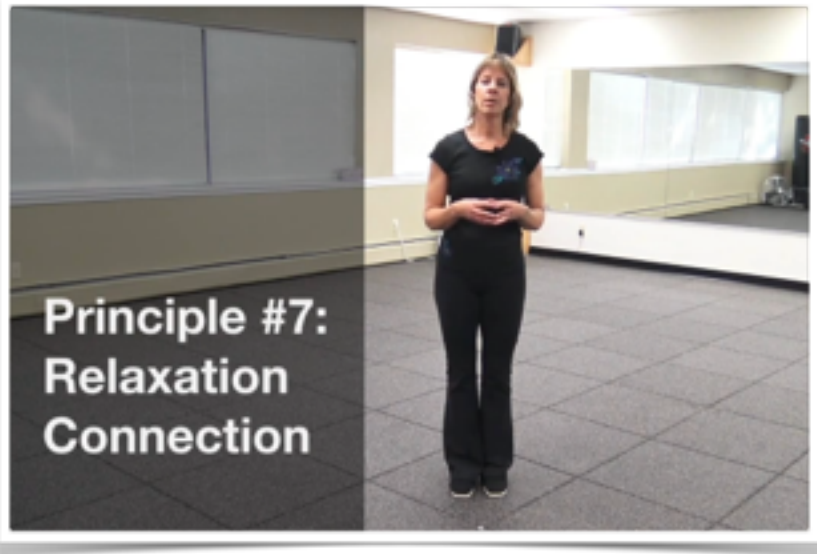




Principle #7 Relaxation Connection

Creating fluidity

The center of your "chi" or energy is stored in the dan tian, which is 2 inches in from the belly button and 2 inches down. From an exercise physiology standpoint, this is also the center of your balance.

In Tai Chi, you should try to connect with and learn to control the energy in your body. This is part of the "healing" aspect and meditative component of Tai Chi. You must remain relaxed throughout and maintain your wrists in "delicate lady's wrists" to help the flow.

As you move, think about your legs being light and your body flowing in a relaxing state. Sometimes it helps to envision light flowing through your body.

The energy flow in Tai Chi keeps the movement going. Think of the Tai Chi symbol, the yin/yang circle. It flows from one to the next and back again, and each side cannot exist without the other.

Class #19

Focus: Delicate lady's wrists, everything connected

Postures: 1-9

Teaching points:

Every move in the form is connected to the next movement. It is not a telegram where you start a sentence and then stop. You don't stop between each posture. Use your rotation and weight shift to connect each move. Remember that "hold the ball" is a transition . . . not a separate posture. Think about gathering the energy into the "ball" and then releasing it throughout the posture.

In order for your chi, or energy, to flow, you must keep your wrists loose and your hands soft and slightly cupped. This is called "delicate lady's wrists." If you make your hands and wrists tight, you will block the flow of energy. Imagine a violinist and her hand on the bow. Her wrist is fluid and yet controls the bow. You must keep your hands and wrists fluid to control your chi.

Warm-ups: 25 minutes

- Step side to side, holding ball
- Step side to side and lift
- Chi walking
- Part the wild horse's mane
- Brush knee
- Play the guitar into Repulse the monkey
- White crane spreads its wings, into arm circle and into brush knee
- Ward off sequence

Form practice: 15 minutes

Focus on keeping one posture moving into the next posture in a constant flow of motion. Use your "delicate lady's wrists" to help with the flow.

Cool-downs: 5 minutes

- Pushing chi
- Roll the ball
- Ball right to left
- Heaven and earth

Homework:

Practice brush knee on both sides, keeping the movement flowing and making sure you use "delicate lady's wrists." The weight shift back and forth should help as well. Notice water and wind as you move through your day. The constant movement can be slow and gentle, or fast and forceful.

Class #20

Focus: Keeping an internal focus and not "muscling" through the moves
Postures: 10-24

Teaching points:

Even though you are in an imaginary fight using martial arts skills, Tai Chi is an internal art and you need to focus on your energy flow and not on your muscles doing all the work. In fact, your muscles should actually be relaxed throughout the form. Your body should feel light and open, not dense and tense. Keep your weight in your dan tian and try to relax your muscles as you move through the form. Continue to keep your "delicate lady's wrists" throughout, as well.

Warm-ups: 25 minutes

- Step side to side, holding ball
- Step side to side and lift
- Step side to side and kick
- Chi walking
- Wave like the clouds
- Kick, smash and box the ears
- Fair lady works the shuttle
- Pushing Chi
- Return the tiger to the mountain
- Deflect, Intercept and punch
- Snake creeps, pheasant stands

Form practice: 15 minutes

Focus on relaxing all the muscles and keeping your body loose as you move through the last half of the form. These moves are especially difficult to perform, so relaxing is an extra challenge!

Cool-downs: 5 minutes

- Pushing chi
- Roll the ball
- Ball right to left
- Heaven and earth

Homework:

Preparation, chi walking. Try to notice as you move throughout your day how tense your muscles become. Consciously relax and focus on allowing your energy to flow throughout your body.

Class #21

Focus: Relaxation, meditation and energy flow

Postures: 1-24

Teaching points:

Keeping your body relaxed and focusing on the energy flow allows you to start to benefit from the meditative effects of Tai Chi. As you relax your muscles and keep the movement flowing from one posture to the next, you can start to focus on "leading" the chi through the body. Imagine a light flowing throughout your body. That light is both powerful and healing at the same time. Allow the light to penetrate all parts of your body. Feel the energy and the relaxation that results. Keep the flow going by connecting all movements together and not stopping. As you learn to regulate the body in this way, you will begin to learn to regulate the mind and the chi.

Warm-ups: 20 minutes

- Step side to side, holding ball
- Step side to side and lift
- Step side to side and kick
- Chi walking
- Part the wild horse's mane
- Brush knee
- Repulse the monkey
- Fair lady works the shuttle
- Wave hands like clouds
- Snake creeps, pheasant stands
- Ward off, grasp the birds tail

Form practice: 20 minutes

Perform the entire form 4 times. Focus on relaxing the muscles and keeping the flow moving from one posture to the next. Try one time through with a start and stop motion to contrast the constant flow.

Cool-downs: 5 minutes

- Pushing chi
- Roll the ball
- Ball right to left
- Heaven and earth

Homework: Practice the ward off sequence keeping your wrists loose, your muscles soft and your whole body relaxed. Imagine the chi as a beam of light flowing through your body and releasing as you push chi.