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Yang Tai Chi Curriculum

Student Progress Guide for 2019

"Focus on your breath and achieve softness. Can you be like a newborn?"

-Laozi

Level One (First Six Months to Second Year)

A brief overview of *Taiji Quan* (Supreme Ultimate Fist). Why is this the supreme ultimate? Why do we play a slow form in a martial art? What did the old masters teach and what did they know? How did they achieve proficiency? How can tai chi be used as a martial art as well as a health benefit? The old times versus the present. Authentic training versus commercial tai chi. Exploring the body as one energy, understanding the opposites and the study of water.

"The trick to the Taiji boxing art lies in entirely not using strength, and also that this is extremely difficult to do."

-Guan Jiongzhi

Some of What Is Covered from the Beginning:

Intro to the Taoist Principle of *Wu Wei*

Standing Meditation (*Zhan Gong* and *Song Gong*)

Other Central Taoist and Tai Chi Concepts: *Taiji*, *Yin/Yang*, *Jing* (Body Essence), *Qi* (Subtle Energy), *Shen* (Mind/Spirit); *Jin/Jing* (Internal Power), Using *Yi* (intention) and not *Li* (physical strength or exertion).

Introduction to *Qigong* and *Qi* awareness

Start the Old Yang Family 108 Hand Form created by Master Yang Cheng Fu

History of Tai Chi Predates the Yang and the Chen Family Villages

“There is only one tai chi,” the masters used to say

Begin Push Against a Wall, Tai Chi Bag Training, Tree/Pole Walking and Tree/Post Work

Softening and the Agile Body

Begin Basic *Tui Shou* (Push Hands Exercises)

Level Two (Second to Third Year)

Something Comes from Nothing- the Full/the Filling from the Empty/Letting Go

See the World as Energy

Review the Old Frame 108 Long Hand Form with Applications

Review of Core Tai Chi Philosophy and Concepts

Explore More Tai Chi Real Life Self-Defense

Review Push Hands (One Handed, Two Handed, Standing, Walking)

Free Push Hands

Focus on Stick, Adhere, Yield, Follow, Connect, Release

Continue Learning the Various Types of *Jin* (Moving Energy)

Study the Tai Chi Classics and the Yin/Yang School of Classics

Learning to condense or compress *qi*

Begin Old Yang Family *Jian* (single handed straight sword)

Level Three (Third or Firth Year and Beyond)

Review Yang Straight Sword (*Jian*) with Applications, Push Swords

Apply Tai Chi Principles to Weapons

Multi-Person Attack Scenarios

Continue Meditation, Forms, *Zhan Gong*, *Song Gong*, *Tui Shou*

*Note this is only a basic study course guide. These are many levels of dedicated progress of learning. They mean nothing as far as the beginner or advanced martial artist. The key is deeply understanding the essential concepts of system through long ceaseless training. For those seeking more martial arts, this means applying more martial arts focus. For those seeking more health benefits, this means greater meditation. The two are not mutually exclusive but depending on what a student needs, his or her objective might be more of one than the other. Progress may be slower or faster depending on your dedication and availability. The true student has the right purpose, dedication and discipline. Their training is frequent and they make tai chi a central tenant of their life. They spend one to two hours per day practicing with the correct goal in mind for building their health up and honing self-defense skills.

Brief List Taiji Quan Basic Principles, Concepts and Terms Explained

Wu Wei- the state of no action or better understood as not over-exerting oneself beyond what is necessary. This is often practiced as *Zhan Gong* or internal stance work. The idea is to stand and focus the mind on the internal while loosening up and working with tai chi principles. This builds *yi* and cultivates *qi*. Rooting and *Yong Quan*- bubbling well/spring- the energy point on the sole behind the balls of the feet are also related with these methods. Also, *Zhan Zhuang* or stand like a stake is practiced in outwardly static pose.

Yi- intent. In tai chi/taiji a practitioner is taught to lead all movements with the mind and intent and let the body and *qi* follow. Intention leads the body, not strength or force. There should be a harmony of *Jing* (the essential or physical), *Qi* (empowerment of breath and mind-body energy) and *Shen* (the spirit or mind).

