

## **Relaxation, Energy and Chi - adapted from Grand Master Chen Zheng Lei**

At present, Tai Chi Chuan is springing up like mushrooms on a global scale. Under the directions of general and specific policies, with China's high-speed economic development, cultural and sports exchanging activities have become more frequent, in particular, Beijing's successful bid for Wushu to enter the Olympic Games provides a good avenue for its continued spread. Among the many factions of Wushu, Tai Chi Chuan represent a unique facet of the Chinese nation's traditional culture. It is gradually being adopted in the wider world because Tai Chi Chuan has a positive effect on personal growth, physical fitness, self-defence, character and entertainment. The number of Tai Chi Chuan practitioners is growing day by day and many are turning to the family of Chen style forms that feature extended posture, firm steps, continuous actions, harmony with both energetic and gentle movements chequered with quick or slow explosive force.

But according to my experience of visiting many schools at home and abroad for over 20 years, I know many people have no deep feelings for, and know little about how to relax and set out, the energy of Tai Chi Chuan. The following is my experience in the process of teaching and practice. I offer this in the hope of giving some insight and inspiration to those who love Tai Chi Chuan:

### **First: the characteristics of Chen Family Tai Chi Chuan.**

We all know the characteristics of Chen Family Tai Chi Chuan are extended and poised posture, lithe and firm steps, straight and natural body internal energy leading whole body and the use of Chan Si Jin (reeling silk power) using the waist as the axis for coherent movements. We move one part to make the whole body move, quiet one part making all the limbs and bones quiet. We move like floating clouds and flowing water. Practice is required. We must stand with natural posture, relax our shoulders and elbows, close chest and draw the back of body. It is complex. We drop our internal Chi and breathe naturally, relax hips and bend knees, be clear about what to empty and what to strength, followed by our whole body in harmony with firm and gentle, chequered with quickly and slow, the external form moved as an arc and internal power moved as a spiral.

Our body leads our hands and make the waist an axis, twisting and rotating, then gradually producing a kind of internal power which is soft and strong, an internal power not only heavy but also dextrous and changeable. The internal power is soft of external form and made energetic by our internal body like iron wrapped in cotton. The requirement of a Chen Family Tai Chi Chuan set has no plane, no straight line, no off and on, no hollow and projection, no pull and whip actions, no carry and draw. The set is an integral whole circular and continuous curvilinear motion. The main points of movements are rotating wrist and turning shoulders, rotating waist and turning hip, rotating ankle and turning knees, and folding the chest and back of the body.

### **Second: the aim of relaxing and creating energy in relaxation.**

The goal of practicing is to relax, and become soft and slow. It is a unique method and means of practice but it is not the aim of it. The goal is to renew channels that lead internal Chi, make internal Chi and external forms act together, linked through the practice of relaxation, and enable "soft and slow" to break-through the stiffness and achieve softness. Then thought can move Chi and Chi can move easily in one's whole body. The external form is moved and changed by Chi. Only by progressively enriching, growing, energizing the internal Chi and making the Chi permeate and circulate through all the limbs and bones can practicing Tai Chi Quan reach the effect of strong and healthy defense of oneself. Tai Chi Quan seek natural inborn Chi and a return to original purity and simplicity. So stiff energy and unskillful power are abandoned when we practice Tai Chi Quan.

## **What is acquired Chi or stiff energy and unskilful power?**

The acquired Chi is a kind of power, which is produced from the nourishment we need to live that we consume after we are born. The acquired Chi must be given by the advanced Tai Chi practitioner although understanding and abandoning the acquired Chi is best done early in Tai Chi growth so that our natural inborn Chi can be accessed early.

## **How can we relax and abandon stiff energy and unskilful power?**

We can do that by relaxing our shoulders and elbows, relaxing our hips and bending our knees, and relaxing and sinking the muscles of the shoulder, back, stomach, and both sides of the chest. This can be illustrated by a properly executed "single whip": the Bai Hui point, which sits on the crown of the head, is high, the point at the top of right wrist and the middle finger of the left hand are willed upward and the body relaxes and sinks while exhaling. Then you feel your Dan Tian (the body's center of gravity and the storage center of life force) is full and the Chi is sufficient. With this state of Chi, setting out energy reflects the explosive force of nimble loosing and elasticity. The full relaxation of the whole body allows the Chi to smoothly reach meridian ends and reducing the Chi loss in that progress as far as possible.

Third: Relaxation and the result of setting out energy in that state. If you've thoroughly mastered the full experience of complete relaxation and accessed the wealth of internal Chi through Chen Family Tai Chi Quan, your whole body will produce a subtle yet powerful bio-electrical field which can make one's sense of touch more acute and allow the practitioner to move more quickly.

If you reached that state you will get three effects:

1. Your body will be stronger. Relaxing the whole body, loosening muscles, exhaling and sinking can eliminate fatigue, inspire enthusiasm, and give more vigor. Loosening muscles can raise the skin's elasticity leading to sleek skin and improve looks. The soft and circular training of bone joints can raise bone's density, pliability, and toughness, building up resistance to degeneration and decrepitude. Through Tai Chi Chuan's soft exercise, the nervous, digestive, and the circulatory systems along with your muscles and bones can be well protected and strengthened for their designed function, thus achieving real strength and health.
2. Through training in Tai Chi Chuan, students can enhance their physical sensitivity to fatigue and shorten the time from tense muscles to relaxation.
3. Through training in Chan Si Jin (reeling silk power) you will see that there are three kinds of power: rotating, penetrating, and reducing. These are explained in my writings about Chan Si Jin of Chen Family Tai Chi Chuan.