

Technique Class Notes  
Jan 13, 2022  
**Being Erect With a Straight Spine**



## Being Erect With a Straight Spine

This class will focus on the advantages of being erect with a straight spine as well as the importance of straight spine.

### Thoughts on Spine

- ☉ All movements must be guided by the waist-spine the body & the four limbs must be relaxed; the whole body moves as one integrated organic unit. Only when you have coordinated & harmonious body movement, can you develop energy-(chi). And chi makes the "tai chi merry-go-round".
- ☉ Keep your spine erect and in a central position.
- ☉ An erect body is of most importance in Tai Chi posture. From the crown of the head down to the coccyx (lower spine) a straight line must be maintained.
- ☉ The spine column is the axis of the body movement, the area of the waist and the coccyx is the center.
- ☉ The characteristics of body posture in Tai Chi consist of (1) centered and erect, yet comfortable and at ease; (2) light and nimble, yet non-floating and scattered; and (3) sinking and balanced, yet not sluggish or awkward.



I have included some quotes from other Tai Chi masters and authors.

Chapter 7      SOME IMPORTANT HINTS IN LEARNING TAI CHI CHUAN

Body: Posture erect, centered, comfortable and relaxed; upper and lower of the body in one line; the two shoulders and the two 'kuas,' the two sides of the two chest and the two sides of the abdomen are vertically matched. Because of the movement range is great, certain degree of inclination from the central equilibrium is accepted. From THE ESSENTIALS IN PRACTICING TAI CHI CHUAN by Koo Liu-Hsing, translated by H.H. Lui.

**Important Points**

1. When turning the body left and right, you must use the waist as axis. The body must remain vertically aligned. All of the subsequent turning movements of the body must be done in this manner. Mastering Yang style Taijiquan by Fu Zhongwen; translated by Louis Swaim.

Notice that Fu focuses here on turns. He uses drawings of Yang Cheng-fu in his text. The drawing label Figure 42 shows Yang turning. Figures 209 and 227 show two non-turning moves. Notice that despite the forward lean there the straight line between the coccyx and the head.



Figure 42

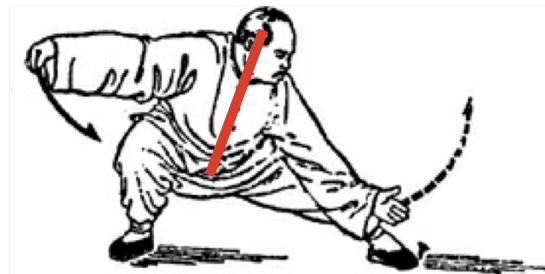


Figure 209

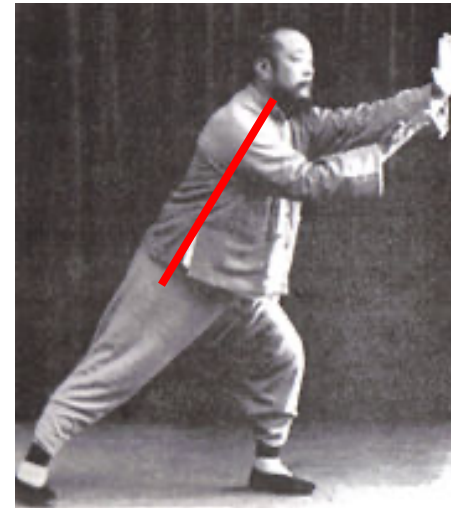
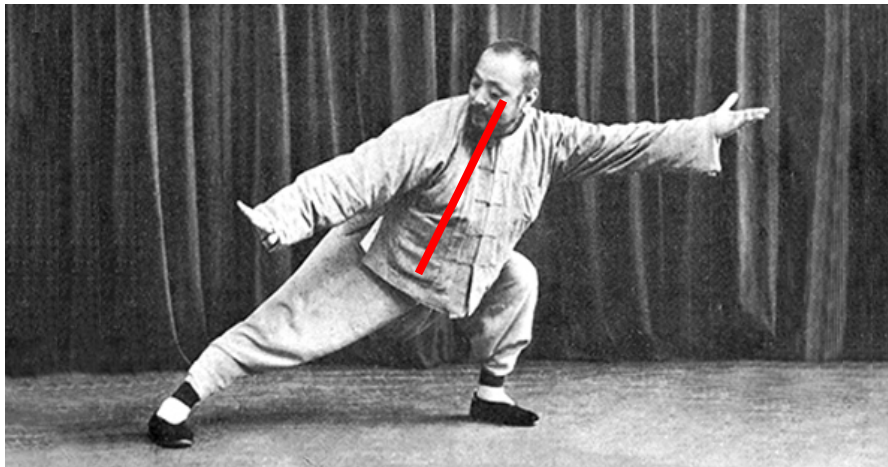


Figure 227

*The Tai Chi meditative movements will allow your ch'i to flow and vibrate freely. You should keep your posture in the center, and in vertical alignment. Leaning in any direction will cause blockage of your ch'i.* From *The Essence of Tai Chi* by Waysun Liao . There are no illustrations of Tai Chi postures in this book. Very little on-line.

