

# Tai Chi for Beginners – the YouTube Notes

I made a [series](#) of YouTube videos meant as a Tai Chi course for beginners. It covers the first part of the traditional Yang style slow set.

The video descriptions are an important and integral component of the course. This is a collection of all the video descriptions:

## General advice:

- Even if the movements and postures are hand-to-hand combat techniques, don't perform them as if you are in a fight. Because you are not. But you need to understand the techniques to know the direction, progression, and flow of the individual movements.
- Concentrate on relaxing and aligning your entire body, and connecting all the way from each foot to the fingers of the opposite hand.
- When you inhale, imagine you are hanging suspended from the top of your head. When you exhale, imagine that you are stacking the different parts of your body onto each other from the floor and upwards.
- Pay at least as much attention to your feet and legs, and the lower part of your body as you do to your hands and the upper part of your body.
- Pay attention to which direction you are facing. Your entire body from groin to shoulders should face in the same direction. When you turn your body, try not to twist it.
- Once you know a few postures, link them together in a smooth unbroken flow.
- Don't go too slow, don't go too fast. Keep an even speed. You can always change the speed next time you start over.
- Practice every day, even if it is only for 5 or 10 minutes. Daily practice gives the fastest progress.

REMEMBER:

EVEN IF YOU DON'T DO IT "RIGHT" OR "CORRECTLY", TAI CHI CAN STILL BE A VERY BENEFICIAL WAY OF EXERCISING!

## 00 - Preparation

This video introduces the dual concept of imagining/listening. You imagine, which means to maintain a mental image of what each part of your body should ideally be doing – and you listen, which means to be aware of all the physical sensations that tell you what your body is actually doing. And you do it simultaneously all through the set.

Tai Chi is very much a mental exercise.

In the video I talk you through the entire body, starting at the feet moving to the top of the head, and then back down again. As you get more familiar with the approach, you may want to do it otherwise. This is as it should be.

Important points to keep in mind are:

- Hang suspended from the top of the head
- Body balanced around its central axis
- Awareness of feet and focus on lower central abdomen
- Relax lightly – don't slump

## 01 - Begin Tai Chi

There are three techniques in this movement:

First, you raise and lower your hands. Weight is evenly distributed between your feet. Inhale as the hands go up, exhale as they go down.

***This move is a part of many QiGong exercises, but can also be used to tear yourself loose if somebody grabs your chest or throat with both hands. Hands come up outside your opponent's arms and come down to press the inside of their elbows downwards***

Next, you inhale as you sink your weight into your right leg while you 'sit down' and let your right hand come in front of your body, palm downwards, wrist on the center line.

Exhale as you turn your entire body, including your right foot to the right (east). Right hand keeps its relative position to the body, left hand sort of trails along. Both palms downwards. Weight stays on the right foot, left foot still points north.

*'Sitting down' is essential to Tai Chi practice. It means bending your knees a little bit and at same time tucking your tailbone inwards and forwards so that your back stays straight. You do this all the way through the set. It makes it easier to turn and to connect the upper and lower parts of the body.*

***This movement is a parry. Somebody tries to punch you with their right hand, and you respond by having your right hand coming up under their arm, hooking it with the outside of your wrist and leading it past you as you turn.***

Finally, you inhale as you turn your body towards the corner (northeast) and at the same time lift your left leg and step out in the same direction as the body, heel first. Weight is still on the right foot which still

points east. Left hand comes up in front of the body, palm inwards, wrist on the center line. Left arm is rounded from the shoulder, make sure to open the armpit. Right hand goes downwards and slightly backwards, palm still downwards.  
Exhale as you shift your weight to the left foot, still facing the corner.

***This posture is called Ward-Off. Basically, it uses the outside of the arm to keep someone or something at a distance. If the arm is rounded properly, and the connection through body, lower abdomen, leg, and foot is properly made, it is almost impenetrable. The best way to do this is to relax and align the body. Ward-Off can be used both defensively and offensively. In this case you use it to ‘push’ into the right side of the person whose punch you just parried.***

## 02 - Grasp Sparrow’s Tail

Also known as the pheasant’s, the peacock’s, or simply the bird’s tail. Variations of this sequence of movements appear eight times in the Yang set. It comprises the four primary Tai Chi techniques: Ward-Off, Roll-back, Press, and Push.

First, Ward-Off.

When we left off in the previous video, you were facing north-east, weight in your front – left – foot, having just exhaled. Now inhale as you turn your body to face east. At the same time, you step out to the east with the right foot, your right hand goes past your hip and goes on to ward off (see the notes to the previous video). The left hand comes up inside the right arm, on the center line, fingers pointing upwards, palm away from body. Hands move forward towards the east. As they pass the front knee, the weight shifts to the right foot.