Zhong Ding- this is the tai chi concept of the central equilibrium. It is not simply one's balance point but one's center from which drives intent of movement in the five directions. It is located in the lower *dan tian* area. During *Zhan Zhuang* the practitioner trains an awareness of *zhong ding* and sinking *qi*.

Song/Fang Song- is the concept and practice of loosening the body and the mind of any tension that might block *yi* and *qi* from moving through the body. It takes many years to break the natural habits of stiffness and tension that we develop in society. It is the first and last concept of all tai chi. One should begin the practice of *song* by understanding that one can always be more *song*. If there is no *song*, there can be no other tai chi concept.

Rou- the softness. Being soft and gentle are essential aspects of *yin*. Because most people are naturally *yang* or hard/stiff, they can more easily be defeated with less effort using subtle touch and or softness of martial techniques. In addition to two person drills that help students develop softness, there is also the conditioning of the body to be more *rou* in addition to be more *song*. This is why tai chi emphasizes softness over hardness but good tai chi does not neglect the balance. But 'where my enemy is soft, I am softer' tends to be the prevailing ethos of Yang Taiji Quan.

Jing- in Chinese literally means peace. A state of calm or peace in the heart are essential to properly leading with *yi*.

Qi versus Li- tai chi generates *jin* (power or energy) by cultivating and utilizing *qi* (empowerment of breath and mind at the *dan tian*) and not by using *li* (physical strength, struggle or effort).

Dan Tian- literally means a grain in a field but has been translated as elixir field or energy center. This is the area two inches or three fingers below the navel. It is the store house for *qi* and is allegorically thought of as a cauldron of boiling water over fire. From here the *qi* can be gathered, compressed and sent out or the incoming force can be gathered to this area. There are three major *dan tian* in Chinese thought but typically we focus on the lower *dan tian* below the navel; the others being the heart and the third eye.

Taiji (often spelled in English- *tai chi*)- is the Taoist concept describing the totality of all things and their motion. The concept of perpetual, eternal and balancing changes. It originates from a state of *wuji* (primal nothingness) and the *Tao*. *Taiji* gives rise to the still and the moving, the empty and full, the push and the pull and all the other opposites. *Taiji Quan* (Tai Chi Fist or Tai Chi Boxing) refers to the Taoist usage of the philosophical concept *taiji* as it relates and is applied to martial arts. It is often depicted as a symbol of opposites meant to remind students of the unity of opposites.

Yin/Yang (Active Balancing Opposites). In Chinese philosophy, they represent an active balance of all opposite forces and things- the positive and the negative, the strong and the weak, the masculine and the feminine, etc. It is important from a philosophical standpoint to remember that *Yin* and *Yang* exist not only in the movement of things but make up the thing itself. In anything, even the most *Yang* there is always some *Yin* and in every motion hard or soft, there is always its opposite. For martial artists, we focus on large principle opposites such as: Emptiness and Fullness or Sinking and Floating in our movements. Also: Pushing and Pulling, Fast and Slow, Hard and Soft, Up and Down, Right and Left, Backwards and Forwards... The better understanding, practice and experience of this principle leads to safer and more powerful martial arts ability as well as optimal health.

The Thirteen Postures of Tai Chi or *Bamen* (eight gates) *wubu* (five steps)- The “eight gates” refer to directional points of entry. Four are straight and four are off-angled: *Peng* (Ward-Off- open expanding), *Lu* (Roll Back- close in), *Ji* (Press from two points of body to the center point), *An* (Push); *Cai* (Pluck- soft yank often redirect slanted downward), *Lie* (Split or snap apart- a circling motion), *Zhou* (Elbow Strike) and *Kao* (Shoulder Strike/Body Strike). The “five steps” are active positions (Forward, Backward, Left, Right and Settle).

