

T'ai Chi Ch'uan

Movement

While there are many different positions in Tai Chi they all contain some common aspects and one of these is movement. The form, once begun, continues to move until it is finished. The classics discuss the fundamental aspect of yin and yang and the exchange of energy. While it can be said that yin corresponds to stillness and yang corresponds to maximum movement you must remember that each contains the other so that within yin is yang and within yang is yin. Therefore within maximum movement there is stillness and with stillness there is maximum movement. Another way to look at this is that at the precise moment when one position ends is the same moment when the next position begins. Or think of this in very subtle terms, breaking each moment into smaller and smaller moments, and seeing how as each little piece is ending the next piece is beginning. Without an ending there can be no beginning and without a beginning there can be no ending. You may be thinking that this is all very obvious and intellectually you may understand this but the goal is to allow the body to understand this. Nothing happens by itself, it is always the result of something else that occurs.

When we say that once begun the form continues without breaks or interruptions until the end we need to understand another concept that is inherent within Tai Chi and that is change. This is the purpose of movement, to promote and embrace change. As we move from one position to the next we are changing the position of the body, the feet and the hands. Again this may be obvious but the implication of change goes far beyond this simplicity. Change must occur within movement. By this I mean that the speed and tempo of the movement must constantly be changing to adjust to the flow of energy within the body.

Change must also be allowed to occur within the body.

A movement begins from nothing. Prior to the movement starting it has no motion, and the mind is empty. An infinitesimal moment before the movement begins the mind forms the idea of the movement. Not the whole movement, just the portion that is immediately in front of it. It is the intent of the mind that supplies the change necessary for the movement to begin. Just as your car cannot go from rest to maximum speed in zero time neither can your body.

All movements can be broken down into the following three periods: beginning, middle and end. In the beginning the movement begins from nothing and slowly over time builds speed and energy. The period of no movement also corresponds to maximum stored energy. During the middle phase of the movement the speed will remain fairly constant but may vary as directed by the energy. The middle period corresponds to maximum working energy. At the end of the movement the speed must go to zero and so the speed of the movement must begin to decrease prior to the end of the movement. The end of the movement again corresponds to maximum stored energy.

The following table is intended to generalize some of the facets of this subject. Do not try to extend some of the generalizations across a particular movement, such as single whip. Instead look at the generalizations with the microscopic parts of the movement single whip.

<u>Period in movement</u>	<u>Speed</u>	<u>Energy</u>	<u>Characterized by</u>
prior to beginning	zero	maximum stored	internal movement
beginning	slowly increasing	stored energy being changed to working energy	internal movement creating external movement
middle	constant	all energy changed to working energy	external movement
end	slowly decreasing	working energy being changed to stored energy	change from external movement to internal movement
after end	zero	maximum stored	internal movement

As you can see from the above table the periods labeled beginning and end are the two periods with the most change in terms of both energy and speed. Everyone is pretty clear on where the prior to beginning, after the end, and middle periods are. It may be instructional to note that when learning new movements is these three periods that are what most students really learn. However, it is the beginning and ending periods that are the most critical and also the hardest to recognize and perform. Without the beginning and ending of the movements the form will not be linked and the energy created during the movement will not complete its flow. Since one of our goals is to store energy in the body it is important to allow the movement to complete itself.

In science there are two types of energy: stored energy which is called potential energy and working energy which is called kinetic energy. A dam is a good example of these two types of energy. The water behind the dam is the potential energy and it just sits there waiting to be useful. As the water is released it begins to flow downhill and slowly gains speed. This falling water is the kinetic energy and at some point towards the bottom of the downhill flow the water is made to hit a paddle attached to a wheel which causes the wheel to turn, doing work. After all of the energy has been taken out of the water (turning successive wheels for instance) the water will have arrived at the bottom of the hill and will again sit waiting to be used in some way. Kinetic or working energy must always find an end and become potential energy (i.e., there is no such thing as a free lunch).

We are looking to accomplish the same thing with Tai Chi. We want to boost the amount of stored or potential energy we have in our bodies. Just holding the energy in place does not accomplish this goal. We must find a way to change the potential energy to kinetic energy and at the same time draw in some more kinetic energy so that when we change it back to potential energy we have more than we started with.