on and on without cease.”

10. Move from Centre, Seek Calm

dòng zhōng qiú jìng

動中求靜

In the external schools of martial arts, jumping and flailing use up all the energy and power, inevitably leaving one gasping for breath after training. *Taijiquan* uses stillness to counteract movement and, while in motion, remains calm; therefore in training the form, the slower, the better. Slow, deep, steady breathing—*qi* sinking to *dantian*; one remains free of blood pressure diseases and hypertension. Students should ponder this teaching deeply to grasp its importance.

¹ Dictated by Yang Chengfu. Recorded by Chen Weiming (陳微明).

² qì (氣) 'vital force'.

³ jīngshén (精神) 'spirit'; 'consciousness'.

⁴ fúqǐ (浮起) 'floating'.

⁵ xū-shí (虛實) also means 'the actual situation'; 'theoretical versus practical'; 'false versus true'.

⁶ This is a reference to the commonly used Chinese martial arts stance term xūbù (虛步) which means 'empty step'.

⁷ Note: the names 'Taijiquan Classic' (Taijiquan Jing 太極拳經) and 'Taijiquan Treatise' (Taijiquan Lun 太極拳論) have been used interchangeably to describe two different writings. What is referred to here as the 'Taijiquan Treatise' is more often named the 'Taijiquan Classic'.

⁸ yì (意) 'will'; 'intention'.

⁹ jīngluò (經絡) The meridian circulatory system in Chinese medicine.

¹⁰ lì (力) 'force'; 'strength'. Refers to muscular power.

¹¹ xīn (心) heart; mind. yì (意) will; intent. Xīn here refers to the complex of heart and mind together: the melding of desires, wishes, goals and aspirations. Yì refers to the intention needed to bring about the wants of the xīn.

¹² hòutiān (後天) post-heaven. Referring to the energetic conditions of the individual once born; and in contrast to xiāntiān (先天) pre-heaven, the energetic conditions of life in the womb.