



Guidelines for Solo Practice

Old Oak Taiji School

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I would like you to experience authentic results in your Taijiquan practice. This depends on your having an appetite for the practice, receiving proper teaching, understanding some basic principles, and practicing regularly over a long period of time. Our objective in Taiji is for the qi to flow smoothly. This is experienced as comfort and ease in the midst of gradually increasing challenge.

The development of Taiji gongfu requires that we practice what we learn in class on our own. In the beginning this may be difficult because we may not know what to practice or we may not have the discipline. We are advised to take continuous baby-steps, neither pushing too hard, nor neglecting daily practice and steady progress.

These guidelines are intended to encourage you to develop a solo training regimen and to give you some guidance in establishing your routine. There is no one-size-fits-all Taiji practice routine, so you need to take the reins of your own practice. There are universal principles, however, that are important to consider.

When: Practice anytime. Ideally at sunrise and sunset, when the concerns of daily life are not preoccupying your mind. Steal moments to practice whenever you can. A session should last 20 minutes or longer, but there are no rules. Experiment. The key recommendation is that it needs to be every day, and it should be around the same time every day, preferably before noon when yang-qi is rising.

Where: Ideally practice outside near healthy vegetation with fresh air. Find a comfortable place that fosters a relaxed yet sober state of mind. Avoid too much wind or commotion as these break up the qi and may bring in harmful elements. If you practice in public, find a somewhat discreet location; don't put yourself on display. You want a flat, level surface that will not disrupt your movement, and enough space around you to not feel cramped. You want to feel fairly at ease with your environment so that you can relax your engagements. Down the road you can add obstructions for a challenge.

Other atmospheric factors: You may wish to play music, burn incense, or set up an altar or garden. Invest in your practice space, but don't get too elaborate or dependent on things being perfect. As you experiment with different spaces and atmospheres, notice how atmospheric factors affect your experience. You will develop a natural sense of feng-shui but may want to study feng-shui principles.

What to wear: Wear loose, comfortable clothing that does not restrict your movement or blood flow. You will become very sensitive to the feeling of clothing on your skin. I recommend cotton or other natural fabric. Remove constricting jewelry and glasses (if feasible), and avoid synthetic perfumes. Your footwear should suit the floor and your personal needs; I prefer slippers that allow the toes to wiggle. Toss your keys, phone, wallet, watch, and day-planner aside.

Avoid: food, sleep, sex, alcohol, and strenuous activity or excitement for some time before and after practicing Taiji. These activities affect qi, and you want to remain settled so the qi can cultivate properly and integrate throughout your system.

Daily conduct: Complete Taiji practice involves how we sleep, eat, breathe, and conduct ourselves throughout the day. Pay attention to these processes and apply common sense. Chew your food thoroughly and stop eating before you get too full. Breathe smoothly with the belly, but not too deeply. Get a good-night sleep. Go to bed early and wake up early. Be nice. Everything grandma taught us.

Four Stages of Every Practice Session:

1. Preparation - Start by gently warming up and loosening the body. Methods I use for this stage include taking a walk, loosening the joints, swinging the arms, bouncing, self-massage, and falling into the wall. It's nice to have a regular routine, but you don't need to do it all every session. Experiment. This stage culminates in "ahh". You feel fresh and ready. 5-20 minutes.

2. Fundamentals – Next work on Taiji fundamentals of posture, movement, and/or breath. Methods I use for this stage include Taiji walking, constant-bear, Taiji arm movement, closing-the-gate, Taiji standing, and belly-breathing. Focus on the fundamentals that need work based on the feedback you receive in class. This stage culminates in relaxed focus - calm and alert. 5-20 minutes.

3. Form – Next practice the Taiji form. First just flow through what you know without stopping, thinking, or checking. Notice any sticky points that need refinement. Then work on those points or the latest posture you've learned - over and over several times. This stage may culminate in anything from sublime ease to hopeless frustration. 10-40 minutes.

4: Meditation – Close with a Taiji salute and some time of effortless ease – just sit and breathe or take a quiet walk and release any frustration you may be having with the Taiji form. Have a moment without any aspirations or self-reference. Let the qi seep inward. Have some tea. Don't rush back into things...ease your way back into the world. 5-20 minutes.

Journal: This is a personal thing, but I can't imagine developing Taiji gongfu without some kind of notetaking to absorb and process the myriad elements of the art.

Resources: I have plenty of reference materials, including instructional photos and videos, available on my website: www.oldoakdao.org.

Recommended Reading:

Dao De Jing/Tao Te Ching
Tao of [Winnie the] Pooh, Hoff
Healing Promise of Qi, Jahnke
Zen Mind Beginner's Mind, Suzuki
Complete Idiot's Guide to Tai Chi & QiGong, Douglas

Principles of Taijiquan

Keep the spine soft and supple
Relax the bodyweight downward
Breathing smooth, easy and quiet
Let the mind be calm and empty
Drop the pelvis and float the head-top
Relax the shoulders and sink the elbows
Empty the front and fill the back
Clearly distinguish empty and full
Rotate the body on a single axis
Internal quality over external form
Minimize exertion, no struggle or strain
Weaken aspirations, strengthen bones