Listen, Follow, Stick- *Ting* (listen), *Zou* (follow by yielding) and *Nian* (sticking) are three very important characteristics of *Taiji Quan*. These are rigorously practiced in push hands and applications training. Listening is done by increasing sensitivity and feeling an opponent on the physical level but there is also listening by reading to an opponent from a distance or sensing their intentions. Following is a skill of yielding. Only by listening, following and yielding can you get ahead of your enemy and you know them and their intentions better than they do. In other words, you yield to lead. Lastly, the concept and practice of sticking is when you are able to not only stay connected with an opponent but able immobilize, control, etc. because you are in the position of advantage using softness and *ting* and *jing* enabling you to easily influence their position.

Yang Cheng Fu's 10 Essentials: 1) effortlessly raise or suspend the head, 2) close in chest slightly and pluck back, 3) Loosen your waist, 4) sink your shoulders and drop your elbows, 5) use intention, not strength, 6) distinguish between empty and full, 7) coordinate upper and lower body, 8) inside and outside or internal and external joined together, 9) all motion is continuous without breaks, 10) within movement, seek stillness.

Zhuo- literally means to touch. This should be a very soft and subtle light touch. *Lian*- connectedness. The student should learn to connect and feel the level of connection with their partner. *Nian* (stick) is a much stronger or deeper connection through the opponent's body- able to listen and follow- but still ahead and softer than them. These concepts tend to run together.

Jin- internal force that literally means "energy, strength, enthusiasm, expression". Often misspelled or mispronounced *jing*. In the internal martial arts, like tai chi and qigong, one uses this internal energy instead of the external energy or strength *li*. There are also many ways to express *jin*. Most people call this *fa jin* which is often falsely associated with explosive power. It can be explosive or subtle as it literally means to "send, release, emit" *jin*.

The Exploration of Expressing or Emitting [*Jin*] Energy

Nian Jin

Ti Jin- lifting power

Hua Jin- neutralizing power

Zhan Jin- adhering power

Fa Jin- explosive power, sending/releasing power

Jie Jin- intercepting power

Jie Jin- borrowing power

Zhuan Jin- rolling power

Dou Zin- shaking power

Qujin Jin- entering/penetrating power

Old Yang Large Frame Taiji Postures:

