



Linda's T'ai Chi

Weekly Handout July 19, 2020

Softness

What distinguishes Yang Style T'ai Chi from other styles is the focus on relaxation, flexibility, increased (large) range of motion, centering, and balance. These are hallmark concepts of Yang Style, the style you are learning. Although Shibashi is a qigong exercise, it is based on Yang Style postures and principles. Students of Yang Style learn to be soft but alert and focused in the here and now.

In the fighting form of T'ai Chi, the defender assumes the attacker is younger, stronger and faster. This means they are likely to hit and make contact. Softness lets you take that hit without any damage. The belief is that wherever you hold tension is where the force of an impact will do damage. Being soft also allows the fighter to "listen" using intuition, and peripheral vision for the intent of the opponent. The T'ai Chi fighter offers no resistance but instead uses the force of the opponent against them. The fighter uses the balance of the opponent, leverage and diversion to throw the opponent off balance and get the upper hand. The goal- avoid the fight, Sensitivity, **softness** and yielding allow the fighter to use their energy efficiently. There is no blocking, banging, bracing, tensing, or fighting back. By being soft, the T'ai Chi fighter avoids fatigue and reduces wear and tear on the body.

We carry tension in many parts of our body. Tension stems from emotions that get trapped or repressed in the body. Anger, fear, frustration, worry, anxiety, resentment, loss of control, hurt, burden, trauma, loss of self, and oppression can be held in the body and can be manifested in physical sensation. Tension also comes from habit. We may have developed a habit of holding on tight in our hands, shoulders, neck and back and not even realize the tension until we learn to let go and relax. This takes some practice.

In class, I have been focusing on softness particularly in the hands. But, frankly, we need to let go and be soft in our head, eyes, neck, shoulder, back, legs, stomach, and gut. Complete, energized relaxation throughout our entire body is the goal. We need to let our mind be soft- free from the past, and the future. Our focus is on the present.

I believe we can achieve the overall softness if we create soft hands. When we are feeling stressed, the muscles in our **hands** begin to clench, sometimes we don't even notice it happening. Even when you are not **holding** something, they will stay in that tense position. This **tension** causes constriction to the tendons of the **hands** from the palm up through the tips of the fingers. This creates many problems on the long term.

As you perform T'ai Chi, Qigong, or Shibashi, you may want to focus on making your hands very soft. I use various imagery to achieve this- hollow bones, hands floating on the wind, hands float on the wings of a bird, and hands float like leaves on the wind. You can create your own imagery to ensure that your hands and fingers are soft- not limp, but soft. If you create the image in your mind, your body will soon follow. This takes some practice but each time you perform your T'ai Chi, be soft. You will get better and become aware of the change.



Peace,

Linda