***You are warding off the opponent’s chest with your right arm and controlling their upper left arm with you left palm.***

Next, Roll-Back.

Fingertips continue forward. Inhale as hands turn and start to go backwards and to the left. Left palm upwards, right palm downwards. When they pass the front knee, you shift the weight to the left foot while you exhale. All the time your body faces east.

***Your opponent is moving towards you, and you follow their movement - roll with it, so to speak. You control their upper left arm with your right palm and their lower left arm with your left palm, giving you the option of pulling them or flipping them to the side at some point.***

Third, Press.

As you inhale, your hands turn again and move in front of your body. Right hand with the palm towards the body and the wrist on the center line. Left hand with the fingers upwards and the palm facing south-east. The outer edge of the right hand makes gentle contact of the inside of the left wrist as the hands pass the front knee, and you shift the weight to the front leg while exhaling.

***You are pushing your opponent’s shoulder or chest. The contact is made with the outside of the right wrist, but the force of the push comes from the left hand. The right arm adjusts the direction of the push,***

Finally, Push.

The hands continue forwards and come apart. You inhale as the hands come back in an arch, palms downwards. As the hands pass the front knee, you shift the weight to the back foot while exhaling. Shoulders, elbows, wrists relaxed. The hands finish close to the body at navel level, palms still downwards. As you inhale, the hands turn, fingers upwards, palms away from the body, moving forwards and upwards. The hands are at diaphragm level as they pass the front knee and you shift the weight forwards while exhaling. The hands finish at shoulder level. Body faces east the whole time.

***The beginning of this movement is just a variation of Roll-Back. In the actual push, you are pushing your opponent’s lower arm or central body. The upward movement causes them to lose their foundation, making them easier to push. Push with the palms – they are both stronger and more robust than the fingers.***

***The upward movement is very much a result of body mechanics. If your body is properly relaxed and connected from feet to hands, you will find this happening all by itself without your interference. Once you are aware of it, you will find it many places in the set – it is just very obvious here.***

***It’s even got a name: Uprooting.***

## 03 - Single Whip

(at the end of the video, I demonstrate a small loop, that can be repeated over and over, so you can get a sense of the sustained, unbroken flow that is an important part of Tai Chi practice.)

This posture appears 11 times in the traditional Yang set.

You start from Push, weight on the front, right foot, facing directly east. Keep weight in the right foot as you inhale. If you relax your arms properly, your hands may drift a little to the left, this is as it should be. When you start exhaling, you shift the weight and sit back the on left foot, whole body still facing directly east. Relax shoulders, elbows and wrists. Hands stay in the pushing position almost at face level. When your weight is fully shifted, you inhale as you turn your body 135° to face north-west. Your right, unweighted, foot turns with the body until it points to the north-west. As you turn, your hands go down, palms downwards, fingers of the two hands turning towards each other.

This will cause your weight to shift from the left foot to the right, almost by itself. Exhale when it does and let your left hand come up in front of your chest, wrist at the center, palm inwards. Right hand goes straight out towards the north-east corner, starting at the hip, ending slightly above shoulder level. Arm almost straight, fingertips held together pointing downwards. Left foot is lifted fairly high, body still facing north-west.

***Here, you are first leading you opponent’s left arm past your face, and then, as you turn, you get your hand inside their arm to strike or push their chest or armpit with the outside of your wrist. The finger position of the right hand is called “crane’s beak”.***

Next, you inhale as you turn your body to face west and step out with your left foot. Left hand turns its palm outwards (facing north-west), fingers pointing up in order to push with either the palm or the edge of the hand. As left hand passes the knee, the weight shifts forwards as you exhale. It's a short push, don't extend left hand too much. Right hand keeps its position the whole time, pushing or blocking towards the north-east corner with the outside of the wrist.

***Here, the left arm is diverting a moving arm or body, rolling off it and adding speed to it, once its direction is changed. Ideally, it is not just the hand turning, but the whole arm rolling in a curling or twisting motion.***

And there it is. A solid right arm as the whip's handle, and the left arm lashing out like the whip's thong. Single Whip.

