

Exploring Whole Body Continuous Movement

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One of tai chi's treasures is the sensation of a suffusion of wholeness, calmness, centeredness, well-being. How does that happen? Experiencing an integrated flow in tai chi comes through practice and more practice. We move from the deep root, through the dan tien, up the torso and out the arms and fingers always circling and spiraling and we breathe.

"There is an interplay between movement and inner feeling; each developing out of the other and each serving as an impulse initiating and influencing the other. They are mutually growing and mutually arising." H. H. Lui

Shifting Weight and Sturdy Feet

Our deep roots provide the base of our movement, the connection to the earth. As we stand we feel that rootedness, and as we shift our weight we press away to return to earth and root in every step.

Dan Tien: Moving from the Waist

"All movements must be guided by the waist-spine. The body and the four limbs must be relaxed; the whole body moves as one integrated organic unit. Only when you have coordinated and harmonious body movement can you develop energy (chi) and chi makes the 'Tai Chi merry-go-round.'" H. H. Lui

When the waist remains loose and free we move from the waist, from the dan tien. As we direct our movements from the dan tien, the rest of the body gains direction and precision, meaning and power or oomph. With each turn, sink, or rise of the dan tien, the torso moves. With each movement of the torso and shoulders, the arms move. With each move of the arms, the hands and fingers move. In this way, chi flows through the body, and our tai chi grows full and meaningful, free and meditative.

Coordination of Upper and Lower Body; Whole Body Movement.

"In all movement the inner strength is rooted in the feet, developed in the thighs, controlled by the waist, and expressed through the fingers. From the feet to the thighs, waist and fingers there must be complete coordination and they all should act as one integrated unit." Tai Chi Classics

"No body part works too hard, no part takes a vacation." H. H. Lui

The upper and lower body maintain relationship in movement: shoulders and hips, elbow and knee, wrist and ankle, hands and feet, fingers and toes. This coordinated relationship may be one of exact synchronization; or of support and movement like the relationship of roots and

leaves; or movement in which one part leads and another follows. Always something is moving, always, we are changing.

Circles and Spirals

We balance. One leg weighted, one leg empty until we transfer the weight, sinking into our roots. Our arms rise and sink, an extension of balance and movement, as we draw circles in the air, divide the circles with S curves. Yin and yang, the shifting balance that centers us.

The Way of movement: There should be no "straight and flat" movement in Tai chi as it would not involve yin and yang and therefore no strength and growth. All movement should be spiral and circular with level after level of spirals, as if there is unlimited number of levels, circles within circles. There is change in every circle.

Lui Diary Circa 1986

The universe circles and spirals, from the double helix of our DNA to the whirling galaxies. The sunflower seed head even spirals in two directions at once. In tai chi, spirals abound, both external and internal. And we spin in multiple directions, continuously circling, expanding outward, compacting inward.

All the usual suspects help us out: rooting, sinking, turning, opening/closing, transferring chi shifting weight, breathing, aligning the body, and spinning the dan tien. From the base of a deep root, we move out from and in toward the dan tien. Our breath infuses, enlivens, and integrates the spirals throughout the body. Our alignment of no hard angles and the curve and bows of the body and limbs, the long line of the spine, allows a free flow of chi.

Breath

Inhale to sink, to gather, to compress. Exhale to rise, to expand, to express. As we breathe into the movement, into the dan tien, into the moment, our bodies relax, our minds relax, and our spirit centers and lifts. The breath sets the pace and rhythm for movement, seals the calm center, brings us to wholeness—mind body spirit working as one, movement as though inside a profound silence.

Whole Body Continuous Movement

"How many movements are there in your tai chi form?"

"One"

We learn the moves individually, and eventually we connect them in one continuous flow. Each end is the beginning is the end is the beginning is the end, movements linked in an unbroken chain. No stops, no hesitations. Chi/energy is always in motion.

Movement: A Practice Sequence

This practice sequence is done in a two-corner style.

Sink the Weight and Weight Shifts (N)

Row the Boat (NE & NW)

Diagonal Stretch (NE)

Diagonal Stretch with a Twist (E)

Diagonal Stretch (NW)

Diagonal Stretch with a Twist (W)

Stab Hands (R under L to NW)

Butterfly Turn & 3-Palm Movement (NE)

Grasp Bird's Tail (NE)

Stab Hands (L under R to NE)

Butterfly Turn & 3-Palm Movement (NW)

Grasp Bird's Tail (NW)

Subdue Tiger (N)

Yin Yang Steps (E & W)

Finish

1. Do the sequence.
2. Repeat and bring your awareness to the feet and weight shifts. How do you shift your weight in the transition from Sink the Weight to Row the Boat? How do you step? land a step?
3. This time, bring your awareness to the dan tien. How does movement in your center draw in from or expand out to the four limbs? How does the dan tien help you change direction?
4. Now, focus on the coordination of the upper and lower body. Do the legs and arms complete Sink the Weight at the same time? What happens to the arms and hands in relation to the feet and legs in Row the Boat? How do the weight shifts in Grasp Bird's Tail affect the upper body movements?
5. What about circles and spirals? How do these occur in every movement? Where are they vertical? Horizontal? Both?
6. Breathe each move. How does this change the move? Do you inhale to gather and exhale to express? How does breathing the movement affect the other elements in tai chi?
7. Do the sequence one more time, feeling the flow, enjoying the wholeness of movement.