



---

Taiji (太極) is a Chinese fitness system based on relaxed body alignment and smooth flow of energy. It is also a moving meditation based on the philosophy of Laozi, a legendary ancient sage who taught about the virtues of remaining calm, yielding, and returning to simplicity. Traditionally it is said that Taiji is three things: Qigong, Quan, and Dao-De.

Qigong (氣功) means energy practice. It is a system of circulating energy through the body to promote health and well-being. Taiji is a sophisticated form of Qigong. The basic theory is that if we relax everything into a stable base and move and breathe naturally, our energy will flow well and gradually improve its quality.

Quan (拳) means fist, which represents martial art. Taiji is not only for promoting health but also for preventing harm, a system of self-defense. The theory of Taiji martial art is that soft overcomes hard – by remaining calm and relaxed, yielding to oncoming force, we can respond spontaneously and remain unharmed.

Dao (道) means path – the way. The way of nature, the way of life, etc. De (德) means to encounter and embody the way. Taiji is not only for health and self-defense, but as a meditation it also invites us to a direct experience of our original nature, which we come to see is no different than nature itself.

We all come to Taiji for our own unique reasons, but these reasons will likely fall into at least one of these three categories. Your teacher's job is to help you learn the theory and principles and to teach you the methods of practice. But you have to actually practice in order to get results. And you need to study and ponder the philosophy so that you come to understand the theory for yourself.

The fundamental theory of Taiji is that everything is one cosmic energy – qi. This energy naturally polarizes into yin and yang – the heavy sinks down and becomes earth and the light rises up and becomes heaven. Living beings, as a microcosm of the universe, contain both body (earth) and mind (heaven). So in Taiji we cultivate both – cultivating body and mind is cultivating the interplay of earth and heaven.

In Taiji the body must relax and the mind must become empty, then the qi can naturally flow between the two poles. We connect to earth by opening up the bubbling-well in the foot and letting our body weight sink down. We connect to heaven by opening up the crown of the head and letting the mind be empty. We connect to living beings by – we're already a living being – but we reconnect with the basis of life by relaxing the torso, breathing naturally, and returning to the simplicity of a newborn baby.

When we maintain these principles, along with the myriad points of posture we learn in class, the qi will begin to flow more smoothly and naturally as we practice our Taiji fundamentals, form and partner practice. See you in class!