*The Loop:*

*Once you have completed Single Whip, you inhale as you let your right hand come down past your hip. You step forward with your right foot as your hands do the Ward-off from Grasp Sparrow's Tail. Do Grasp Sparrow's Tail followed by Single Whip and repeat in the opposite direction. Over and over.*

*Do it a specific number of times – I suggest nine – or a certain amount time – maybe 10 minutes.*

## 04 - White Crane Spreads Its Wings

First you do the posture called Raise Hands. Inhale as you turn your body to face north, left foot pointing to north-west. Hands coming together, palms towards each other, fingers pointing upwards and forwards. Left hand close to right elbow at chest level, right hand further out and slightly higher. Hands almost align with body's center line (no crossing!), Weight stays in left foot all the way, right foot ends resting its heel more or less vertically to your right elbow.

***Here, your opponent is coming at you to strike or grab you with their left arm. You control their elbow with your right palm and their wrist with your left palm. Pressing the palms together will block their elbow, making it easy to control the arm.***

Next, you exhale as the fingers of both hands dip downwards before the left hand makes a small circle backwards and upwards past your face, palm first. Right hand ends up horizontal, palm upwards about a hand's breadth under left elbow. Right foot is lifted fairly high.

***Here, you are first pulling your opponent from before downwards and to the left. Then, another opponent strikes at your head from the north-west with their right hand, and you push it to make the blow go barely past your head.***

Finally, you go into the posture White Crane Spreads Its Wings. Inhale as you turn your body to face north-west and step out to let your right foot point north-west. Exhale as you shift weight to the right foot and

turn your body to face west, right arm rolling forwards and upwards ending with the hand pushing outwards and upwards. Left foot swings by right foot and comes forward to rest, pointing to the west, on the front of the foot. Left hand comes down in front of the body, ending at the left of the body, slightly below hip level, palm down, fingers pointing forwards.

***Here, you step “into” your opponent, putting your right foot under their body. As you shift your weight and turn, your right arm pushing into their right side and arm pit uproots them. You displace them, and they fall to the side.***

## 05 Brush Left Knee, Play the Pipa

First, you brush the knee. As you inhale, right hand turns and comes down in front of the body, palm first inwards, then upwards. Left hand turns outward (from the elbow), palm facing upwards, fingers pointing left.

When the hands are at the same level, you exhale as the hands continue their movement - right hand going outwards and backwards, palm upwards, and left hand making a vertical half-circle from left to right, ending palm down, fingers pointing right, wrist in front of the center line of the body.

You inhale as the right hand comes upwards and forwards, passing your ear, palm first. Left hand makes a horizontal half-circle forwards and outwards, palm downwards, above your left knee.

At the same time, you step out towards the west with your left foot. The foot sets down as the right hand passes the ear. Right hand continues forwards, pushing.

As right hand passes left knee, you shift the weight to the front leg as you exhale

***Here, an opponent tries to strike you twice. First with their left hand, which you deflect downwards and outwards with your right hand. Next with their right hand, which you deflect by bringing your left hand over their arm and swiping it to the left. Now they are completely open, so you step in close and push to send them flying.***

Next, you play the pipa. The pipa is a traditional string instrument, a bit like a lute or a guitar. You start by inhaling as you lift your right foot and set it down again closer to the left foot. You exhale as you shift your weight back on the right foot. At the same your right hand goes slightly backwards and your left hand comes forwards and upwards. When the hands finish, they are almost at the center line of the body (no crossing!), fingers pointing upwards and forwards, palms facing opposite sides. Left hand in front at chest/throat level, right hand behind, same level as left elbow.

At the same time, you lift left foot and set it down again to rest on the heel. Now you look like a minstrel in an old picture holding a lute.

***Practical applications of the movements are always a bit different from the way you do them, when you practice alone. In this case it is very clear to see.***

***This posture looks a bit like Raise Hands, but there are differences. Here, you are controlling your opponent’s right arm. Your left palm is pressing their elbow upwards and your right palm is pressing the root of their hand downwards. In this way you can use the opponent’s arm as a lever to lift/uproot them and move them in various directions.***

***But that’s the application. In the set, the palms face sideways.***

Finally, your right hand goes backwards and to the side, palm upwards. Your left hand goes to the right side and downwards, palm down. Now you are ready to inhale and brush left knee again.

## 06 - Brush Right Knee

There is not a lot to say about the actual movement – it's just a mirror version of Brush Left Knee. In the set, it is immediately followed by a repetition of the sequence from the preceding video: Brush Left Knee, Play the Pipa, and Brush Left Knee again. Altogether, you brush the left knee four times and the right knee only once in the first part of the set.

That is unfortunate, because there is great practice benefit in alternating between left and right brush knee more than just once. So, in the last half of the video, I present a small exercise, that does precisely that. It is good practice and I highly recommend it.

