



## Chief Master Heg Robinson

The Roxbury T'ai Chi Academy  
 Ten Guiding Principals of T'ai Chi Ch'uan  
[www.roxburytaichiacademy.com](http://www.roxburytaichiacademy.com)

*These 10 guiding principals of T'ai Chi Ch'uan have been passed down for centuries. You must practice with these elements in mind in order to realize the best results from what T'ai Chi has to offer.*



## The 10 Guiding Principals of T'ai Chi Ch'uan

### 1) To Relax

The word sung is usually translated into English as "relax." The basic meaning of the word relax is to become looser or less firm in the muscles, and to become less tense or stern in one's features, or to give up one's energy. From the T'ai Chi point of view, however, the word "relax" can only represent a part of the requirements of the Chinese sung. Since I cannot find an equivalent in English to express fully the meaning of sung, I can only use the word "relax", which is about the closes word to it. The principle of sung implies loosening one's muscles and releasing one's tensions, giving up one's energy externally but preserving it internally so that internally one's body will be sensitive and alert enough to adapt itself to any circumstance. Otherwise, it will be merely a body collapse which has no ability to meet emergency.

### 2) To Sink

To sink means to relax completely. The whole body (the upper torso, the waist, the thighs and legs) should all be relaxed. All the energy should be concentrated in the "Bubbling Well Point," a hollow place in the middle of the sole. When one has reached this high level of development, the chi will sink deeply to the tan t'ien and one's movements will be light and nimble. The body will be so sensitive and alert that the addition of a feather will be felt for its weight and a fly would not be able to alight on it without setting it in motion.

### 3) The chest should be held in, the back straightened, the shoulders sunk, and the elbows lowered.

When the chest is slightly held in, the chi will sink to the dan t'ien and the blood will circulate throughout the whole body without hindrance. Otherwise, the chi will come up and accumulate in the chest, causing the top of the body to be heavy and the bottom light, and the feet to be easily uprooted. When the back is straightened, the energy will be collected in the spine so the whole body will act as one unit and the energy that is issued will be tremendously powerful. Otherwise, the energy will be dispersed.

The shoulders should be sunk, so the chi will sink to the tan t'ien. If the shoulders are shrugged, the chi will immediately rise up to the chest and the entire body will be heavy and clumsy so that the application of energy will be disadvantageous (to no avail).



The elbows should also be lowered. The elbows and shoulders are closely connected. If the elbows are raised, the shoulders will be immediately affected.

**4) A light and nimble energy should be preserved on the top of the head. The lowest vertebrae should be plumb erect.**

The head should be straight and the whole body should be completely relaxed without exerting the slightest external force. Keep only a light and nimble energy preserved on the top of the head as if you were suspended from above to prevent you from collapsing. The lowest vertebrae should be erect so that the mind will be clear. It is said in the T'ai Chi Classics, "When the lowest vertebrae are plumb erect, the spirit of vitality reaches to the top of the head." When the top of the head feels as if suspended from above, the whole body feels light and nimble. Human beings are the cleverest creatures in the world because their heads reach to heaven and their feet stand on the earth.

**5) All the movements are directed by the mind. One does not use external muscular force.**

It is said in the Classics, "Use the mind to direct the movements, which will then be light and agile. If you use external muscular force to direct the movements, they will be heavy and clumsy. "When one practices T'ai Chi, the whole body should be completely relaxed, not exerting the slightest clumsy force in the muscles, bones, or veins (blood vessels). If one does not restrain oneself (by using clumsy muscular force), the movements will be light and nimble and the body can be turned at will. There are some who doubt this and say, "If you don't use energy, how can you develop energy?"

The answer is that we have sinews and (blood) vessels in our body which are like underground water courses. The water will flow continuously

when the courses are not blocked just as the chi will circulate through the whole body when the sinews and vessels are not obstructed. If the sinews and vessels are filled with clumsy energy, the chi will circulate through the whole body. If the sinews and vessels are filled with clumsy energy, the chi flow and blood circulation will be impeded, the turning of the body will not be light and agile, and even the slightest stir of any part of the body will be shaky and tottering.

