

Three Key Elements In Tai Chi Practice

There are three key important elements to assist your Tai Chi.

- 1. Listen inward to feeling.** Listening inward to feeling is directing your attention to your internal environment. This is the preparation for the next key element.
- 2. Breathe.** As we listen inward to feeling we become aware of our breathing. At this stage it is very important to place your attention on your belly and let go of any tension there. As you observe your in and out breath, you will notice how your body and mind naturally begin to relax.
- 3. Relax.** Relaxation is a natural process of letting go of excess tension in your body and mind. As you are able to relax even deeper, you will notice how your breathing becomes more rhythmic and smooth. This begins to release tension in the muscles and joints which increases internal energy (Chi) flow.

These three key elements are progressive. One flows into the other as they mix to become a foundation by which all other practice takes form.

Five Principles of Relaxation

As a prerequisite to all principles of relaxation, our attention is directed away from our external environment to our internal environment. This is called Listening Inward to Feeling.

1. Alignment. Probably the most important – essential body posture *adjustment-regulation*. Everyday tension that has locked itself into various parts of your body can contribute to poor posture - your ability to *sink and dissolve energy blockages* in the body is core to allowing energy blockages to both open and dissolve.

In general, your stance must be comfortable for you. Keep your feet parallel to each other – your tailbone should point to the ground (thus, not inclining backward as it does when you stand normally). While gently straightening your spine, your head should “float lightly” above your neck much like being suspended by a cord attached to the top of your head (Bai Hui) point. In other words, suspend from the crown as if you are suspending from a string at the crown of your head. Allow the Hips to rest into the hip sockets and shoulder-blades into the shoulder. Soften the muscles behind your knees and slightly allow the knees to bend – thus allowing the weight to translate downward from your waist through your legs into the earth while at the same time, gently lifting up through your spine – allow the earth to “*invite you in*” as we say.

2. Breathing. Lower back or (kidney breathing) – gently using your “imagination/imagery,” allow the breath to slowly (count of 4 or 5) flow up the spine and over the top of the head and down through the body back into the lower, Dan Tien.

3. Relax shoulders. By relaxing your shoulders, your neck muscles also begin to relax via connective tissue. Our cells have memory, and we may need to repeat this process many times throughout practice. In time, with persistence, we will transmute this constricted code.

4. Relax Dan Tien. Dan Tien is approximately an inch below your navel. The literal meaning of Dan Tien is 'Field of Elixir'. This is a very important bio-vortex for cultivating Chi. By simply placing our attention on the Dan Tien, it becomes energized.

5. Relax waist, sink and root. By relaxing your waist, your Chi is able to sink and flow down into your feet. This will give you a very distinct feeling of being grounded, or rooted, also, with a relaxed waist, you are able to neutralize spinal compression caused by resistance (stress) to gravity.

Listening inward to feeling does not mean that we become unaware of our external environment; it means merging the internal with the external, the Yin and the Yang. Listening inward sets up a filtering system to filter out sensory debris.

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