*Starting from the posture Brush Left Knee (weight on left foot in front, right hand pushing), you inhale as you turn your body to the right. Right hand turns palm downwards, fingers pointing to your left. Left hand turns outwards, palm upwards, fingers pointing left. Keep inhaling and turning the body until its direction is the opposite of the starting position. Left foot turns with the body and ends pointing outwards in a 45° angle. Left hand comes up to pass the ear. Lift right foot and step out. Brush right knee and push with left hand. Shift the weight as left hand passes right knee.*

*Alternate between brushing left and right knee until you encounter an obstacle, then turn and go back the way you came. You can go on indefinitely as long as you take care to do an even number (2,4,6,8...) of brush knees. If you do an odd number, you will find yourself going more and more sideways over time.*

## 07 - Deflect, Parry, and Punch

The name of this movement describes precisely what it does. You face west throughout the whole movement – don't turn the body.

You start in the Brush Left Knee Posture. Left foot opens, left hand turns and goes back, and right hand goes downwards to the left, like they would if you were going into Brush Right Knee.

But instead, right hand makes a (relaxed!) fist as you begin to inhale. Right leg comes forward making a small circular movement before it sets down a half step in front of the left, toes pointing north-west. Right hand (still in a fist) follows along with the right foot, moving upwards, to the right, and then downwards, the back of the hand coming first. Left hand goes forward. Right foot sets down when left hand passes the ear, palm inwards, fingers pointing upwards.

Both hands continue their paths – left hand straight forwards letting the fingers come forward to point straight ahead, right hand downwards and backwards with the back of the hand towards the ground, ending at the hip. As the hands pass each other, you exhale and shift your weight onto the right leg, letting the left leg come forward and step out. Your weight stays on the right foot.

***Here, you are first deflecting an opponent's right arm to the side with the outside of your lower right arm. Then you step forward and position your left hand on the inside of the opponent's upper right arm, so you can control it with the edge of your left hand.***

Next, you inhale and let your right hand come forwards and your left hand come slightly backwards. At the same time, right hand turns so the back of the hand is turned to the right, and left elbow bends to let left hand's fingers point upwards. When right hand passes left knee, you exhale as the weight shifts forward onto the left leg. When the weight is shifted, both hands are on the body's center line at chest level. Left palm next to right wrist.

***Here, you use your left hand to keep the opponent's arm out of the way (that's the parry), as you punch them in the chest with your right fist.***

## **08 - Retreat and Seal, Cross Hands, End Tai Chi**

Retreat and Seal is widely known as Apparent Close, but I first learned it as Retreat and Seal, and I like that name better.

You have just punched. Now you continue to exhale, right hand continuing forward, left hand continuing backwards towards the hip, palm upwards.

Inhale as right hand's fist opens, palm upwards, and goes backwards. At the same time, left hand moves across the body and forwards as it passes under right elbow, palm still upwards.

When right hand passes left knee, the weight shifts back onto the right leg. Both hands go back, palms turning downwards ending in front of the hips.

Inhale to let the hands com forwards and slightly upwards. When the hands pass left knee, the weight shifts forwards. The hands continue forwards and upwards ending at chest level. Fingers point upwards at a slightly less than 45° angle.

***Here, your opponent has gripped your right arm with their left hand. Your right hand goes forward to loosen their grip, and then backwards to 'scrape off' their hand with your lower left arm. Then you push your opponent's left arm with the roots of both your hands, controlling it with your palms and fingers.***

Next, you Cross Hands. Inhale as you turn your whole body, including left foot, to face north. Hands come up in front of the head, palms outwards. Continue inhaling as the hands go outwards and downwards in two half-circles and right foot steps in to be parallel with left foot. Left hand goes a little faster than right hand. Exhale as left hand comes up in front of the body, ending palm inwards, wrist in front of the chest bone. Right hand follows close by, coming up on the outside of the left. All the time, weight stays in the left leg.

***Here, your opponent has grabbed your chest and you bring your hands up between their arms, forcing them upwards and outwards with your lower arms.***

Finally, you inhale and distribute your weight evenly between your feet, as your hands go the sides. When the hands pass the shoulders, the palms turn downwards and you exhale. Hands go downwards and your



body goes slightly upwards as you come out of the 'sitting down' position that you have held throughout the set.

***Here, you are basically getting out of your Tai Chi frame of mind and body, and back into your everyday self.***

If, after having completed this video course, you find that Tai Chi appeals to you, you should try to find a real-life teacher. It's much better to learn that way. Until you do, try to find a little time every day to practice.

**Relax. Enjoy. Persist.**