If you use the mind to direct the movements instead of using muscular force, then the chi will follow where mind-intent directs. So, day by day, the chi and blood will circulate through the whole body without hindrance. If one practices in this manner for a long period of time, one will acquire the real intrinsic energy.

In the T'ai Chi Classics, it is said, "From the most flexible and yielding one will arrive at the most powerful and unyielding." When one has mastered the techniques of T'ai Chi, one's arms are like iron bars wrapped in cotton and weight of both arms is tremendously heavy.

**6) Upper parts and lower parts follow each other and the body acts as one unit.**

When the hands move, the body and legs immediately move also so that the whole body acts simultaneously. As it is said in the T'ai Chi Classics, " It is rooted in the feet, develops in the legs, is directed by the waist and functions through the fingers. The feet legs and waist must act as one unit. When one moves, every part of his body is moving, and when one stops, every part of the body is tranquil so that in advancing and retreat you can find the opponent's defects and establish your own superior position." If one part moves and the other parts do not move, the whole body will be in confusion.



### 7) Insubstantial and substantial must be clearly defined

When practicing T'ai Chi it is of the utmost importance to discriminate between the insubstantial and substantial aspects. For instance, if the whole body's weight is on the right foot, the right foot is substantial and the left foot insubstantial and vice-versa. If one can discriminate between insubstantial and substantial, the movement of steps and turning of the body will be light and nimble. If not, the movements will be heavy and clumsy and you will be easily uprooted by any slight pull and push by your opponent. If you want to step forward with your right foot. you must shift your entire weight to the left foot and leave no weight on the right foot-- then the movement will be light and agile. When you (try to) step forward with one foot while there is still some weight on both feet, it is called "double weighting." The movement will be heavy and clumsy and put you into a posture "ready to be beaten." It is said in the T'ai Chi Classics, "The insubstantial and the substantial must be clearly defined. Every part of the body has both a substantial and insubstantial aspect at any given time. The entire body also has these qualities if considered as a unit."

### 8) Concentrate the line of vision

Your eyes must look forward as an imaginary opponent in front of you; watching him constantly to see what he will do to you. No matter in what direction your body turns, your eyes must look forward in that same direction. It is incorrect to look toward the southeast by simply turning your head while your body is facing east. The head and body must be considered and move as one unit.

9) All the movements are to be connected without severance. When the energy does become severed, use mind-intent to reconnect it.

All the postures are to be practiced slowly, effortlessly, and continuously so that the chi and blood can circulate through the entire body without hindrance. Suppose one posture contains four beats--you must stop momentarily at the end of the fourth beat to complete the movement of the posture, then go on to another posture. So during the transition from one posture to another, you must stop just half a second. This momentary stoppage will be connected and joined to the next posture by mind-intent. If one goes on to another posture before the proceeding one is fully completed, the posture will be incorrect "continuous moving." This causes confusion, and one is not able to discriminate clearly which of the postures is which. The Classics say, "T'ai Chi Ch'uan is also called 'Chang Ch'uen' (Long Boxing)--this is because it flows unceasingly like the great river." The great T'ai Chi Master Lao Chen said, "The energy breaks off, but is joined and connected by mind-intent, just as the lotus root is broken, but the fibers remain connected."

### 10) Meditation in Action

In other kinds of boxing arts one must use tremendous external muscular force. This results in expansion of veins and blood vessels, impediment of the chi, exhaustion, and panting, all of which is bad for health. When practicing T'ai Chi you must control your movements by tranquility and direct the movements by mind-intent rather than by external muscular force. Then the movements will be effortless, continuous and slow. The slower one practices (without stoppages or blockages), the better. Gradually, the above mentioned defects will be eliminated. If the student ponders the matter carefully, he will be able to acquire the idea and beauty of this art without difficulty.