

## Taiji Notes

By Abhayamati

### 5. Exercise number one and 'sinking' the mind.

*Refer to last week's notes for how to move from the preparation exercise to the opening movement.*

The number one exercise:

1. Move into the opening movement as in the form. There should be a 'sitting' in the wrists so that the hands are resting on two cushions of air.
2. With small continuous pushes with both feet against the floor, send the body up as in the opening of the form until the legs are 90% straight. Raise the arms out to either side of the body rather than straight in front as in the form; keep the shoulders relaxed and the chest 'hollow' – i.e. slightly caved and not lifted.
3. When the arms reach two thirds of the body height, begin to sink down from the base turning the hips to the right corner as you do so. You will feel yourself spiralling down into the left leg as if you were coiling up a spring, with the weight shifting increasingly to the left foot. Ensure that the knee does not collapse in, but moves in line with the toes and that the central plate – the V shape made by the hip joints – is level.
4. As the base moves so the body moves – the belly hangs, the chest soft and hollow – followed by the arms; relaxing from the shoulders, then the elbows and finally the wrists. The left arm swings down in front of the body; as it bends at the wrist, the lower arm continues to swing up so that the thumb touches the middle of the chest. At the same time, the right arm swings behind and the thumb touches the lower back.
5. Now push into the ground with the left leg. You will feel as if the spring is unwinding from the feet; this has the effect of turning the waist to face the front and sending out the arms. (The pushing into the ground drives the waist square and sends out the arms: as if there were a large cog at the base which drives a medium sized cog at the waist and a small cog at the shoulders. You will now be back in position 2, with the arms out to either side of the body.
6. Repeat the process turning into the right leg and turning the waist to the left corner; the right arm swings in front, left arm behind. Continue from left to right to practice the movement.

*Keep the body soft and the movements loose. The speed of the exercise is determined by the speed of the relaxation; too fast and the movements will not be connected, too slow and you will be holding the body.*

Sinking:

Sinking is the mental component to the physical movements in taiji. Practice sinking in the attention posture – as if you were about to do the preparation exercise (feet at 90-degree angle, arms by your sides etc). Once you have grasped the mental sinking in this static posture, you can learn to sink in the exercises then the form and finally in 'push hands' partner work.

1. Imagine that you are pouring a glass of warm water over your head. With your mind, feel the water cascading over the head, over the shoulders, down the arms, over the body and down the legs and into the ground under both feet. *This is the first wave of sinking, from the head to the feet.*
2. Now send the wave up from under the feet in the reverse sequence to step one, finally arriving at the crown of the head. *It is as if the first wave rebounds up from the ground to the top of the head.*
3. Repeat again from the crown to the feet and continue to practice the exercise. *You will notice that the mind becomes quiet and you may feel an increase in pressure of the feet against the floor. This is an indication that you are producing more 'grounding'.*

Why sink?:

The purpose of sinking is two fold: to relax the body and to increase grounding. The passing of the mind through the body melts the excess tensions, so that the body becomes more loose and the movements more fluid. Grounding is the increase in stability that comes when the body is not being 'lifted' by excess tensions and by the sending of the mind into the ground under both feet. The taiji classics state that the posture must be 'rooted' at the feet: this is why the mind goes under the feet, to connect with the earth as if you were growing roots. Being rooted and well-grounded will help you to maintain stability in all aspects of taiji, as you will always be stable. It also has the effect of increasing your confidence and feeling more emotionally stable; so that you are less easily 'blown about' by life's difficulties.

Relax, relax, relax:

These are the three most important words in taiji. Relax as much as you can in both body and mind in whatever you do. True relaxation is not the absence of activity – such as a hot bath after a stressful day – but a mental and physical state that you inhabit continually, no matter what life brings.