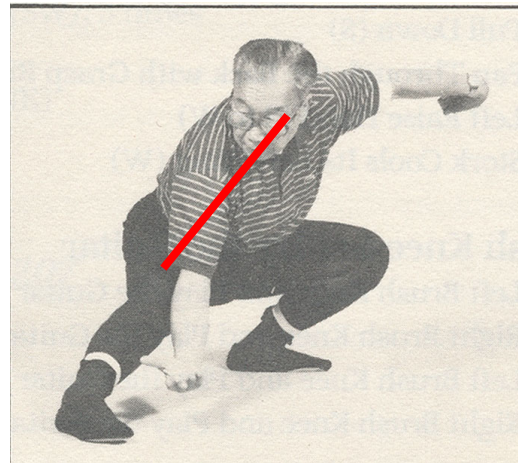
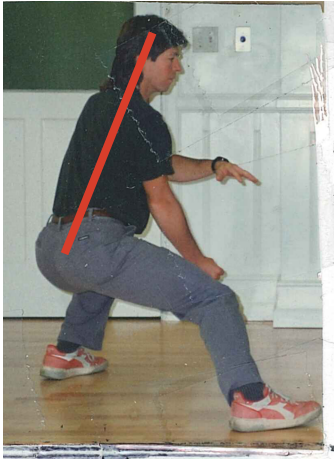
1. The Suspension of the Head and the Lifting of the Inner Strength Up to the Crown

In practicing Tai Chi Chuan one must keep one's head in a central and erect position so that there is inner strength ascending to the crown of the head. The head is the key part of the entire body. Only when it is maintained in a central and erect position can one's spirit be raised and active. From *Six Essential Points* by WU CHIEN-CHUAN. Below are two photos of Wu.





1. Keep the moving body erect so that you can be "the axis of a wheel" or the "central vertical column of a balance".
2. Only when your coccyx and the section from the waist down to the coccyx is erect can the body rotate swiftly. Imagine this part of your body to be like the straight wooden handle of a whip. By H.H. Lui



This is the main reason for exercising the spine, in order that the spirit rising up from the bottom of the spine- which is kept ram-rod straight and in a plumb erect position - to the very top of the head, it is particularly necessary that the head be held in a position as if suspended by the scalp from the roof or ceiling. This posture immobilizes the head and the spine so that neither could move up or down or sideways, and the spine is strengthened thereby. By strengthening the spine, one not only automatically strengthens one's vital organs but the brain itself. This is technically known as the effects or benefits of "replenishing or toning up the marrow," TAI CHI CHUAN -A simplified Method of Calisthenics for Health Self Defense by Cheng Man-ching

Thus we see that the concept of verticality is a loose conce



### Rotation about the Vertical Axis

*Keep your neck erect and direct the crown of your head upward as if your head is suspended from above. Allow your intrinsic energy to sink to the "tan-tien". Avoid leaning or inclining your body in any direction. Attributed to Wang Chung-yueh*

When people talk about the uniqueness of human anatomy and movement, they rightfully mention the opposing thumb and our bipedal gait. However, as we evolved our bipedal gait we became more and more vertical in our posture. The more vertical we became the smaller our moment of inertia about the vertical axis became. The moment of inertia is a measure of a body's ability to resist rotation, just as a

body's mass is a measure of its ability to resist translation. The smaller the moment of inertia the easier it is to rotate an object. Simply put, objects with their mass closer to the axis of rotation have smaller moments of inertia. Thus, a broom is easier to rotate about its vertical axis and harder to rotate about its horizontal axis and we've all seen the skater spin faster as she draws her arms closer to her axis rotation. The ballerina, the ice skater, the matador, and the Tai Chi practitioner all display the human ability to rotate around our vertical axis. Watch any Tai Chi practitioner and notice the many waist turns. Rotation about the vertical axis is a hallmark of Tai Chi Chuan. The small moment of inertia means rotation can occur easily and quickly. This informs us of one of the reasons the Tai Chi Classics tell us to be vertical or erect.

# Today's Movements

Today we will focus on two types of moves. First, moves where we can be almost completely vertical and thus easily turn our hips. Second, we will look at moves where we sink and there is bending as the waist-hip. Here we will focus on maintaining a straight line from the coccyx to the head. The key to a good form becomes maintaining a straight spine.

## Focus on Verticality

Grasp Bird's Tail

Yin Yang Steps

Fan Thru the Back

## Focus on a Straight Spine

Row the Boat

Brush Foot Sequence

Yin Yang turn with Pull Down to Single Whip

Play guitar

Snake Creeps Down/ I

Beginning of Continuous Punch