



## Jake Newell's Taijiquan Program

### Guidelines for Solo Practice

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The benefits of Taijiquan are profound and transform the practitioner at the deepest level of our being. By calming the mind, relaxing the body, and breathing and moving with ease and harmony, we open up the flow of qi energy inside our body. Ahh... When the qi flows smoothly it can gather and grow; when the qi is abundant it supports all aspects of our life – physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. If we maintain this practice steadily over a long period of time, the qi will naturally refine itself, opening us up to subtle experiences of the spirit.

Although we use external forms, Taijiquan is a really process of internal cultivation, meaning that we are working with hidden internal qi. Qi is slow to cultivate and quick to degrade. Therefore, the only way to truly reap the benefits of Taijiquan is by practicing regularly. Ideally one should practice every day. If this is not possible, then a few times per week will suffice.

I believe there are three factors in becoming a successful practitioner: determination, direction, and diligence. By determination I mean that you need to want it with all your being and completely give yourself to the practice. And you need to be confident that it is within your reach - believe in yourself! By direction I mean *correct* direction - you need to be working on what is appropriate for you at your current stage of development, and you need to approach it in the proper manner. Your focus changes as your practice matures, so you'll need to continuously adapt your practice. Early on this process is your instructor's job, then it gradually becomes your own. By diligence I mean that you have to actually do it and do it and do it. When we practice we're both drawing a bow and shooting an arrow. By drawing a bow I mean gradual progress; by shooting an arrow I mean reaping the fruit – by practicing, we're actually already attaining our goal. There is no end to progress, so mastery lies in finding fulfillment now. Below I have outlined a few pointers to keep in mind for your regular practice sessions.

**When:** Practice any time. Ideally at sunrise or sunset, but it should be a time when the concerns of your daily life are not preoccupying your mind. You need to settle your mind to practice Taijiquan. Steal moments here and there whenever you can. A session should last 20 minutes or longer, but there's no rules. Experiment.

**Where:** Ideally I recommend practicing outside near healthy vegetation with fresh air. Find a comfortable place that fosters a relaxed yet alert state of mind. Traditionally, you want to avoid too much wind or commotion as these break up the qi and may bring in harmful elements. I prefer a nice open space so that my energy can expand outward, with some shelter nearby such as trees or buildings for grounding. You want a flat, level surface that will not disrupt your movement. Before practicing, check to make sure you have enough space and a reliable surface - don't crowd yourself. You want to feel totally at ease with your environment. Down the road you can add obstructions for a challenge.

**Other atmospheric factors:** You may wish to play some music, burn incense, or set up a meditative altar or garden. Really invest in your practice space. As you experiment with different spaces and atmospheres, notice how atmospheric factors affect your experience. You will spontaneously develop a sense of natural feng shui.

**What to wear:** You must 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. Toss your keys, phone, wallet, and day-planner aside!

Avoid: food, sleep, sex, alcohol, and strenuous activity or excitement for a certain period before and after practicing Taijiquan. These activities disrupt the qi, and you want to remain settled so the qi can cultivate and integrate throughout your system.

Basic Principles of Body:

Relax completely. Be constantly relaxing, releasing, melting, opening. Keep your posture upright; keep your chin, elbows, and sacrum down. Move and breathe with minimal strain - softly, naturally, like a cat.

Basic Principles of Mind:

Be here now – let your senses be clear and open. Look and listen inside – who is this? Daoists call this returning to the Source. Keep just enough mind – don't hold extra thoughts but don't space out.

Four Stages of the Practice Session:

Every practice session should have these four stages.



1. Plowing the Field

Start off your session with warming up and loosening the body. Methods I use for this stage include falling into the wall, loosening the joints, light stretching, bouncing, swinging, shaking, self-massage, and meridian tapping. This stage culminates in “Ahh”. You know the garden is fresh and ready.

2. Planting the Seed and Nourishing the Root

Next you want to invite the qi by working on Taijiquan fundamentals of posture, movement, and breath. This will allow the qi to gather and will build the Taijiquan fundamentals which allow you to contain the qi. For this stage I use various Taiji/Qigong methods including open/close, shan jien, shin gong walking, lion walking, or standing. This stage culminates in a sense of being energized, focused, calm, and alert.

3. Training the Branches

Next you work on the Taijiquan form. I recommend that first you just go through what you know without stopping, thinking, or checking. Don't worry about the details, just go through the motions to train the internal flow of qi. Then, no matter what stage of your development, after flowing through the form pick something that you need to work on and review it several times. Remember that only perfect practice makes perfect.

4: Harvesting the Fruits:

I recommend a Taiji salute and a brief reflection on the session or just a quiet walk for a cool-down. Enjoy the feeling of just being and experience gratitude for your practice. Don't rush into things – ease your way back into the world. Have some tea. This way the fruits of your session will seep into your core rather than leaking outward.

Recommended Reading:

Tai Chi is Natural like a Tree, by CK Chern (handout)

Tao of Pooh, by Benjamin Hoff

Dao De Jing, by Laozi - a.k.a. Tao Te Ching, by Lao Tzu (various translations)

Complete Idiot's Guide to Tai Chi & QiGong, by Bill Douglas

Healing Promise of Qi, by Roger Jahnke

Zen Mind Beginner's Mind, by Shunryu Suzuki Roshi

Cheng Tzu's 13 Chapters, by Cheng Man Ching/Ben Lo