太極起式

[0] TAIJI BEGINNING POSTURE

攬雀尾

[1] CATCH THE SPARROW BY THE TAIL

單鞭

[2] SINGLE WHIP

提手

[3] RAISE THE HANDS

白鶴亮翅

[4] WHITE CRANE SHOWS ITS WINGS

摟膝拗步

[5] BRUSH KNEE IN A CROSSED STANCE

手揮琵琶

[6] PLAY THE LUTE

左右摟膝拗步

[7-9] LEFT & RIGHT BRUSH KNEE IN A CROSSED STANCE

手揮琵琶

[10] PLAY THE LUTE

進步搬攔錘

[11] ADVANCE, PARRY, BLOCK, PUNCH

如封似閉

[12] SEALING SHUT

十字手

[13] CROSSED HANDS

抱虎歸山

[14] CAPTURE THE TIGER & SEND IT BACK TO ITS MOUNTAIN

肘底看錘

[15] BEWARE THE PUNCH UNDER ELBOW

左右倒鞏猴

[16] LEFT & RIGHT RETREAT, DRIVING AWAY THE MONKEY

斜飛式

[17] DIAGONAL FLYING POSTURE

提手

[18] RAISE THE HANDS

白鶴亮翅

[19] WHITE CRANE SHOWS ITS WINGS

擻膝拗步

[20] BRUSH KNEE IN A CROSSED STANCE

海底針

[21] NEEDLE UNDER THE SEA

肩通臂

[22] FAN THROUGH THE ARMS

撇身錘

[23] TORSO-FLUNG PUNCH

上步搬攔錘

[24] STEP FORWARD, PARRY, BLOCK, PUNCH

攬雀尾

[25] CATCH THE SPARROW BY THE TAIL

單鞭

[26] SINGLE WHIP

左右抅手

[27] LEFT & RIGHT CLOUDING HANDS

單鞭

[28] SINGLE WHIP

高探馬

[29] RISING UP AND REACHING OUT TO THE HORSE

左右分脚

[30 & 31] LEFT & RIGHT KICK TO THE SIDE

轉身蹬脚

[32] TURN AROUND, PRESSING KICK

左右擽膝拗步

[33] LEFT & RIGHT BRUSH KNEE IN A CROSSED STANCE

進步栽錘

[34] ADVANCE, PLANTING PUNCH

翻身白蛇吐信

[35] TURN AROUND, WHITE SNAKE FLICKS ITS TONGUE

上步搬攔錘

[36] STEP FORWARD, PARRY, BLOCK, PUNCH

蹬脚

[37] PRESSING KICK

左右披身伏虎式

[38] LEFT & RIGHT DRAPE THE BODY, FIGHTING TIGER POSTURE

回身蹬脚

[39] TURN BACK, PRESSING KICK

雙風貫耳

[40] DOUBLE WINDS THROUGH THE EARS

左蹬脚

[41] LEFT PRESSING KICK

轉身蹬脚

[42] TURN AROUND, PRESSING KICK

上步搬攔錘

[43] STEP FORWARD, PARRY, BLOCK, PUNCH

如封似閉

[44] SEALING SHUT

十字手

[45] CROSSED HANDS

抱虎歸山

[46] CAPTURE THE TIGER & SEND IT BACK TO ITS MOUNTAIN

斜單鞭

[47] DIAGONAL SINGLE WHIP

左右野馬分鬃

[48] LEFT & RIGHT WILD HORSE VEERS ITS MANE

上步攬雀尾

[49] STEP FORWARD, CATCH THE SPARROW BY THE TAIL

單鞭

[50] SINGLE WHIP

玉女穿梭

[51] MAIDEN WORKS THE SHUTTLE

上步攬雀尾

[52] STEP FORWARD, CATCH THE SPARROW BY THE TAIL

單鞭

[53] SINGLE WHIP

掚手

[54] CLOUDING HANDS

單鞭下勢

[55] SINGLE WHIP, LOW POSTURE

金雞獨立

[56] GOLDEN ROOSTER STANDS ON ONE LEG

倒鞏猴

[57] RETREAT, DRIVING AWAY THE MONKEY

斜飛勢

[58] DIAGONAL FLYING POSTURE

提手

[59] RAISE THE HANDS

白鶴亮翅

[60] WHITE CRANE SHOWS ITS WINGS

擻膝拗步

[61] BRUSH KNEE IN A CROSSED STANCE

海底針

[62] NEEDLE UNDER THE SEA

扇通臂

[63] FAN THROUGH THE ARMS

撇身錘

[64] TORSO-FLUNG PUNCH

上步搬攔錘

[65] STEP FORWARD, PARRY, BLOCK, PUNCH

進步攬雀尾單鞭

[66 & 67] ADVANCE, CATCH THE SPARROW BY THE TAIL, SINGLE WHIP

抔手

[68] CLOUDING HANDS

單鞭

[69] SINGLE WHIP

高探馬

[70] RISING UP AND REACHING OUT TO THE HORSE

十字腿

[71] CROSSED-BODY KICK

擻膝指襠錘

[72] BRUSH KNEE, PUNCH TO THE CROTCH

上勢攬雀尾

[73] STEP FORWARD, CATCH THE SPARROW BY THE TAIL

單鞭下勢

[74] SINGLE WHIP, LOW POSTURE

上步七星

[75] STEP FORWARD WITH THE BIG DIPPER

退步跨虎

[76] RETREAT TO SITTING TIGER POSTURE

轉脚擺蓮

[77] SPIN AROUND, SWINGING LOTUS KICK

彎弓射虎

[78] BEND THE BOW TO SHOOT THE TIGER

上步搬攔錘

[79] STEP FORWARD, PARRY, BLOCK, PUNCH

如封似閉

[80] SEALING SHUT

十字手

[81] CROSSED HANDS

合步

[82] CLOSING POSTURE

*As found in Master Chen Wei Ming's Book, "The Art of Taiji Boxing." Note there are movements that are not counted as repeats here in the finally tally of the 108 Movement Yang Family Large Frame set. "Clouding Hands" for example could be performed three, five or seven times, depending on the master or the school.